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Hetfield Project: Moraga Residents Organize to Appeal Planning Commission Approval

By *Sophie Braccini*



The hillside site of the proposed project Photo Sophie Braccini

The Planning Commission approved on November 17th a Mitigated Negative Declaration, a Conceptual Development Plan and a Conditional Use Permit for the construction of six new homes on the "Hetfield Estate." Immediately following this action, a number of Moraga residents living in the area organized to appeal these approvals. The Town Council will hear their request on January 14th 2009.

Located on MOSO land, the Hetfield property is across from Larch Creek, parallel to Sanders Drive; it is a woodsy hill that was used for cattle grazing. The owners of the land in question, Robert Lipson and Sandy Cage, have authorized John Wyro to submit an application to develop 6 homes on their 51.45 acres.

If built, the new residences would be accessed via a bridge at the end of Hetfield Place between 1120 and 1124 Sanders Drive. The new residential development, as currently proposed, will be located directly behind eighteen existing residences on Sanders Drive.

During the October 6th Planning Commission meeting, Planning Director Lori Salamack explained that the project, as redesigned, "would be the proper way to implement the MOSO guidelines on the site." She explained that the proposed area for development was outside the environmentally sensitive area, and the density of 1 dwelling per 9.7 acres was consistent with past practice in the Town for open space development.

On December 1st, a group of residents calling themselves the Sanders Drive-Hetfield Place Homeowners' Group filed an appeal with the Town of Moraga to reverse the decision. Their arguments entail a number of issues including environmental, visual, economic, and noise impacts they believe have not been

properly addressed and/or mitigated.

For example, they argue that the proposed massive grading of the hill will affect the area's wild life, creek water quality, and will permanently and adversely impact the wetlands.

The group also claims that the project fails to comply with key elements of Design Guidelines. That document states that new residential development should reflect the size, scale, height, setback and character of existing development. The 6 "Estate Houses" proposed in the project would "dwarf " the existing homes they would face along Larch Creek and will negatively affect the property values, according to the group.

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