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Moraga Specific Plan Triggers Traffic Concerns from Neighboring Cities

By Sophie Braccini

Traffic issues surrounding the Moraga Center Specific Plan (MCSP) took center stage at the May 13 meeting of the Town Council as the two neighboring cities of Lafayette and Orinda sent strong signals about their concerns regarding the impacts of the plan on their own travel times. The method used by the Consultant, Fehr and Peers (F&P), to calculate traffic takes into account the type of housing planned and assumes that residents will shop more locally if provided with an adequate mix of retail stores. The cities of Orinda and Lafayette have challenged these assumptions.

□ The MCSP addresses the 183 acre area located northwest of the Moraga Road/Moraga Way intersection and covers the existing shopping center plus about 90 acres of undeveloped land. Under current zoning, the undeveloped area could accommodate 366 single-family homes. The MCSP, which is in effect a large re-zoning effort, would comprise between 400 and 720 dwelling units, 90,000 square feet of new retail, and 50,000 sf of new office space.

□ Lafayette and Orinda sent letters, supported by traffic reports developed by transportation consultant TJKM, to the Town of Moraga that seriously challenged the finding of Moraga's traffic expert. During the Council meeting, F&P was asked to respond to Lafayette's concerns (Orinda's letter was received after the 13th). "They are comparing apples and oranges," said Rob Rees of F&P as he went down the list of Lafayette's findings, refuting one after another.

□ According to Rees, Lafayette's main difference is a failure to take into account the real usage of the units. Lafayette argues that a worst-case scenario approach should be used when planning for traffic impact.

□ "There is significant difference between the (Moraga) EIR (Environmental Impact Report) and the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) standards in term of trip generation," wrote Joy Bhattacharya from TJKM .

□ "It's true that standard ITE rates are higher than the ones we used," admitted Rees, "but that's because those rates are not applicable here, they were determined in Washington, not looking at the different local factors." Rees explained that the rates F& P used take into consideration senior housing, student and faculty housing, and workforce housing. "These types of residents generate much less trips than the single family residence," he added

□ The second difference of approach between the communities is the way they look at retail. Moraga Town Manager Mike Segrest consistently states that the fact that 75% of the dollars spent by Moragans goes to other cities is a mark of a lack of adequate retail in town. Therefore the MCSP will want to seek local stores that

will fulfill local needs, "There is no Costco in the future of Moraga," said Rees, explaining that the MCSP is what is called an "in-fill" project, meaning that it will attract mainly locals.

□ On the other hand, when Lafayette sees 90,000 sf of new retail, they calculate that there is enough space to attract the "big box" retailers that have a regional appeal and generate more "going to the freeway" traffic.

□ Moraga does not deny that their plan will have an impact on the neighboring communities: "Some of the intersections are so heavily impacted already that adding just one more trip a day will degrade the level of service," said EIR Consultant Rob Brueck, who further stated, "If the area we are talking about was developed to the capacity that is in the General Plan today, 339 single family homes would be built. That alone would generate more traffic than the development that is proposed today."

□ The Town seemed confident that, if the dispute should ever come before a court of law, Moraga would prevail. The Town Council and the Planning Commission continue to advocate sensitivity to the needs of their neighbors and plan to continue discussions.

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