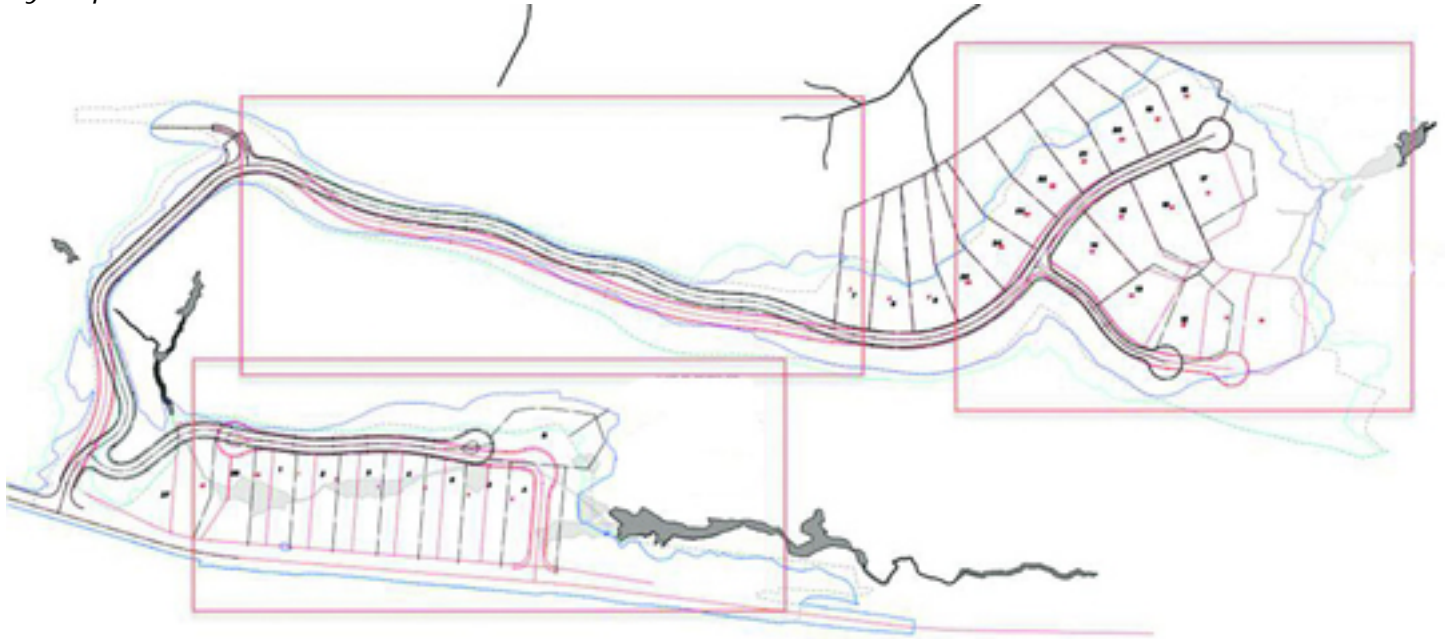


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New Plan for Rancho Laguna II

By Sophie Braccini



New plan for Rancho Laguna II: previous lots in red, new ones in black Image provided

During his State of the Town address Nov. 21, Moraga mayor David Trotter talked about 'behind the scenes' discussions with Summerhill Homes that led to a new map of the Rancho Laguna II development project; Summerhill presented its revised plan to the Planning Commission at a Dec. 2 study session.

Trotter was outvoted 2-1 in 2011 when the Town Council denied an appeal, filed by the local organization Preserve Lamorinda Open Space, and approved the Conceptual Development Plan for Rancho Laguna II - a 27-home project off Rheem Boulevard that included the construction of two residences on a minor ridgeline and a large amount of grading. The debate was around whether or not the General Plan allowed development on ridgelines; the phrasing "protect ridgelines" led to different interpretations. The General Plan's perceived ambiguities are driving the current effort to consider revisions of hillside and ridgeline development rules.

"We entered into contract (to purchase the development) the summer of 2012," said Summerhill Homes vice president Katia Kamangar. "Coming into this transaction, we also wanted to take a fresh look at the previously approved plan to see if there were enhancements that we could undertake that would further minimize the project's impacts." Summerhill reached out to Preserve Lamorinda Open Space, which has been critical of the project.

Summerhill's proposed new plan includes several changes, none of which is significant enough to lead to a challenge of the approved Conceptual Development Plan, notably the re-siting of two lots that were going to be set on a ridgeline, and that required significant grading, which have been relocated to the lower housing cluster along Rheem Blvd. The new plan also reduces grading by moving inside streets, it preserves a mature buckeye tree along Rheem Boulevard, suppresses some mitigation wetlands that were, according to Preserve Lamorinda Open Space, proposed in a poor location, and adds a detention basin for the drainage of the upper development cluster.

In a letter to the town's planning director, Suzanne Jones of Preserve Lamorinda Open Space stated: "SummerHill Homes has been a very willing and cooperative partner in working with (Preserve Lamorinda Open Space) and we greatly appreciate their efforts. The changes they have made represent an honest attempt to work with the community and address project impacts within the constraints imposed by the (Conceptual Development Plan) and the requirement of the new detention basin. We ask that the changes outlined in this letter be met with the Town's approval." Jones added that although Preserve Lamorinda Open Space supports the changes proposed by Summerhill, the group still thinks that the plan includes too many homes.

"The alternative plan has less environmental impact and the area graded is smaller," said Shawna Brekke-Read, planning director, "so we recommended the Planning Commission proceed with the alternative plan." Once the commission completes its review, the next step will be the presentation of the General Development Plan by Summerhill Homes during a series of public meetings in 2014.

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