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## Specific Plan Approved by Moraga Planning Commission

By *Sophie Braccini*

On April 20, after months of study and discussion, the Moraga Planning Commission approved a Moraga Center Specific Plan that offers the potential for building 560 dwelling units in the downtown area.

Many questions remain unanswered as the main property owner, the Bruzzone family, does not appear to support the plan.

The Commission had to decide between four alternatives. They chose a median option that sets the stage for building up to 560 dwelling units, 90,000 square feet of retail space, 50,000 square feet of office space, a 50-room hotel, a 30-room congregate care facility and a 60-room assisted living facility. Commissioners Stacia Levenfeld and Dick Socolich voted against that plan. "560 units is too much and not compatible with the character of the town," said Levenfeld, who added concerns around the 90,000 square feet of new retail that the plan can accommodate.

As part of their decision-making process, the commissioners studied the impact the plan would have on traffic. This question has been an area of particular scrutiny both in Moraga and in neighboring cities that are concerned with increased traffic coming from Moraga.

Fehr & Peers, traffic consultants for the Town, presented their findings. They calculated that the total impact shouldn't be more than 1 or 2% of added traffic at major intersections compared to the present situation. They explained that the impact on traffic would be limited because multi-family housing generates less traffic than single-family homes, especially when considering senior housing, student housing, or housing for the local work force that presently lives outside of Moraga.

Planning Commissioner Bruce Whitley remarked that the impact of the Specific Plan should not be compared to what the traffic is today, but to what the traffic would be if the area was built according to its present zoning. The present building potential of the Moraga Center area is of about 339 homes. If built, these new homes would likely generate more traffic than the multi-family units the Specific Plan proposes. Therefore not adopting the plan now could even have a more negative impact on traffic.

Also included in the project description for the Moraga Center Specific Plan was the development of a 30,000 square foot community center/gymnasium. The commissioners recommended that if such a facility were to be built, it should be located across from the Commons Park, where the Town signboard is located, as opposed to the area currently used for overflow parking. Dave Bruzzone had stated at a previous meeting that he would never build such a center where the overflow parking is because he considers that a facility in middle of prime retail space would be counter-productive to achieving economic viability.

Bruzzone expressed a series of concerns he has regarding the financial sustainability of the project. He explained that in order for a new downtown to be successfully developed there should be additional high-end family units built in town. "The plan will fail without the development of Bollinger Canyon," he said, referring to one of the other properties the family owns in Moraga. He says does not understand why all of the future affordable housing in town should be built on his property, when other locations, such as the Rheem Center area, could have been considered. "We want to see a quaint downtown with the development of a

nice corridor along the creek, new restaurants and retail," he said. For the property owner, the development of the Moraga Center should be studied within a whole town development perspective.

But the Town of Moraga is studying the Moraga Center and the Rheem Center areas one after another in order to amend its General Plan. Furthermore, the Planning Department has used the opportunity of the development of a Specific Plan for the Moraga Center to fulfill its State mandate to provide for a range of housing options, including affordable housing. The Plan approved by the Planning Commission will allow the town to complete that mandate.

The Town Council should review the plan by the end of May (check the Town web site at [www.ci.moraga.ca.us](http://www.ci.moraga.ca.us) for updates). There will be then another opportunity for the public to make comments.

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