

Meet Planning Director Lori Salamack

By Sophie Braccini

From the 2nd floor at 329 Rheem Blvd., Lori Salamack directs the Planning Department for the Town of Moraga. The mother of two teenage girls lives in Oakland where she was born. After a B.S. in Economics at UC Berkeley, she moved to New York State where she completed an M.S. in Urban Environmental Studies at the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. There, she worked for a developer, Properties of America, specializing in the second-home market for the Boston and New York area. When the real estate market crashed in 1987, having completed her graduate studies, she and her husband decided to move back to the West. In 1990 she became Piedmont's City Planner. But for somebody who enjoys working on land development projects, Piedmont didn't have enough to offer, so when a position became available in Moraga in 2001, she made the move. "I was looking forward to working with St Mary's as well," adds Salamack, "I had worked for my Alma Mater, Rensselaer, and had enjoyed the challenge."

Salamack's department processes all applications for development, additions and modifications of residential and commercial buildings. Anything that's built in the scenic corridor, on hillside or that requires some exception to the municipal rules needs to be processed by the Design Review Board. Rich Chamberlain, Senior Planner, is in charge of about twenty-five applications a year that require this procedure. Otherwise, Kelly Suronen, Assistant Planner, processes about seventy applications a year that conform to the Design Guidelines. "The vast majority of the applications are approved," says Salamack, "we work with the applicants so they understand the Guidelines and modify their project so it fits in." The Director works with the administrative support of Rhonda Basore.

A less common part-time position reports to Salamack as well. Calvin Wong is in charge of the Transportation Program for the Town of Moraga.

"Planning oversees the development plans of the shopping centers and businesses in town, an efficient public transportation system is an important element to create a successful retail climate," she explains. For some time now her department has been working cooperatively on a shuttle program that would link both shopping centers, the St Mary's campus, Ascot Drive (where many students reside), the retirement homes and possibly Campolindo High school. The project is called SMART: St Mary's Ascot Rheem Transit. With the campus having the MBA program housed on Rheem, this makes a lot of sense, and not only for the students. Salamack notes that the College is the largest employer in town, but it does not contribute as much as it could to the local economy.

This interesting development will materialize when long term financing has been secured. Salamack believes that it could be part of the Specific Plan for the Rheem Shopping Center. At the moment, the Planning Department is working on the Moraga Center Specific Plan. The



Lori Salamack working on the Moraga Center Specific Plan

Photo Sophie Braccini

complex process involves the Design Review Board as well as Planning. "I am a flexible person," says Salamack, "the process is fixed but not the order of operations. When managing large projects with many stakeholders, one has to remain adaptable."

If the Planning Director works by the book, the Municipal Code book, she is not shy about making recommendations for modifications when improvements can be made.

Salamack also encourages public comment on planning issues. "It's to the advantage of the public to participate and the government needs to know the view of the public." Salamack believes that it is the role of her department to inform the public about coming meetings, to provide agendas and minutes. But individuals need to be active, too, and seek the background and complementary information they need.

To be notified of upcoming issues, send an email to Darlene Colaso, the Town Clerk, at dcolaso@moraga.ca.us, and ask to be added to the Town's e-mail list.