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## Moraga Center Specific Plan Moving Toward Consensus

By Sophie Braccini



Map courtesy of [www.maps.google.com](http://www.maps.google.com)

(Editor's note: On May 27th the Moraga Town Council is scheduled to review the Planning Commission's recommendations as outlined in this article. Please check our website, <http://www.lamorindaweekly.com> for an update.)

□ "I think we've made a little progress and I am encouraged," said Moraga Town Manager Mike Segrest, commenting on the May 18 Planning Commission meeting at which the Moraga Center Specific Plan (MCSP) was discussed. For the first time, and after years of discussions, it seemed that the Town and principle property owners -- the Bruzzone family -- had achieved a framework for the future development of the MCSP. If approved by the Town Council, the May 18 consensus will establish a critical milestone for realizing the future of downtown Moraga.

□ A few days earlier, on May 13th, the Town Council meeting saw the usual level of confrontation between the Town of Moraga and the Bruzzones, as the number and types of housing were discussed. The Council was reviewing the Planning Commission's previous recommendation to limit the number of dwelling units in the MCSP to 560, Option 4 of the different alternatives that had been studied.

□ Council Member Ken Chew clearly stated that his job was not to make sure that property owners make money, but that our citizens are heard, and he favored

the construction of no more than 400 dwelling units. Council Member Karen Mendonca supported Chew's position. Mayor Dave Trotter and Council Member Mike Metcalf supported zoning that would allow 560 units, noting that, "it seemed reasonable."

□ Council Member Howard Harpham asked the property owner what would be the number of housing units needed to allow him to successfully develop the Moraga Center area. In response, Dick Loewke, planning consultant to the Bruzzone family, stated the right number of units was somewhere between 560 and 720. When asked to share the studies that justify these figures, he answered "there was none."

□ In absence of an economic study that would determine the right number of dwelling units, Segrest proposed that the impact of traffic could help determine the number of housing units acceptable in the MCSP. "Traffic is clearly one of the main concerns that surround this project," he said.

□ Confronted with unanswered questions, the Town Council sent the plan back to the Planning Commission for its May 18 meeting.

□ In the meantime, the property owner and Town staff met to discuss the plan. At the May 18 meeting, Loewke proposed refinements to the MCSP that would allow greater flexibility to the 560 housing unit option.

□ The consultant explained that flexibility was a key to the success of a plan that will take years to be built and will have to adapt to economic situations that no one can really anticipate.

□ Loewke advocated flexibility to vary the mix of senior, work force and compact single-family housing units, while respecting peak commute limits for external traffic volume (inbound in the morning and outbound in the afternoon) as defined in the Environmental Impact Report (EIR).

□ Planning Commissioner Bruce Whitley was the only one that night to express reservations. He said that increasing flexibility could result in the construction of a larger number of units. Because he was concerned with the risk of changing the character of the town, he said he would favor sticking with the previous 560 dwelling unit plan. His position failed to sway other colleagues on the Commission and the motion to approve the compromise was passed.

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