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**Civic News**

**Lafayette**

**City Close to a Final Decision on Shorter Condo Project**

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If a decision is not made within 45 days, "They can sue us for failure to act under the Process Agreement," clarified city Attorney Mala Subramanian.

Project Architect Jeffrey Heller responded to City Council concerns explaining that the current plans are "shorthand." Both Heller and Panek expressed a willingness to go back to the Design Review Commission, noting that it's a Catch-22 situation; they will work on much richer and refined final plans – but need to understand the parameters of the building size in general first.

As usual, comments from citizens were all over the map, some called it a "rude awakening" of a massive building in the center of town; others supported the multi-family project, saying, "Great transit oriented development – this is the center of town – it should look like a town center ... this is not a semi-rural site." With a unanimous vote by the City Council, the project will go back to the Design Review Commission and Planning Commission.

**Civic News Moraga**

**New Home Concept Moves Forward**

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"This is a very eco-friendly home," said Wright. "The materials we are using include reclaimed redwood and multi-color slate." One energy efficient innovation proposed for this house is the construction of a thermal cistern that uses water to cool the house in summer and warm it in winter.

Neighbors have voiced concerns about the massiveness of the house that's 45 feet from the lowest point to the highest. "The building is actually behind the oak trees," said Wright. "The living roof is a rainscreen roof where moss and lichen will grow. This house belongs to the trees, it be-

longs in the woods." Wright added that the trees inspired the design and that is why all the sidings will be made of redwood. One neighbor came to the DRB meeting to express his opposition to the project. "You will be able to see this house from far, far away, even from Moraga Road," he said. "This project would change the hillside, there's nothing similar in Moraga; it would be something new. Eco-friendly - top, but somewhere else."

A few hours before the meeting, former Moraga mayor Lynda Deschambault sent the Board a letter detailing her concerns about this project.

Among them are the instability of the site - a property nearby slid during construction; the project's proximity to open space; the fact that the General Plan suggest that homes should meet the character of their neighborhood.

DRB members were nonetheless seduced by the project. "This is a fantastic design," said DRB member, and architect, Allen Sayles. "It is a very creative project," added DRB Member John Zhu. "I could almost see in very short time the whole thing blending into its surroundings. It will melt away," said Zhu. "Because of the materials used, the house will disappear," agreed DRB Member Gerald Kirk-

patrick. "This house is pushing the limit, and I can support it."

The Board noted that although existing oak trees will hide the house during the day it might be more visible at night when light will shine through the many windows of the facade.

They also know that the Fire Marshal could require a sizeable defensible space around this home. "If the Fire Marshal wants to cut most of the shielding trees around the house, the visual impact will be very different and we will want to see the project again before it proceeds to the Planning Department," said Sayles.

**Solar Skin for Moraga**

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"It is a very performant product that uses LFP (lithium iron phosphate) batteries and a proprietary management system of the energy that lasts up to 11 days (or nights) of use, even without sun."

The reduced cost is not where the savings end. The energy bill for the lights will be null, there is

no maintenance and no need for additional digging and repair for connecting the lights since they're off the grid. "Dust and deposit can affect the performance of standard solar panels," said Kwan, "but here the photovoltaic surface is vertical and self cleaning with the rains."

Kwan said he used such solar powered streetlights in Richmond several years ago, but that the new products are even more attractive. "These two crosswalks are perfect test sites," he said. "The intersections are already lit so if we have a problem, the consequences won't be dramatic."

During the Council meeting, Mayor Mike Metcalf questioned the cost of repair if a driver were to run into the posts. "It is a very sturdy product," responded Kwan, "and if we have to replace it, that can be done easily because no digging is necessary."

Share your thoughts, insights and opinions with your community.  
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Source: 2011 REAL Trends Top 500 survey, ranked by Closed Sales Volume in 2011