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Moraga 2040 General Plan Community Workshop surveys net a variety of responses

By Vera Kochan



Photo courtesy Moraga Planning Department

Attendees complete the visual preference survey

An estimated 60 residents attended the Moraga 2040 General Plan Community Workshop on April 30. Held at Saint Mary's College, it was the town's way of getting feedback with regards to key areas of Community Design, Sustainability, Transportation, and Economic Vitality. Many who took the survey requested that the results be made public.

Attendees were divided into four groups in order to report to the four interactive stations and participate in a provided survey particular to each station. At the end of a signal each group rotated to their next station. On hand to answer any questions were Town Manager Scott Mitnick, Planning Director Afshan Hamid, Public Works Director/Town Engineer Shawn Knapp, Principal Planner Brian Horn, Associate Planner Mio Mendez, Senior Administrative Assistant Suzie Mele, Consultant Barry Miller, and Moraga Police Chief Jon King.

At the "Transportation" station, participants were given five adhesive dots and asked to mark their top five transportation priorities out of 15 choices. Getting 31 votes as a top priority was ensuring the safety of children walking or bicycling to school, including improvements to sidewalks, crosswalks, and bike lanes. Garnering 30 votes

was working with Lafayette and Orinda to improve traffic flow on Moraga Way and Moraga Road. Earning 26 votes was maintaining free parking in the commercial districts; 19 votes for a shuttle service connecting SMC, Rheem Center, Moraga Center, and BART; and 17 votes for road/pavement maintenance.

The "Transportation" station also gave attendees the opportunity to write responses onto post-it notes with regards to "What's Working Well? What's Not Working?" Most of this feedback was directed at what wasn't working. These comments noted the limited access to BART, lack of pedestrian safety features, poor walkability, school-related congestion and idling, and congestion in general. Notable suggestions included school buses for the high school, more transportation options for seniors, a BART shuttle and greater pedestrian improvements (push button "HAWK" - High-Intensity Activated Crosswalk) beacons.

At the "Community Design" station, participants were given a scorecard and asked to participate in a Visual Preference Survey by looking at 48 photographic images located on four wall

posters and scoring their preferences. The posters included images of mixed-use areas, townhomes, streets, plazas, crosswalks, etc. In the multi-family category, the highest scoring image was of a four-story project located in Southern California's San Gabriel Valley. The appeal was the contemporary residential architecture, with outdoor common space and decorative lighting. Also scoring high was an image of The Mill on Brown in Lafayette - a new, three-story condominium project with earth-toned, multi-colored siding.

Of the 12 townhome images, the highest scoring was from Danville, which featured a mix of wood and stone exterior materials, earthen colors, craftsman-style architectural elements, and a landscaped corner setback. Another high-scoring image came from Portland, Oregon featuring a row house incorporating a wood and stone exterior façade, trellised entryways, and units set back a considerable distance from the street.

The mixed-use projects, with a combination of office/retail/restaurant, scored higher than the previous two categories. The Mercantile in Lafayette scored the highest out of 10 images to choose from. Another high-scoring was a three-story, downtown San Rafael development that included 10 housing units over ground floor retail with a Mediterranean-style architecture.

Public space images included 12 examples of outdoor areas. Scoring high were images of Santana Row in San Jose where outdoor dining, decorative lighting, large trees, live music, and a fountain were depicted. Also, Lafayette's Pizza Antica's exterior was one of the favorites.

The "Sustainability and Resilience" station asked participants to place 31 dots onto 16 sus-

tainability strategies and 15 resilience strategies that were listed. Adjacent columns were rated in priority levels of "low", "medium", "high", and "highest." The top rated sustainability strategy was to encourage denser housing in the commercial districts in order to improve walkability and reduce dependency on cars. Second was to improve pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure to reduce dependency on cars.

Of the resilience strategies, ranking high on the list was to conduct additional planning for evacuation in the event of a wildfire or other natural disaster. Second was to coordinate with the Moraga Police Department and Moraga-Orinda Fire District to create shelter in place strategies.

