

Moraga Specific Plan Continues To Raise Questions

By Sophie Braccini

The comment period on the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Moraga Specific Plan will not be extended. Despite requests from the cities of Lafayette and Orinda, and David Loeke, urban planner for the Bruzzone family, the Moraga Town Council decided not to change the August 1st deadline.

A major factor in the decision was the realization that comments can be sent after the deadline, and that letters from the neighboring cities and the responses could be included in the EIR even if they are received late.

If the deadline had been moved to a later date, the final vote could not have taken place until after the November election. None of the Council members expressed a desire to adhere to the deadline just to make sure they could participate in the final vote, but as Planning Director Lori Salamack explained, if the plan is not approved before the end of the year, months could be added to the process in order to bring possible new Council members up to speed.

Salamack keeps in mind the deadline of June 30, 2009, to present the Town's housing element to the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG). She was supported by Interim Town Manager Jay Tashiro, who has experienced firsthand the penalties a local government can face when defaulting on its housing obligation to the State.

Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) is a state mandated process for determining how many housing units, including affordable units, each community must plan. The California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) determines the total housing need for a region, and

it is the ABAG's responsibility to distribute this need to local governments. In Moraga, the number of required housing units is:

Very Low –	73
Low –	47
Moderate –	52
Above Moderate –	62
Total -	234

Because Moraga did not have a state certified housing element during the previous cycle the Town also needs to plan for those required units, bringing the total number of needed units to 307.

At the public hearing on July 22, many residents voiced concern that affordable housing would bring crime to town and change the nature of the place in which they have chosen to live. According to Salamack, however, the Town may opt to use the State's default density of 20 units/acre for a suburban location. By using the default standard, the Town is not required to prove affordability for low-income households. The Town's obligation then is to define areas that have appropriate zoning to accommodate affordable housing. In Moraga, a suburban area, the density is 20 units per acre. Council Member Rochelle Bird reminded the audience that the number of houses included in the Specific Plan has not been determined yet.

In October Salamack will present the responses to the comments that have been received. After this presentation the Council will discuss, amend and vote on a final version of the Specific Plan. Differences of opinion have already emerged on the Council.

Council Member Ken Chew believes that this plan would so change the character of the town that a referendum would be needed. Council Member Mike Metcalf

would like to better understand the risk associated with not having a housing plan. Bird believes that the town shouldn't be dictating what the developer must do with the property. Vice-Mayor Dave Trotter asks which vision is the right one for the community, stressing the need to revitalize the existing center and is concerned that the plan presented does not include a financial feasibility analysis. Mayor Deschambault is concerned by the absence of an evacuation plan, the viability of retail, the mitigation of the CO2 impact of the plan and the preservation of the riparian corridor by the creek.

Residents may still appear before the Council and voice their comments and recommendations until the final vote.