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Planning Director Lori Salamack Leaves Moraga

By Sophie Braccini



Lori Salamack on her last day of work as Moraga's Planning Director, August 5 Photo Sophie Braccini

the job is to understand the fine points of the Town's regulations, and interpret the rules in a manner that's consistent over a range of similar projects," says Salamack. One of Moraga's main issues is development in Open Space and near ridgelines. "The definition of ridge lines and the rules that apply to them are contained in the General Plan," she says, "but the General Plan defines the rules only for MOSO (Moraga Open Space Ordinance) land and areas immediately adjacent to MOSO. It indicates that ridge lines have to be protected, which leaves room for interpretation."

Salamack adds that reasonable people can differ in their interpretation of the rules and that it is the role of the Town Council to interpret the law. Some projects are in process in Moraga that will involve deciding what kind development can occur in open space- for example, the Hetfield project and the Town-owned property along the Lafayette-Moraga Regional Trail.

Salamack's knowledge of the Town's Municipal Code, all 356 pages, is widely recognized and praised. Town Council Member Mike Metcalf started working with Salamack eight years ago when he was chair of the Planning Commission. "Lori is a very perceptive person and she has a remarkable analytical mind," said Metcalf, "she always produced very clear and understandable staff reports and she's been uncompromising in her commitment to the Town's law," which, according to Metcalf, was not always what people wanted to hear.

This held true for Moraga resident Hollie Lucas-Alcalay, who was unhappy a few months back after talking with Salamack about the pending arrival of the Dollar Tree store, and who would have preferred a more sustainable approach to planning. "We saw things differently but she really knew her stuff," said Lucas-Alcalay, "Moraga is not an easy town and it is not easy to please everybody."

Planning Commissioner Bruce Whitley, who worked with Salamack for many years, recalls, "Seven years ago, when I was a new, green, Planning Commission member, Lori took the time and effort to teach me how to best contribute as a member of the Commission. For that, I am personally in her debt," he says, adding that he believes Salamack was invaluable in enhancing the Town's commercial community while preserving its semi-rural character. "For her efforts, the Town of Moraga is in Lori's debt," he said.

On August 5, her last day on the job, Salamack was finishing her review of the Environmental Impact Report for a 126-home development proposed by the Bruzzone family for its 180-acre property located in Bollinger Canyon, listed as a 'study area' in the General Plan.

With other proposed developments across from the Rheem Shopping Center and the Moraga Center Specific Plan area, this big file now sits squarely on the lap of the new Planning Director, Shawna Brekke Read, who started work on August 11.

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