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Ten Years in the Making

By Sophie Braccini



Design by Andy Scheck

acre, similar to the Sonsara development," said resident Dave Ramazetti, "but a lot of citizens are concerned about the size of this new development and their comments are not taken into account." Ramazetti cited concerns over the crime rate going up, or increased traffic beyond what experts have predicted. "I understand that the town needs more resources, but some alternatives could be studied, such as a higher parcel tax, rather than developing like Lafayette or Walnut Creek," he added. Mike Bernhardt indicated his concern about the lack of affordable housing and control, "What would happen if the developer would choose to just add housing and nothing else?" he asked.

Those questions prompted the Council to redefine the political will behind the plan.

"There needs to be more development downtown to make it worthwhile for the property owner, plus we want a center for Moraga and that will be the extended School Street," said Council Member Dave Trotter, "The implementation will be challenging but we can't stagnate and we need to move forward."

Council member Mike Metcalf, who was on the original steering committee in 1999, added that from a traffic view point, the new zoning plan had a better potential outcome than that of the 2002 General Plan.

"The build up of the General Plan would produce a lot of traffic from giant homes, this does not work," he said, adding that clustering at higher density had a proven lighter traffic impact.

"I liked the number 400, but we didn't get a majority for this" said Vice-Mayor Karen Mendonca, referring to the number of housing units permitted by the new plan. She added that the Plan provides what residents have been asking for years in term of senior, student and work force housing. "By the time this is built, some of us might be looking for such opportunities!" said Mendonca. Council Member Howard Harpham and Mayor Ken Chew also agreed that this was a good plan.

Planning Director Lori Salamack, who has been at the forefront of this project for years, stressed that the only project that could break ground in the coming months was the development at a minimum density of 20 dwelling units per acre (30 units if the project is for senior housing) on a six-acre lot. That project would only require staff approval and is the condition that Moraga has chosen to fulfill its State mandate for affordable housing. "Density is enough," she confirmed, "The developer will not have to guarantee any affordability for these units."

As far as the rest of the Plan (summarized in the sidebar), its development hinges on the developers' decision. "There is a possibility to enter into a development agreement with the property owner," said Salamack, "but there is no obligation." The Plan could very well take much longer to develop than it took to be drafted.

The Moraga Town Council approved the Moraga Center Specific Plan on January 27, 2010, after some colorful commentary. "It's time to pick this fruit, it has reached full maturity and we don't want it to rot," said Vice-Mayor Karen Mendonca. "This is a Procrustean bed," said Council Member Dave Trotter, referring to the Greek mythological figure Procrustes who either stretched out or cut off the extremities of prisoners who didn't fit his bed. "We are polishing a rock," added Council Member Metcalf. Planning Director Lori Salamack noted that this process started ten years ago.

The final session allowed a last tweak or two to the Plan; it was also an opportunity for the Council to remind the community of the arching principals of a plan that holds the possibility of dramatically altering Moraga's downtown area.

Some residents still had concerns to voice. Judy Dinkle, of the Hacienda Foundation, expressed concerns about the re-appearance in the text of a new community center that would be constructed in the Moraga Center area. "The Hacienda Foundation believes that the Town's resources should not be directed toward a new center, when the Hacienda could be improved for a fraction of the cost," said Dinkle, adding that the term gymnasium would be better suited. Council members indicated later that the new center was only a possibility, not a requirement, and they encouraged the Foundation to come to the Town goal setting session on February 20 from 8:00-12:00 at the Hacienda.

Others again expressed their concern about the size of the project. "I am happy to see that the undeveloped side of Camino Ricardo has been zoned at three dwelling units per

Moraga Center Specific Plan Summary

- Up to 90,000 square feet of new retail and entertainment space
- Up to 85 rooms for a bed and breakfast/boutique hotel
- Up to 50,000 square feet of new office space
- Up to 150 assisted living/congregate care units
- Up to 630 new residential units at densities of 3 to 20

Dwelling Units per Acre (DUA); up to 30 DUA with available density bonus for senior housing

- A Community Center of up to 20,000 square feet could be accommodated in the Specific Plan area

Residential details: Development allowed under the Plan includes up to 65 traditional single-family detached homes at 3 to 6 DUA along Camino Ricardo. Other residential housing includes up to 300 active senior dwelling units at up to 30 DUA; up to 165 compact single-family housing units at 10-12 DUA in a central "Village" setting; and up to 100 workforce housing units. The mix of housing may vary, but minimum residential unit types have been identified in the MCSP, including 40 single family detached homes, 148 active senior units, and 100 compact single-family homes.

The ultimate residential development in the adopted MCSP will be capped at a number and mix of types of residential units that are expected to generate no more than the level of peak hour, peak direction traffic generated by build out of the development levels anticipated for the MCSP area in the 2002 General Plan.

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