
**Revenue Enhancement
Community Outreach
to Neighborhoods (RECON)
Committee Report to the Moraga Town
Council and Public Forum**



July 28, 2010

Background



- November 2009—Revenue Enhancement Committee Report presented to Town Council
- February 2010—Town Council goal established: Develop a plan to implement the REC Report’s recommendations
- March 2010—Town Council Ad Hoc Committee formed. Immediately recognized that first step should be establishing a baseline as to community’s knowledge of challenges facing the Town, and what should be done to address them
- April 2010: Town Council authorized formation of RECON Committee

RECON Committee Composition



■ Committee Members

- Mike Metcalf, Council Member, Chair
- Howard Harpham, Council Member
- Dick Olsen, REC Chair
- Ellen Beans, Moraga Citizens Network
- Mike Segrest, Town Manager

■ Consultants

- Dr. Larry Bienati, Professor, Management Consultant, Facilitator, CTM, Inc.
- Maridel Moulton & Kathy Ferber, Facilitators/Recorders (Moraga Residents)
- Lilia Garcia, Survey Analyst, CTM Inc.

All volunteers. Consultants Pro Bono

RECON Committee Process



- Purpose: Conduct an Outreach Program at the Neighborhood Level
 - Assess community's knowledge of:
 - Town's financial condition
 - Services provided by the Town
 - Condition of the Town's infrastructure (roads, drainage, parks & buildings)
 - Learn citizen conceptions about problems and solutions
 - Listen to any "hot button" issues
- Approach
 - Engage in Focus Group Dialogues with small groups of voters from all of Moraga's neighborhoods
 - Conduct a separate Online Survey available to all
 - Ask similar questions to ensure that Focus Group findings represent the community
 - See if anything was missed
 - Use the findings to help the Town Council determine next steps

Focus Group Selection



Objective: Recruit a representative cross section of Moraga Voters

- Town divided into six geographic Districts tied to Moraga voter precincts
- Utilized voter rolls which were filtered to eliminate:
 - Non-Moraga mailing addresses
 - “Non-likely” voters (voted in fewer than 2 of last four elections)
 - No telephone number on voter rolls
- For each District, “call” lists were randomly generated comprising 80 unique voters
- Phone-bank volunteers recruited approximately 12 discussion group candidates from each call list; no arm-twisting, no further screening
- Discussion groups ranged from 7-10 participants in size, with a mix of ages, genders and geographic districts

Focus Group Discussion Method



- Focused 2-hour-long discussions around a set of carefully constructed questions
- Each of six groups comprised 7-10 citizens representing a cross section of Town
- Professionally facilitated and recorded on flip-charts
- Each session observed by two or three committee members and a maximum of two Town Council members
- No observer-focus group member interaction allowed
- No video or audio recording (honoring participant confidentiality)
- Conducted at Hacienda (Dance Room) on three days in late May

***RECON Committee's purpose: Listen and learn,
not to discuss or advocate***

Online Survey—Methodology



Objective: Validate the Focus Group discussions.

See if any additional issues surface

- Augment focus group discussion process by providing an opportunity for all Moragans to weigh in
- Provided pro bono by Dr. Larry Bienati and Ms. Lilia Garcia via their *eListen.com* system
- Survey period: Late June to July 10, 2010
- RECON committee expanded the Focus Group questions. Total of 15 question areas
- 650 respondents by closing date

Online Survey Analysis



- The “art and science” of online survey analysis: What’s important?
- Develop both quantitative and qualitative response data by question area
- Capture top six theme areas in the Online Survey to validate and/or augment the Focus Group conclusions
- Capture similarities with Focus Group results as well as any significant differences, if applicable

Online Survey—Demographics



- Survey respondents (650 as of July 10 closing) evenly represented all geographic districts of Town
- Almost all respondents represented two-or-more-person households
 - 55% had children living at home
 - Of those with children, most had 1-2 children at home
- Most respondents have lived in Moraga over 10 years
 - 28% less than 10 years
 - 34% between 10 and 20 years
 - 15% between 21 and 30 years
 - 23% over 30 years
- Respondents predominantly over age 40
 - 9% between 20 and 30 years
 - 66% between 41 and 65 years
 - 24% over 65
- Half were employed, 25% were retired

Focus Group Question—Values



“What do you value or appreciate about our Town? Why is Moraga a great place to live and work from a ‘quality of life’ perspective?”

