

Civic News

Moraga



Public Meetings	
Town Council	Wednesday, January 27, 7:30 pm Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School, 1010 Camino Pablo
Planning Commission	Tuesday, February 1, 7:30 pm Moraga Library, 1500 Saint Marys Rd
Design Review	Monday, January 25, 7:00 pm Moraga Library, 1500 Saint Marys Rd
Liaison	Friday, February 12, 8:00 am Fire Station, 1280 Moraga Way

Check online for agendas, meeting notes and announcements
Town of Moraga online: www.moraga.ca.us
Chamber of Commerce: www.moragachamber.org

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Moraga Specific Plan: The Democratic Process Takes Work

By Sophie Braccini

At the January 13th meeting of the Moraga Town Council the Moraga Center Specific Plan was reviewed yet again, or as Council Member Dave Trotter put it, "We've been massaging this for six months now."

However lengthy and detailed the process is, it seems that the text is always subject to modification, last minute additions, or, as was the case on January 13th, "mistakes" that delay final votes. A few motivated residents in attendance waited over three hours for the Council to work through its agenda and take up the Specific Plan. The discussion continued until midnight, and no final decision was made. That led some residents to ask whether the process still involved the public at the level it should.

"This is a public hearing and there is nobody here, you should not take a vote on this tonight," said Barbara Simpson. "How are the public's concerns addressed?" asked Jeffrey Fara, who said he had sent two letters and never received an answer. "This project got so much bigger than was discussed in the past; how did it get that way?" asked Connie Hayes. At midnight, it was clear that the doc-

ument was not yet ready and the final decision was postponed.

Of the five members of the public that were present to hear about a plan that could change the downtown significantly, only two stayed until the end of the meeting. It was easy to get lost in the debate over the use "will" or "could" in the CEQA (California Environmental Quality Act) Findings regarding the implementation of a recreation facility in the Moraga Center. Members of the Council wondered how a recreation center/gym was again referenced as being mandatory rather than just a possibility, as the Council had previously agreed. "I explained at previous meetings that we first had to work on the political aspects of the documents and that the thousand pages that compose the plan and the EIR (Environmental Impact Report) would be reconciled at the end," explained Planning Director Lori Salamack, "only one discrepancy was found and it will be fixed."

The reappearance of the gym was not the only element that concerned consultant Dick Loewke, representing the main property owner, the Bruzzone family. "One of our major concerns is the re-

moval of a paragraph that allowed the reuse of the adopted Environmental Impact Report for projects that are compliant with the plan," said Loewke. Adding the obligation for each and every project to go through complete individual EIRs would add costs and threaten the likelihood of the plan to be implemented, according to Loewke. A compromise was found to change that language in the final document.

On the other hand, no satisfaction was given to the Bruzzones regarding an additional 50 feet of setback from the creek that, according to Loewke, "takes away some of the best flat land for affordable housing, and will transpose the buildings to steeper slopes where they will be more visible."

During the evening, the public received a good summary of the rationale that took the plan where it is now, when Salamack responded to questions. "We could have planned a lower number of dwelling units and still satisfy our State housing mandate," she explained, "but there needs to be sufficient development to fuel the revitalization in the Moraga Center. The Council put a cap on the number of units, and required

that the traffic impact be less than the General Plan's. The Specific Plan needs to provide amenities, a quality of life and a sense of place. All these factors have taken us where we are." Salamack said that the Plan stems from needs identified by residents in the first year of planning, the first one being senior housing, that does not exist in Moraga and the impact of which is much less than single-family housing. Other needs are student housing (1000 undergrad students from Saint Mary's live off campus), and professional and work-force housing.

The Specific Plan sub-committee will meet again to work out acceptable language before the Council again takes up, and hopes to approve, the Plan on January 27th. "It won't be the end of the road, just the end of the beginning," said Salamack, referring to the implementation phase. In the meantime she is available by phone or email to respond to residents' questions. "When you are in a democracy it is work," she concluded, "People have to participate for it to work." She can be reached at 888-7043, or by email to lsalamack@moraga.ca.us.

Police Report



Toilet papered, 1/08/10 A family had been away from their Fernwood Drive residence for a few hours, when they returned unknown suspect(s) had "decorated" the front landscaping with toilet paper and tossed a life-size plaster statue to the ground. Stealthy TP-er's were not seen or heard by neighbors.

Profane poop on windshield, 12/31/09 Sometime between 10:30 p.m. on New Year's Eve and 2:00 p.m. on January 1st an unknown suspect wrote a profanity using feces across a Miramonte Drive resident's car windshield, while the vehicle was parked in her designated stall. Additional feces was smeared on the driver's door handle. That is just nasty.

Drunk in public, 12/31/09 At 3:15 in the afternoon a Moraga officer was dispatched to a possible D.U.I. - a car swerving all over the road on Moraga Road at Donald Drive. The driver was located on Ascot Drive as he was getting out of the vehicle. Good news he wasn't driving anymore, bad news he had a blood alcohol level of more than double the legal limit and he was on probation for a prior D.U.I. Because he wasn't driving when the cop caught him he was arrested for drunk in public and probation violation.

Found purse returned to owner, 1/03/10 A good citizen found a purse on the roadway near 7-11 and called police to report it. The purse had a small black wallet that contained California and Australian driver's licenses, gift cards, \$12.00 and some loose change. Everything was returned to the owner, who lives in Lafayette.

Council Orders Nuisance to be Addressed

By Sophie Braccini

Attorney Mark McLaughlin, representing the Alothman family that owns the house at 316 Calle La Montana in Moraga, appeared before the Moraga Town Council on January 13th to ward off abatement proceedings against the house that was declared a nuisance last October.

The house, located in the beautiful Campolindo neighborhood, has been unoccupied for years. It has degraded over time. Four years ago after a similar threat by the Town, the owners, who reside in Kuwait, had the roof replaced. They failed to

remove the car and furniture that still linger on the property and since then the house has been further vandalized.

According to Julie Herrington, whose family lives nearby, the house has become a place for teenagers to throw parties. The Town's staff is concerned over the mold and general squalor of the house, which could represent a health hazard.

McLaughlin explained to the Town that it was more reasonable to trust his clients to abate the condition themselves

within 30 days, saving the Town the expense. A list of seven actions that need to be taken was given to the owner. But the Council was ready to get tougher with an owner who, according to Council Member Mike Metcalf, has been taking the Council for a ride. "What can we do as a town to stop this abuse?" he asked.

For Council Member Trotter, the simple removal of filth and boarding of the house will not remedy the problem. He suggested that the house needs to be returned to a habit-

able state, to solve the situation permanently. The Council agreed, and a resolution was drafted that mandates the owner to comply with the 7 elements of the abatement list within 30 days, and hire a contractor that will restore the house to a selling or renting stage within six months. Monthly reviews by staff are required under the resolution.

Neighbors expressed satisfaction with the Council's firm stand. If the owner does not comply, the Town will take further action.

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