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## High Density Single-Family Housing Proposed Across From Rheem Center

By Sophie Braccini



Proposal for 21 homes on two acres Graphic courtesy Town of Moraga

driveways. Patios would form the back yards.

"We choose a Spanish theme to tie in with the existing buildings on this strip," said the developer's representative, "Young families are attracted to this type of home, as well as residents who want to downsize, don't want to have to maintain a yard, but still want to keep the feel of a single detached home."

Some of the residents who came to the meeting said that the project's density was not what the community wanted to see. A resident of the nearby Moraga Place development indicated that he was concerned that this project was out of character with the town. Resident Claire Roth concurred, adding that this project looked like the sort of single-family home subdivision that can be seen outside of urban areas where someone can lean out of his window and shake hands with the person next door. Resident Scott Bowhay commented that he liked the idea of small parcels, but not in a location where traffic is so intense.

Ellen Beans, of the Moraga Citizen's Network, spoke in support of the project, pointing out that smaller, more energy efficient homes are the wave of the future.

The developer indicated that Signature Homes only builds to green building standards and that the average monthly energy bill of the homes would be about \$100, and noted that this project is quite similar to what is outlined in the Moraga Center Specific Plan, where high density housing adjoins commercial development.

"We were told that high density is vital to thriving commercial use on the other side of town (the Moraga Center area)," said Planning Commissioner Bruce Whitley, "We don't want high density anywhere else in town other than in the commercial centers. If housing is granted here, then it has to be higher density."

Other commissioners agreed that high density in the area was appropriate, but some were a bit uncomfortable with the concept of detached family homes being so close together. "I liked the condominium concept," said Commissioner Stacia Levenfeld, "the concept of smaller homes makes sense, but I am concerned about density." Commissioner Roger Wykle asked the developer if it had thought about the type of neighborhood it wanted to create, "why not put the garage in the back and porches in front to encourage residents to walk outside and develop a community?" he asked.

All of the commissioners expressed concerns about pedestrian traffic. "The Starbucks is just across the street," said chair Russell Driver, "the walk to the next stop sign is down a long and noisy block; some creative solutions will have to be found."

The area is currently zoned Limited Commercial; all uses, other than agriculture, require a conditional use permit.

During a study session at a mid-July meeting of the Moraga Planning Commission, Signature Homes presented a plan to build 21 single-family detached homes on a two-acre lot located across from the Rheem Center on Moraga Road that was once the site of a bowling alley.

The land belongs to Mike and Jim Knuppe, who also own the adjoining lot on which sits AAAAA Rent A Space, and who have struggled to find a profitable use for the vacant lot - they previously proposed a condominium project, which the Planning Commission had supported, that was later deemed economically unviable.

Commission was favorably inclined toward the new project, considering it compatible with the commercial Rheem Center. Because this was only a study session, should the developer decide to move forward with the plan it would have to go through a full review where issues such as traffic, parking, pedestrian circulation and visual impact in the scenic corridor would be scrutinized.

Signature Homes is a 27-year old Bay Area/Sacramento area developer that builds condos and single family homes, more or less densely clustered together. Its Pleasant Oak project in Roseville is similar to what is proposed in Moraga: two-story homes with an average size of 1900 square feet on lots of about 2700 square feet. The homes would all have four bedrooms, and 2-car garages and

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