- ❑ “Small Town”, quiet, quaint, secluded, atmosphere (26)
- ❑ Schools / Quality of Education (22)
- ❑ Sense of Community (17)
- ❑ “Pastoral”, Semi-Rural Setting (15)
- ❑ Central Location (access to San Francisco and Walnut Creek) (15)
- ❑ The People / The Neighbors and Neighborhoods (14)
- ❑ Safety / Low Crime (10)
- ❑ Recreation amenities (11)
- ❑ Kid and Family Friendly (9)
- ❑ Community Services (police and park & rec) (8)
- ❑ Community Events (8)
- ❑ Saint Mary’s College (6)

Online Survey Question—Values



“What do you value or appreciate about our Town?”

- ❑ Schools / Quality of Education (450)
- ❑ “Small Town”, quiet, quaint, secluded, atmosphere (250)
- ❑ “Pastoral”, Semi-Rural Setting (200)
- ❑ Safety / Low Crime (150)
- ❑ Public Areas/Parks (125)
- ❑ Sense of Community (100)
- ❑ Central Location/Convenience (50)
- ❑ The People / The Neighbors and Neighborhoods (85)
- ❑ Kid and Family Friendly (75)
- ❑ Community Services (police and park & rec) (25)
- ❑ Community Events (75)
- ❑ Saint Mary’s College (25)
- ❑ Retail services (20)

Values and relative weighting were consistent between Focus Groups and Online Survey

Online Survey—Values



“Why Is/Is Not Moraga a Great Place to Live and Work?”

- Feedback to this question was mostly positive (more than 450 such comments)
- Five major thematic areas of concern were noted:
 - Deterioration of streets and roads
 - Lack of retail shops, dining and entertainment
 - Poor condition of Rheem Shopping Center and high vacancy rate
 - Blight in Moraga Center
 - Need to strike a balance between economic development and maintaining the Town’s core values

Focus Group Question— Expectations



“As a Moragan what are your key expectations for Town government and staff and the services they provide?”

- Promote economic development through support and advocacy of affordable business environment. Revitalize the Town’s retail shopping areas (particularly the Rheem Shopping Center) (22)
- Be fiscally responsible and accountable. Work to generate revenues for the Town (14)
- Manage development and growth in a reasonable way that protects and reflects our core values (12)
- Communicate with the community and promote civil, two-way discourse (10)
- Assure Town safety (10)
- Provide primary services (Police and Park & Rec) (8)
- Manage Town’s infrastructure (6)

Online Survey—Expectations



“What are your most important expectations for services the Town Council and Staff provide?”

- Minimum government with clearly demonstrated effective and efficient use of financial resources
- Quality roads and infrastructure
- Promotion of economic development
- Police focus on traffic control, safety, crime prevention
- Planning focus on fast turnaround, flexibility, customer service

Focus Group Question— Knowledge



“What do you know about the Town’s financial condition?”

- “Don’t know as much as I should” / Need for more information (16)
- General perception that revenues are decreasing and things are “tight now” financially (15)
- We are fine, compared to others in California / Trust we will not go bankrupt (15)
- Need to focus on saving money / Have to prioritize (9)
- Suggest a summary version of Town’s annual financials be made available

Online Survey Question— Knowledge



“What do you know about the Town’s Financial Condition?”

- Very few respondents claimed to be “well informed” (11%)
 - 44% were “somewhat informed”
 - 32% knew “only a little”
 - 13% said they knew “nothing at all”
- Respondents identified two existing major sources of financial knowledge
 - Town’s periodic publications & website cited by 43%
 - Local news media mentioned by 41%
- Improvements suggested to enhance understanding
 - Newsletter with simple graphs & pie charts (427 responses)
 - Condensed financial statements on Town website (291 responses)

Focus Group Questions— Performance vs Expectations



“What do you know about services provided by the Town and their cost?”

- Have not seen services decreased or degraded / No issue with Town services (13)
- Concerned about Police costs (6)

“What do you know about Infrastructure conditions (roads, drainage, street lighting, parks)?”

- Concern with deteriorating roads and recent repaving projects (17)
- Infrastructure relatively good: Major roads are acceptable, neighborhood streets are poor (6)
- Concern about condition of sports fields (3)

Online Survey— Performance vs Expectations



“Do you think the Town is doing a good job of meeting your and our community’s needs?”

- Over 80% of respondents generally satisfied with services of Police, Parks & Recreation, Public Works
- Majority generally positive about services provided by Town Government, given limited financial resources and necessary reliance on volunteerism
- Major concerns:
 - Deterioration of two commercial centers
 - Deterioration of streets and roads
 - Cumbersome planning process
- Significant untapped opportunity:
 - Engagement of the Saint Mary’s College community

Focus Group Question—Remedies



“What, if anything, do you think needs to be done about any deficiencies in service and/or infrastructure?”

