

Moraga Center Specific Plan Takes Shape: *Community Input Needed*

By Sophie Braccini



Planning Director Lori Salamack is holding a Specific Plan document, available at the Moraga Library or the Town Offices Photo Andy Scheck

The first visualization of the Moraga Specific Plan for the Moraga Center area was presented to the public on Monday, June 16th during a Planning Commission meeting. The Dahlin Group and Fehr and Peers presented alternative plans to develop the area. A draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for each option assessed impacts on traffic, air quality, and drainage among other aspects. The public has forty five days to comment on the plan, from June 17th-August 1st. Planning Director Lori Salamack encourages all residents to send their comments to her office. The consultants will subsequently present their responses to residents and the Town Council.

“Moraga’s General Plan calls for a Specific Plan in both the Moraga Center and the Rheem areas,” says Salamack, “the Moraga Center area is the largest undeveloped location where we can plan for the affordable housing that the Town has the obligation to design in order to comply with ABAG.” The Dahlin Group was awarded a contract to present different scenarios for development of the area, while Fehr and Peers assessed the traffic impact of the proposal.

The purpose of the plan is to revitalize the shopping center, create a real town center, add mixed student/senior/ multi-family housing and provide opportunities for potential new businesses such as a hotel, a community center/gym and office spaces.

The area that is proposed for the highest density is “the village” west of Laguna Creek and up to Camino Ricardo. The density would start at 24 units per acre closer to the creek to go down to 12 dwellings per acre approaching Camino Ricardo. The Ranch area would be renovated and harbor eclectic retail and walking space, School Street would be extended past Safeway to connect with St Mary’s Road and would be developed in a ‘Main Street’ style with mixed commercial and residential use.

A community center would be located to the north, across from the Moraga Commons Park. The area to the south of Moraga Way would be for a shopping center or mixed office/residential use. This scenario would allow the construction of 720 new dwelling units.

Some alternative plans were also presented. One would be a simple extrapolation of the General Plan and would permit the construction of only 323 housing units, which wouldn’t be sufficient for the Town to meet its ABAG obligation. Another alternative would reduce the maximum housing density to 20 units per acre, resulting in 400 new dwellings. That hypothesis would allow the town to meet its affordable housing obligation. Yet another plan includes 560 units and incorporates a gym located on the School Street extension. A town square was proposed in all of the alternatives in the middle of the School Street extension, shaped as a large roundabout, to control speed and provide a visual hub.

One of the main concerns of Moraga and surrounding city residents is the im-

pact on traffic of new developments. Fehr and Peers based its traffic impact report on a very detailed analysis of current Moraga traffic, by type of user (single or multi-family dwelling, seniors, students), by type of trip (shopping, commute, recreational) at different times of the day. They extrapolated their finding to the proposed development, incorporating the type of housing and therefore the type of traffic that would be expected. They added the fact that new retail would recapture some of the outside of the area shopping and that the community center/gym could attract different types of trips.

They concluded that the first option with 732 new units would increase traffic, while the other options would not have a significant impact, especially if the size of the community center/gym was limited to attract only local residents. Other issues were presented as well, such as adequate drainage and the need for additional services for new residents. Notably, the Moraga School District and the utility companies already have the capacity to cover the needs of the anticipated developments.

Most of the land addressed by the plan belongs to the Bruzzone family, and they have had conversations for years with the Town and its consultants about the plan. The Bruzzone’s development consultant, Dick Lockee, made a comment after the presentations. “This was a very good presentation,” he said, “with many exciting ideas.” He added that indeed Moraga needs to recapture some of its retail, but the specific plan does not include any facilitation for the implementation of the plan. “What are the incentives that will be put in place to attract the right retailers?” asked Lockee, “what kind of regulatory programs will allow speedy and smooth implementations?” The consultant explained that procedures that take years of review are not conducive to attracting investors.

You can watch the specific plan presentation on Comcast channel 26, Sunday, July 20 at 9 p.m. This broadcast is made possible by the Moraga Citizens Network (MCN) and a couple of dedicated townspeople who paid a production company to videotape the June 16 presentation. MCN is also looking into the possibility of posting it on their website, <http://www.moragacitizensnetwork.org/>, hinging on technical constraints.

All the documents presented at the June 16th meeting are available on-line. Of particular interest to residents is the “Draft EIR figures.” This nineteen-page pdf file includes the visual simulations created by the Dahlin Group and detailed maps for each of the alternatives. Go to <http://moraga.ca.us/production/index.php>. Send your questions and comments to LSalamack@ci.moraga.ca.us or come to one of the meetings where public comments will be heard and recorded.

Upcoming Meetings

Mon, July 7 at 7:30 pm

Planning Commission meeting at JM Auditorium, 1010 Camino Pablo

Public hearing and opportunity for public comments

Wed, July 9 at 7:30 pm

Town Council meeting at JM Auditorium, 1010 Camino Pablo
Presentation regarding the specific plan

Wed, July 22 at 7:30 pm

Town Council meeting at JM Auditorium, 1010 Camino Pablo
Public hearing and opportunity for public comments