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Moraga En Route to Approving its Housing Element and Specific Plan

By *Sophie Braccini*

The Moraga Center Specific Plan (MCSP) and the Housing Element for Moraga continue to be developed by the Town, in spite of a non-buy-in by the main property owner, the Bruzzone family.

On March 26 a joint meeting of the Planning Commission and the Design Review Board was conducted as part of a series of public sessions that aim at adopting the MCSP (in the area comprised between Moraga Rd, Moraga Way and Camino Ricardo) and at establishing a Housing Element for the Town of Moraga, complying with its State obligation.

The MCSP will determine specific zoning and design guidelines for these areas. Whether the property owner will ever decide to develop the pear orchard along Camino Ricardo, the Ranch area and the Laguna Creek, the R.V. and overflow parking area and renovate the Moraga Center shopping center remains to be seen, since the Bruzzone family continues to display opposition to the plan as it is proposed.

At the March 26 meeting Joan Bruzzone and her son David both addressed the Planning Commission and the Design Review Board as part of the public comment period, raising different concerns and objections, making it obvious that this plan is not to their liking. "What role do you envision for the property owner in this design process?" asked Mrs. Bruzzone. David Bruzzone raised the issue of the appropriateness of the proposed density of 20 dwelling units per acre.

"We have been working with them (the Bruzzone family) since the fall of 2002 on these questions," said Lori Salamack. It is the duty of the Town to plan, but without a consensus it is hard to imagine when residents will see anything actually happen. The alternative of doing nothing and not spending the money that goes into planning is not an option either: "If there is no plan, then when a developer comes back with a project such as the Orchard Supply store, the town goes in an uproar and there is no rule to fall back on," explains Salamack.

The Bruzzone family did not comment on its plans for the Moraga Center.

In the meantime, the Specific Plan is being fully vetted and options will be decided in the months to come. The public is invited to check the pictures that are online (www.ci.moraga.ca.us) that show what the proposed land use rules could translate to. At the March 25 meeting, a simulation video presented by the Dahlin Group got many of the Commissioners quite puzzled. "It looks like downtown Emeryville," said Commissioner Allison Daniels, while DRB member Sayles expressed concerns about the preservation of the Laguna Creek and its riparian corridor.

Residents who have questions and desire to express concerns can come to future public meetings. Different aspects will be studied in the coming months with a decision that could be reached by the end of the summer. Dates are tentative at this time; check the Town web site for update. Right now it is planned that traffic and recreation amenities will be discussed at the April 6 meeting, that the Planning Commission will recommend a level of development (number of units that could reach more than 700) at its April 20 meeting, and that the Town Council could approve the MCSP at its May 27 meeting.

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