- Most frequently heard:
 - Stronger education and two-way communication between the Town and its Townspeople regarding issues and financial situation of the Town (15)
 - Advocate for the improvement of the Rheem Shopping Center (11)
 - Prioritize (and publicize) key issues facing Town, related to Core Values (8)
 - Attract more business to the Town to increase sales tax base (10)
 - Increase citizen involvement, volunteerism (8)
 - Work to improve Town’s appearance (5)
 - Additional taxes may be necessary (3)
 - Capitalize on being a “College Town” (3)

Online Survey—Remedies



“If you believe services need improvement, how could things be improved?”

- Focus on roads and infrastructure; optimize use of federal, state and regional funding assistance
- Promote economic development and local business activities that model core values of the Town
- Improve public communications
- Increase community engagement in determining needs, developing potential solutions and setting priorities

Focus Group Question— What To Do?



“Based on your earlier identified ‘values’ and ‘deficiencies’, what is your highest priority for generating revenue? What would you be willing to do or support?”

- Economic development (17)
 - ❑ More commercial development to increase sales tax revenue
 - ❑ Focus on Rheem Center
 - ❑ Attract stores that are economically viable long-term
- Taxes (10)
 - ❑ Specific assessments are fine, if for something valued
 - ❑ Citizens are reasonable if need is well-communicated
 - ❑ Need good justification and good long-range plan
 - ❑ Tax increases must be a last resort
 - ❑ “Pay as you go” preferred; huge assessments not acceptable

Focus Group Questions— What To Do? (Cont'd)



***“What is your highest priority for generating revenue?
What would you be willing to do or support?”***

- New development / growth (7)
 - Don't shut doors to development
 - Balance growth with quality of life
- Increased volunteerism (6)
 - Town runs on volunteers
 - Seek out way to build community involvement
 - Citizens are willing to volunteer, if asked
- Reductions in services (3)
 - Not much to reduce
 - Combining with Lafayette/Orinda—is this an option?
 - Are outsourcing and/or privatizing worth pursuing?
 - Look to other cities for models

Online Survey Question— What To Do?



“If it were clearly demonstrated to you that the Town’s Services (Police, etc), infrastructure (streets & storm drains), or any other qualities you most value about the Town were “at risk”, would you consider paying more to address the threats?”

- Respondents demonstrated open-mindedness to possibility of increased taxes and/or fees

Response	Count	Percent
Yes	225	34%
Maybe	330	50%
No	104	16%

- However, the populace must be convinced that needs are real, expenditure plans are well-developed, and available resources are being prudently used

Focus Group Question— Information



“What information do you need to: (1) evaluate the Town’s financial condition; (2) ensure that Town services are being delivered efficiently; and (3) that services or infrastructure deficiencies need to be addressed?”

- Improved access to information (made available online)
 - Condensed financial statements, sources and uses of funds
 - Major issues that Town is currently studying
 - Cost/benefit project analyses
- Open, honest communication—transparency
- Need the bigger picture, the long-term view
- Need to know “What’s in it for me?”
- Improved two-way (Citizen-Town) communication
- Evidence of more coordination between the School District and the Town

Focus Group Question— Communication



“How can we best communicate issues to Moragans, so we can reach a wider audience for input and reaction?”

- Use of the Web and online communications
- Better utilize local newspapers
- Use the Moraga Town sign boards, bill boards or an electronic billboard
- Utilize Town Council Meetings (send emails listing items to be discussed)
- Provide informal opportunities for Council members and staff to interface with the townspeople (e.g. Farmer’s Market, Fairs, etc.)
- Expanded/additional Focus Groups
- Broader multi-media campaign to get the word out about issues, threats
- Identify neighborhood “evangelists”
- Collaborate with Schools to get the word out

Significant Observations

From the RECON Program



- Findings of Focus Group process were validated and reinforced by Online Survey responses
- Moragans have a compelling set of core values: quality schools, rural/quiet setting, safety, parks and recreation
- Moragans want enhanced retail environment and improved infrastructure maintenance
- Moragans are prepared to invest in improving their community. But, it is up to the Town Council to demonstrate the value proposition, prioritize tax solutions, and provide credible expenditure plans
- Multiple forms of communication dissemination will be required in order to engage the community

Recommendations for Town Council Consideration



- Create a greatly improved awareness of the Town's financial situation
- Make the populace aware of at-risk infrastructure needs, and programs for correcting deficiencies
- Create an improved program for economic development; this should include St. Mary's College (similar to other "College Towns")
- Evaluate ways to streamline the Town's planning processes
- Develop ways to improve communications between the Citizens and the Town's government