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## Neighbors Challenge the Moraga Center Specific Plan

By *Sophie Braccini*

A crowd of wary residents overflowed the library meeting room May 20 to hear presentations about two developments proposed for vacant lots that lie within the area covered by the Moraga Center Specific Plan. The two projects, one off Camino Ricardo and one along Moraga Way next to the fire station, comply with the zoning plan for the area that was approved by the town a couple of years ago. But neighbors are paying new attention to the plan that allows the construction of 700 homes and condominiums downtown; as projects get closer to their own homes, these residents now seek to challenge the plan.

"One of the things that drew me here was the atmosphere of a charming rural community," said Daniel Martini who bought a house on Country Club Drive a year ago, "and all of a sudden the unthinkable...54 attached townhomes, two and three stories high, on three acres of land." His disconcert regarding the proposed development by City Ventures on a lot located between Moraga Way and Country Club Drive was shared by many in attendance, and Planning Director Shawn Brekke-Read's explanation of the specific plan process did not alleviate their concerns.

"Why does it have to be so dense, why is it exempt from the EIR?" asked Jennifer Stacy.

"An Environmental Impact Report was certified for the entire area of the Moraga Center Specific Plan when it was approved two years ago," Brekke-Read explained. "Now if a project comes in and it fully complies with the plan, it is exempt from CEQA; it does not require any additional environmental review." The City Ventures' project plot is zoned for mixed office/residential with a density of 12 to 20 dwelling units per acre.

The project's opponents, mostly residents of the Moraga Country Club, argued against the conclusion of traffic consultant Fehr & Peers, who recommended that all traffic from the development be directed to Country Club Drive with no access to Moraga Way.

Nancy Wink, who lives on Country Club Drive, said that in the morning and on Wednesdays during swimming season traffic is very congested on her street and the very large medians would create blind spots.

The commission recommended that the developer study ways to improve the flow of traffic on Country Club Drive, including narrowing the medians.

Stacy also stated that such developments draw riff-raff to neighborhoods and Martini, a retired police chief, said that within a few years this type of development would attract the wrong type of people to Moraga. The developer indicated that the units would be for individual owners at a price point of \$750,000.

"I say to the people of the country club that if we organize politically we can have a big impact on this issue," said Jim Tanner.

This would not be the first time Moraga residents have challenged an already-approved project. For more information, read "Palos Colorados: A Long Time Coming" in our first issue, March 14, 2007, archived at [www.lamorindaweekly.com](http://www.lamorindaweekly.com).

The other project in the Moraga Center Specific Plan area, along Camino Ricardo, did not cause as much controversy at the meeting. Summerhill Homes has been working with staff for months on different versions and has considerably amended the project to respond to the commission's requests and reduced the number of diverse homes from 36 to 26.

Although some neighbors on Crossbrook, to the north of the site, object to having a park in the eastern part of the development for security reasons, no formal effort has been launched to challenge this project.

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