



## Moraga Dreams Its Future

By Sophie Braccini



Moraga residents chose the styles they like best Photo Sophie Braccini

Mike Bernhardt imagined his experience in a future Moraga, looking at pictures of possible downtown designs, “It could feel like a European village, with small meandering streets connecting larger ones, with appealing store fronts and outside dining...” It’s true that the downtown area between Moraga Way, Moraga Road and Camino Ricardo has a lot of hidden potential: the Laguna creek, soft hilly grounds, and the Ranch area with its rustic look. It’s easy to imagine what a planned development could create as far as charm and convenience for Moraga residents.

The process Bernhardt was participating in was a “charrette,” or input session for residents to express what they would like to see in the future development of this area. “We see this visualization of the Specific Plan for the Moraga Center as a way to include the public in the decision making,” said Mayor Lynda Deschambault. She hopes this will help move forward a discussion that was started years ago and never brought to fruition. The design consultant for the Town, the Dahlin Group, gathered information and will return with visual simulations at a future date to be determined.

The March 27th charette was held in the Fellowship Hall of the Moraga Presbyterian Church and hosted by Lauri Moffet-Fehlberg, Principal of the Dahlin Group. Each of the roughly eighty residents present at the meeting was given colored dots to choose imagery that corresponded to the feel they would like their city to present. Five types of usages have been selected: the “Ranch Area” (where the historical buildings that harbor the Ranch House Café are located), “the Village” that would be retail oriented, higher density housing for seniors, students and lower income families, lower density housing, and a mixed-use area that could incorporate some retail space, offices and housing.

After each participant chose their preferred styles, Moffet-Fehlberg presented the winning options and asked the group for the rationale behind their choices. Most favored looks that were rustic, eclectic, with open space, gathering space and a lot of trees. One participant humorously pointed out, “If you want mature sixty year old trees in your landscape, you’d better start planting them now.”

Planning Director Lori Salamack reminded the crowd that this intake was part of a larger development process. “The Town is obligated to plan for more affordable housing by mid 2009. This Specific Plan is the way we have decided to address it, so we will move quickly in the planning process.” That said, the obligation of the Town is to plan, not to build. “What is the use of all this planning effort if nothing ever happens?” asked a resident. Council member Mike Metcalf responded, “The alternative to planning is chaotic development, and we don’t want that anymore in our town.”

A key partner in this process is the property owner, the Bruzzone family. Joan and David Bruzzone were present at the meeting and have been involved with Dahlin on an ongoing basis. “We think this is a great opportunity for us and the community to build something great,” said Dave Bruzzone. “How fast this happens will depend on economic factors.” Bruzzone added that he hoped political pressures would not impede the process. Joan Bruzzone noted, “Flexibility will be the key to the long term success of the project, as economic conditions may vary dramatically over the years.”