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Moraga encourages residents to participate in Housing Element decisions with the Balancing Act Tool

By Vera Kochan



Example of multi-family housing Photo provided

California's municipalities are about to enter into the 6th Cycle Housing Element between 2023-31. The Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) for Moraga, as determined by the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG), requires the town to come up with 1,118 units to fulfill its assigned quota. Of the necessary units, 318 are for very low-income, 183 are low-income, 172 are moderate-income, and 445 are above moderate-income units.

In an effort to involve the town's residents regarding potential housing sites and proposed densities, the Planning Department recently held three community participation events to that purpose. On March 25, an Opportunity Sites Walking Tour was held within the Moraga Center Specific Plan and Rheem Shopping Center areas. Maps were provided during the combined 1.5-mile tour and town staff was on hand with explanations and demonstrations of the Balancing Act Tool (an online community housing simulator).

The town also held two community meetings. The first was held in person on March 30 at the Hacienda de Las Flores, while the second took place via Zoom on March 31. The purpose of all meetings was to briefly explain Moraga's RHNA requirements and coach participants on how to use the Tool.

According to the town's website, "Balancing Act is an online mapping tool which allows residents to provide input on the most appropriate locations to potentially develop additional housing units in the Moraga community. Based on projections, and projects currently in the development pipeline, Moraga has a shortfall of 800 units in meeting its housing requirement of 1,118 units. The Balancing Act Tool enables residents to 'click' on each of the sub-areas and use 'plus' and 'minus' tools to add virtual housing units to each area. The number of units that can be assigned to each sub-area is capped to avoid putting all the units in one zone. Once a player reaches 800 units, they receive the 'You Have a Housing Plan!' message."

During the March 31 Zoom meeting members of the town's Planning Department - Planning Director Afshan Hamid, Assistant Planner Mio Mendez, Associate Planner Brian Horn and Administrative Assistant Suzie Mele - were on hand along with Advanced Planning Initiative Consultant Barry Miller to answer questions and guide attendees through the usage of the Balancing Act Tool and the distribution of units within 11 designated areas throughout town. Included in the Tool are maps of each potential area with visible landmarks making it easy for users to realize the areas in question.

Residents had the usual questions concerning evacuation routes in the event of an emergency; whether there would be more retail (namely another grocery store) to provide for a larger population; and traffic congestion during rush hours.

The Balancing Act Tool is available until April 23, and the town is encouraging all residents to take part in determining Moraga's future housing locations. For more information or to participate in the Balance Act visit: makemoragahome.org.

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