



Independent, locally owned and operated!

www.lamorindaweekly.com 925-377-0977

Published December 9th, 2009

Approval of Moraga Specific Plan Delayed

By *Sophie Braccini*

The approval by the Town Council of the Moraga Center Specific Plan and Housing Element that was scheduled for the end of 2009 has been delayed until January 2010 due to the Town's desire to build a consensus with both residents and the property owners. New language is being added to meet the desiderata of the main property owner, but some residents are concerned about the consequences of the proposed new development on traffic as well as on the semi-rural character of the town.

The Town Council meeting December 2nd turned out to be a review of the plans and a time for the public to comment. On November 30th, the Planning Commission had postponed its recommendations since new elements had been given to them that very morning and they hadn't had time to review them. "It's like drinking from a fire hose," said Planning Commissioner Margaret Goglia, referring to the amount of information that they had to process in a short period of time, "and out of respect to the public, we need to allow more time to review the new elements." For residents who might not have followed the past year's worth of discussion, it is indeed a lot to swallow. There are two main documents that are pending approval: the Housing Element for the Town of Moraga, that will allow the town to meet its legal obligation to plan for affordable housing; and the Moraga Center Specific Plan, in which the Town has decided to locate all of this affordable housing, as well as completely revitalize and redesign the center of town.

A third document defines a 6-acre zone which would allow 20-dwelling units per acre, to be located in two possible sites in the Specific Plan area. This high housing density section is what the town has chosen to satisfy its affordable housing requirement, without having to prove that the dwelling units will in fact be affordable.

At the November 30th Planning Commission meeting, members of the public expressed concerns about the process: "We are not ready to accept this plan," said resident Ferenc Kovac, who added that he felt the Specific Plan might change the quality of life in Moraga. Richard Scarpitti, who lives on Camino Ricardo, asked if more visual simulations of what the pear orchard would look like once developed could be included in the Plan.

Another major actor is the Bruzzone family, which owns most of the land in the Specific Plan area; they are often represented by their consultant, Dick Loewke. At the Planning Commission meeting, Loewke presented the property owner's concerns. Among them was the lack of implementation elements in the plan, and the risk that the trail along the creek might interfere with commercial development.

At the Council meeting two days later, after Loewke and Moraga's Planning Director, Lori Salamack, met to work out their differences, new language was added to the plan. No implementation incentives were added, but the change effectively removed the creek-side trail. Jim Townsend, from the East Bay Regional Park District, spoke in favor of the previous version, "A trail is not designed to drive traffic to downtown retail," he said, "it can lead there, but there should be a possible alternative as well."

Both property owners, the Bruzzone family and the Chi family (which owns 14 acres of the total of 183), expressed overall satisfaction with the plan.

The main element that concerned some residents is a plan for up to 630 new units in the area between Moraga Way, Moraga Road and Camino Ricardo. "We're standing with our toes over a precipice, with nobody to pull us back," said Moraga resident J.D. O'Connor. "People who moved to Moraga didn't move to Lafayette," said Muriel Amsden, "we don't have the shopping, then so be it, we are semi-rural. I don't want to see 600 new units, and many people are not happy about this." Amsden's concerns also encompassed the impact on traffic.

Council Member Mike Metcalf asked Salamack to explain again how the town had reached the conclusion that the new development would not have a serious impact on traffic.

"Under current zoning, the undeveloped area of the specific plan could accommodate 366 single-family homes," Salamack replied, "the traffic impact of developing at that density would be in fact higher than what we are proposing here." Salamack's demonstration is backed by traffic studies that show that senior condos, student housing, and multi-family residences generate much less out of town traffic than do single family homes.

In light of the public's comments, the Council decided not to rush the approval of the documents and to wait until the beginning of next year. The Planning Commission will meet again on December - check our website for updates, www.lamorindaweekly.com.

The documents referenced in this article can be found on the Town of Moraga's website, www.moraga.ca.us. If you missed some of our coverage of this issue and want to know more, our articles are archived on-line: <http://www.lamorindaweekly.com/archive/issue0308/Moragas-Housing-Element-Planning-Commission-raises-important-questions-for-future-development-in-Moraga.html> <http://www.lamorindaweekly.com/archive/issue0307/Moraga-Center-Specific-Plan-to-be-Tweaked-Before-Adoption.html> <http://www.lamorindaweekly.com/archive/issue0306/Moraga-Specific-Plan-Triggers-Traffic-Concerns-from-Neighboring-Cities.html> <http://www.lamorindaweekly.com/archive/issue0304/Specific-Plan-Approved-by-Moraga-Planning-Commission.html>

Reach the reporter at: sophie@lamorindaweekly.com

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA