

Design Board Studies Sign Ordinance

By Steve Angelides

Moraga's Design Review Board held a study session on the Town's sign ordinance last month.

Town Planning Director Lori Salamak showed portions of an extensive lecture and slide presentation by a law professor on the legal aspects of sign ordinances. The main points of the presentation were that signs are important to a community, that their regulation should be content-neutral with objective standards which are easy to administer, that exceptions are risky, that the legibility of a sign off the premises is a useful criterion, that temporary signs should be limited and truly temporary, and that the objective of regulating signs is to achieve a proper balance.

The Board then heard public comments. Two merchants from the Rheem Center spoke. Dave Reynolds of Curves for Women spoke in favor of loosening the Town's restrictions on temporary signs and banners. George Quintero of the Rheem Valley Pet Shoppe spoke in favor of eliminating the requirement that neon "open" signs be six feet behind the window.

Community organizers Ellen Beans and Edy Schwartz reiterated Quinteros' concern about neon "open" signs. They said that during their visits with other merchants they had heard many similar complaints

Schwartz said that in Lafayette banners and temporary signs are very useful in communicating important events to the community, and she would like to see that occurring in Moraga. Schwartz added

that large stores have large signs, "but if we don't do something for the little people they're going to go out of business." "We don't want just the national chains," Schwartz emphasized.

Former Mayor Mike Majchrzak addressed the Board as a private citizen, providing some history of the Town's sign ordinance, and some personal opinions. He said the sign approval process needs to be simplified, that there should be more banners, that neon "open" signs are not very important, and that we need more advertising, because "sterile is not semi-rural."

Resident Mary Williams spoke in favor of Moraga's current sign ordinance, stating that Moraga generally has been an attractive place to live and that "overall Moraga's sign ordinance is excellent."

The three Design Review Board members present at the meeting, Dick Socolich, Gloria Nedell, and Christine Kuckuk then all expressed their opinions that as much as possible sign approvals should be handled administratively, rather than going through the Design Review Board.

Planning Commissioner Allen Sayles echoed those views. "I really feel sorry for businesses," Sayles added. "I would never own a business in this town. If you can't properly sign it, why be here?" Sayles exclaimed.

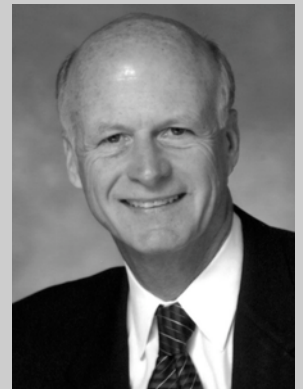


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