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## Planning Director Looks at Reshaping Moraga

By *Sophie Braccini*

Moraga Planning Director Shawna Brekke-Read received support from the Town Council to apply for a Priority Development Area Designation for the Rheem neighborhood. The request represents the first step in the new Director's plan to make Moraga more business, pedestrian, bicyclist and student-friendly, and ultimately a more vibrant town.

Brekke-Read told the Council that future grant funding from regional agencies is expected to become increasingly competitive and largely limited to Priority Development Areas. The plan she wants to implement is the direct result of the report of the Economic Action Team that worked with the community to determine how to best develop the neighborhood around the Rheem Shopping Center. "We will need grant money to create a pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use area, consistent with Moraga's General Plan and what residents want," she said.

Brekke-Read also worked with Senior Planner Rich Chamberlain who, over his many years of service to the Town, has experienced the elements in the code that have nourished Moraga's business-unfriendly reputation.

"What businesses like best is predictability," believes Brekke-Read, "at this time in commercial areas we have a list of permitted uses that are subjected to findings that are discretionary. This process is in fact unpredictable." She would rather have a list of fixed criteria and standards; businesses that would satisfied those would know they could quickly get a permit without having to go through Planning Commission hearings that can require unpredictable amounts of time and money; businesses that did not fit the Town's approved sets of criteria and standards would have to follow an application process that would involved a public review.

Brekke-Read also wants to review the Town's appeal process. "I have heard frustration over how appeals have gone historically," she says, "should Council and Commission members be able to appeal without paying a fee? Usually elected officials can call up an issue, and then the whole body votes on whether or not the item should be appealed." The zoning ordinance is also on her list of action items. For example, the strip of land across from the Rheem Center along Moraga Rd, where 5A Rent-A-Space has its office, is zoned 'agriculture.' "Town Clerk Marty McInturf suggested that we work on our zoning ordinance one chunk at a time," said Brekke-Read, "this year we will start with the wine growers (see side bar), and we will be looking at commercial zoning districts related to the permitted uses."

The Town's General Plan will be due for its ten-year review in 2012.

### Revisiting Winemaking Regulations

"Moraga's winemaking activity started as small vineyards in backyards," explains Planning Director Shawna Brekke-Read when asked why regulations should be revisited in regards to local winemaking. "They stay under the agricultural use that is usually permitted. A few have become wineries (making their own wine under their own label) that have grown as a home occupation business, and that is also allowed. The issue going forward is whether they are going to remain small, more than a home occupation, or will they start to appear to be a business."

The municipal code indicates that a home occupation should remain an incidental and accessory use in residential land use districts under conditions that will ensure that the use is and remains compatible with the residential character of the neighborhood. Brekke-Read, who says that she has experience working with wholesale, distribution and winegrowing businesses, says she will meet with local winegrowers in early January.

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