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SummerHill Enters the Planning Process

By Sophie Braccini

The plan for 28 homes that are proposed off Camino Ricardo was officially presented on October 1 to a joint session of the Planning Commission and Design Review Board. Many aspects of the projects were explored at that meeting, such as parking, landscaping, the ingress and egress of the site, drainage, and esthetics. The major concern of the commissioners present was the density of the homes. Although the general ratio of homes to available space is well within the requirement for that piece of land, massing all the homes on one side of the lot creates a visual of a much denser development.

The relatively narrow piece of property is located on the northern part of the vacant pear orchard. It is bordered by a creek to the east and crossed by a tributary to that creek. The idea was, rather than building between the creeks and constructing a vehicle bridge, that part could be left undeveloped and dedicated to the town for a neighborhood park.

"I like the idea of maximizing open space and massing the development on one side," said Commissioner Roger Wykle, "but the developed area is quite dense." Because of the shape of the lot, the road between the homes is not very wide and would accommodate parking only on one side. Some of the lots are quite small, under 7,500 square feet, much less than neighboring homes. According to the Moraga Center Specific Plan that sets the rules for this area, the property was planned to be a transition area between the existing homes and denser housing planned in the middle of the pear orchard to the south. Commissioners Christine Kuckuk, Jim Kline, and Chair Stacia Levenfeld also expressed reservations regarding the density.

"Our plan with 28 homes on 14.26 acres translates to a density of 1.9 homes per acre, well below the 42 homes contemplated for this site in the Moraga Center Specific Plan and well below the three homes per acre allowed by the land's current zoning," said Katia Kamangar, senior vice president for SummerHill Homes, after the meeting. "As the Specific Plan encourages 'clustering' homes in order to maximize open space and to protect riparian corridors, we felt that our plan with homes only west of the riparian areas, along with eight acres of permanent open space, offers tremendous benefits overall. Based on the feedback we will likely consider other site layouts that spread the homes out over the entire property."

The date for a next meeting has not been set.

Planning Director Asks For Patience

The Planning Department in Moraga consists at this time of only two people-Director Shawna Brekke-Read and Administrative Assistant Kelly Clancy. The Senior Planner that was recruited in September decided to return to her previous position in Union City and the Assistant Planner is moving out of state. The Town is recruiting to replace these two positions, but in the meantime, delays may be expected. The Planning Director has also hired consultants to move forward larger projects such as SummerHill.

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