

## Moraga Comments On Specific Plan

By Sophie Braccini

The public comment period on the Moraga Specific Plan is nearing its end. Unless modified, it will close on August 1st at 5 p.m. Since the forty five day comment period began on June 17th, the Moraga Specific Plan has been presented to and reviewed by all of Moraga's official bodies and many interested parties. Lori Salamack, Moraga Planning Director, has been collecting pages of observations and questions which will be officially responded to once the comment period is closed.

The Town Council had its chance to comment on the plan on July 9th. Some Council Members were very disappointed not to see the 3D animated simulation of the proposed development that had been promised by the Dahlin Group, the consultant in charge of the study. It seems that Town staff canceled that part of the presentation due to budgetary concerns, without a vote of the Council. "This should have been our decision," commented Council Member Rochelle Bird. Mayor Lynda Deschambault was concerned that this lack of visuals would not permit anyone to assess correctly the esthetic impact of the proposed developments.

The plan includes a significant addition of multi-unit housing, either senior housing, students or multi-families, which triggered many reactions from the public. In an email to Salamack, Ferenc Kovac, a 20 year resident of Moraga, summarizes the concern: "Bringing more homes, especially high density housing, will average the home price down, bring crime up, and have a huge

negative impact on the quality of life in Moraga."

The Bruzzone family, which owns 90% of the land targeted by the Specific Plan, expressed concern through their urban planner, Richard Loewke. During a Parks and Recreation meeting he explained that one of the locations proposed for the gymnasium would be very detrimental to retail success and on a larger scale he expressed the opinion that "the Bruzzone family ...were disappointed not to have been able to help shape the project description" and they are concerned that "the limitations contained in this version of the specific plan would block the production of both needed housing and retail development." The consultant proposed a very long list of elements to allow a successful development of the area. Among them, incentives to encourage the expansion of retail, the constitution of the right mix of housing according to market conditions, streamlining of the approval process, and consideration of the use of future revenue to underwrite the cost of a public shuttle service connecting Saint Mary's College, the downtown and BART stations, delivering traffic mitigation and additional retail traffic.

Traffic mitigation was one of Deschambault's concern as well since the new California Environmental Quality Act procedure requires developments to mitigate their

CO2 impact.

The traffic issue was echoed by some residents; one wrote: "Traffic is the main concern, specifically Moraga Road which is the main artery out of Moraga. This road is at full capacity now... How could it handle 2,000 or 3,000 additional car trips a day?"

Moragan James Johnson proposed a public referendum since he believes that the Specific Plan does not comply with the spirit of Moraga General Plan.

The Cities of Lafayette and Orinda both sent a letter requesting an extension of the public comment period, stating that 45 days is not enough time to review the voluminous and complex plan, particularly its impact on the roads and intersections. Both highlighted the timing, during summer vacation, that's not conducive to large public involvement.

At press time the Council hadn't made a decision on extending the comment period, however the staff's recommendation was not to extend to period because of the housing element contained in the plan that needs to be approved by the Town before a certain date. Whatever the vote of the Council, there is still time for residents to get informed and participate in the debate. The plan is available at the Moraga Library and online on the Town's web site (ci.moraga.ca.us); Salamack awaits your contributions. Public comments are also posted on the website.

Download the Moraga specific plan from:

<http://www.ci.moraga.ca.us>



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