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Published December 19th, 2012

New Moraga Road Development Inches Forward

By Sophie Braccini

Developer Signature Properties received support from the Moraga Planning Commission on Dec. 3 for its latest design of 18 single-family, high-density homes at 489 Moraga Road-the land across from Rheem Shopping Center that once featured a bowling alley.

Under the plan, three single-family residences would face the busy thoroughfare, while 15 more homes would be staggered across the property. The proposed two-story homes would be built along a U-shaped road, offering two access points to the development. Each home would have a two-car garage and range in size from 1,900 to 2,700 square feet. There would be 12 visitor parking spots.

The developer felt that the Town has been sending mixed messages about this project, first asking for more density, then for less. "We encourage higher density housing options here," said Planning Director Shawna Brekke-Read. But Signature Properties, with 20-plus years experience in development in the Bay Area, said that higher density options such as condominiums would not sell in Moraga.

"We want a project that would be economically sound," agreed commission chair Stacia Levenfeld.

The commissioners indicated that 2,700 square feet was probably excessive for the location. Because the project is located along a scenic corridor, they discussed at length ways to shield views of driveways where it is likely that people will leave their cars; as garages tend to be used, at least partially, for storage. They also emphasized the need for pedestrian sidewalks and visitor parking in the development because parking is not allowed on Moraga Road.

Some traffic-related concerns remain unresolved. The entrance to the development would be located a few yards north of the shopping center's main entrance. There are two types of traffic issues: ingress and egress of the property, and pedestrian crossing. Regarding the latter issue, Signature Homes' John Bayless suggested that the solution was not to add a pedestrian crossing at the site, which would mean adding a median landing for safety and could have a big impact on the flow of traffic on Moraga Road, but rather to allow residents of the development to cross the street only at the existing crosswalks to the north and south.

The commission decided to wait for a traffic study before making recommendations on design and rules for access to and from the development. It is likely that this will come with the final design the developer will submit for approval in the coming months.

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