The final station, "Economic Vitality," featured aerial photos of both the Rheem and Moraga Center commercial areas. Participants were asked to place a post-it note with their suggestions of what types of services and businesses they'd like to see in the future. At the Rheem Center, some suggestions included adding housing, modernizing, preserving the Rheem Theatre, brewpubs, kid-friendly activities, electric vehicle parking, higher-end stores, and nicer restaurants.

For the Moraga Center, comments included improving pedestrian/cyclist access, better marked crosswalks, improving public transit, fix deteriorating asphalt, improve facades and overall maintenance levels, improve selection of retail stores, adding medical services, adding housing, and something that's already in the works - upgrade Safeway.

"The town is gratified by the level of participation, commitment, and input of its citizens," stated Mitnick. "We were pleasantly surprised by the support for density housing in the two shopping centers."

For more information visit: www.moraga.ca.us/600/General-Plan-2040-Community-Workshop.

SMC's NEW Leadership program geared to encourage political involvement in women

By Vera Kochan



Photo Vera Kochan

SMC Professors Myrna Santiago (left) and Maria Luisa Ruiz head the steering committee for NEW Leadership

Saint Mary's College has taken up the banner in California when it comes to hosting the first, and hopefully annual, New Education for Women's (NEW) Leadership pro-

gram thanks to the efforts of the school's Women's and Gender Studies Department. The week-long program taught undergraduate women how to become actively involved

in politics, advocacy, and public service.

Rutgers University first came up with the NEW Leadership concept 30 years ago, and have expanded NEW to approximately 15 colleges nationwide. SMC's steering committee members for the program, who are also with Women's and Gender Studies, are Professor Myrna Santiago, Department of History, and Professor Maria Luisa Ruiz, Department of World Languages and Cultures.

According to Santiago and Ruiz, SMC applied for the "job" and was accepted. That entailed a visit to Rutgers to see how the program was operated, although each school is encouraged to

make the program their own while preparing the students for a possible career in politics or social activism. "It's about women coming together and finding their own voice. Some students don't know if this is a field that they'd like to get into, so we intentionally picked guest speakers who were seasoned in their areas. Women are more apt to be under a microscope in these types of positions, so you need to build a thick skin."


Both professors were enthusiastic about offering the June 21 - June 28 course to the 17 applicants from community colleges and universities around the Bay Area.

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College Coach's Corner

WITH Sunny Grewal

Welcome to Coach's Corner, where we address questions asked by local student families. If you have a question for us, please email us at contact@mystrivepath.com.

Question: My son is a rising senior at Miramonte. He plans to apply to public and private schools. When should he start writing his application essays? And do you have any tips?

Answer: The best time to start writing is a week or two after school lets out—so he should get started ASAP! However, if he wants to write his Common App essay on an activity he's doing this summer, he should wait until the summer ends before beginning that essay. Instead, he should work on his UC essays.

Tip 1 and 2: Use Specific Details and the List of Three! Specific details—about what you ate, what people actually said (in quotation marks), what you thought (in italics), how you actually changed—make the essay! The Rule of Three involves using three adjectives or three examples to add depth and vividness to descriptions.

- Vague: I learned a lot during my internship.
- Specific: My internship honed my skills in graphics, newsletters, and UX design.
- Vague: My two students improved in algebra.
- Specific: I saw an upward trend in their understanding of functions, solving of equations, and comprehension of many other topics.

Tip 3: Work on Essays One at a Time!

Students run out of creative juice or mana when writing essays consecutively. To achieve better results, students should mostly complete their essay (90%+) before starting a new one. Also, as students revise, rewrite, and integrate feedback, their writing will improve and the next essay will be better written. Don't rush the writing process but...

Tip 4: Stick to a Schedule.

As you will need to write four total essays, try to finish each essay in 2-4 weeks. If you procrastinate, you might not have time to share your essays with family, friends, and teachers.

Tip 5: Share Your Essays with Others but Use Feedback Wisely.

Don't use all of their feedback! Your uncle (who went to Harvard Law) might tell you that your second paragraph is awesome while your chemistry teacher suggests you trash it. Who's right? Share it with a few more people and triangulate! Maybe the second paragraph is great but could use a few tweaks.

In the end, trust your gut. Many editors want to do a great job and will over-edit your essay. Don't let other people take over your essays!

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