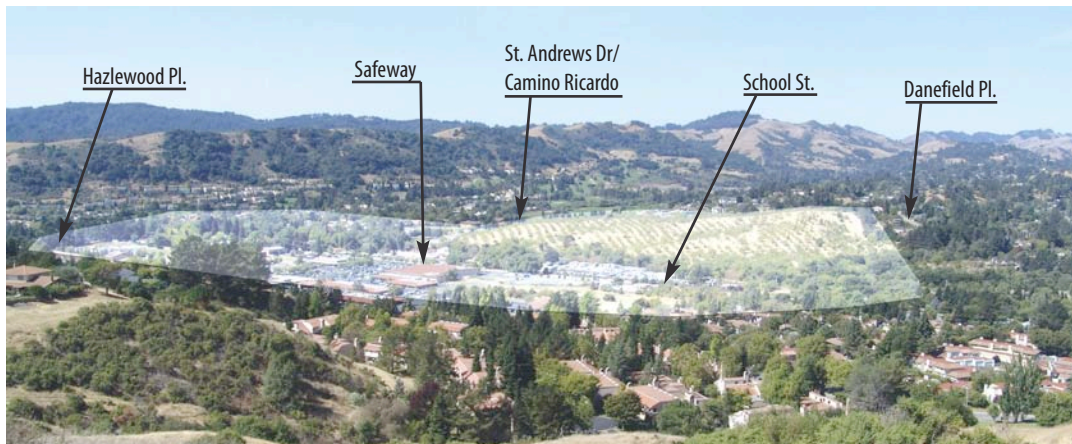


Moraga Center EIR Will Study 720 New Dwelling Units

By Steve Angelides



Moraga Shopping Center from Glen Alpine St.

Photo by Andy Scheck

The Moraga Town Council has directed the Town's staff to include up to 720 new dwelling units in the Moraga Center Specific Plan project description. This sets the stage for an environmental impact report (EIR) on the project and alternatives to it, which must be completed before the specific plan can be adopted.

Only alternatives included in the EIR can be included in the specific plan. Thus the project description effectively sets the upper limit on development that could be included in the specific plan.

The Moraga Center Specific Plan process has been underway since 2002, when the Town's General Plan, which requires specific plans for both the Moraga and Rheem center areas, was adopted. The Moraga Center area is roughly bounded by Danefield Place and Crossbrook Court on the North, Hazlewood Place and Sanders Drive on the South, Moraga Road and Country Club Drive on the East, and Camino Ricardo and St. Andrews Drive on the West.

The Council gave its directions on a 3 to 2 "straw vote", with Councilmembers Trotter and Bird, and Mayor Metcalf, in the majority, while Vice Mayor Deschambault and Councilmember Chew dissented. The

main point of contention was how many new dwelling units to include in the project description.

The staff recommended up to 720 new dwelling units, based on a land use plan largely prepared by a planner retained by the Bruzzone family, the largest landowner in the specific plan area. The Council majority agreed with the staff recommendation, while also directing that alternatives of 566 units and 339 units be considered in the EIR. Deschambault preferred an upper limit of 339 units, while Chew was not prepared to give any directions to staff.

In addition to the new dwelling units, the project description will include 90,000 square feet of new retail space, 50,000 square feet of new office space, and a 30,000 square foot gymnasium and community center. The Council also directed the staff to add renovation of the existing Moraga Shopping Center to the project description.

Another point of contention, between Trotter and landowner Dave Bruzzone, was the location of the gym and community center facility. At Trotter's request, the Council majority designated the overflow parking area across from the Moraga Commons as "Alternative A" for that facility, and the site across from the Commons

where the Town marquee is located as "Alternative B". Bruzzone, who prefers the marquee site, called Trotter's designation "very pejorative."

Besides being an important step in a five year planning process, Planning Director Lori Salamack hopes the Council's directions will lead to the release of \$250,000 of road funds the Town needs to pay for repaving Camino Pablo this summer. The Contra Costa Transit Authority is holding those funds because of Moraga's lack of progress on affordable housing.

Salamack explained that at a density of 20 units per acre, the new dwelling units in the project description would automatically be considered affordable under state guidelines, regardless of their actual market price. Resident Lee Hayes, who works for a homebuilder, told the Council that "you're not going to have a semi-rural community when you go 20 units per acre. You're going to have an Emeryville."

The Town's staff and consultants will now finalize the project description, begin drafting the specific plan, and prepare for the EIR. The next public step in that process will be a scoping session for the EIR, which is tentatively scheduled for September 4, 2007 before the Town's Planning Commission.

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