

## Civic News Moraga

# Moraga's First Development Agreement Stumbles Over Pedestrian Bridge

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As part of its 26-home project, Summerhill Homes will create, and donate to the town, a 2.5-acre passive park located between Rancho Laguna Creek, where it flows along Moraga Road, and one of its tributaries – the new park would sit on a peninsula across from the skatepark. Pedestrian access to the park will require two bridges; one over the tributary and another over Rancho Laguna Creek itself to connect the new park to existing trails.

Where to bridge the creek is the question.

Summerhill Homes proposed to build the bridge on the project's northern edge, across from the skatepark. The Planning Commission, believing this would lead pedestrians to cross Moraga Road in an unsafe location, removed the bridge from the plan. At the request of staff, commissioners later consented to a bridge built further south in the hope that pedestrians would use the crosswalk at Moraga Road and St. Mary's Road.

But the Town Council decided on Feb. 10 that it would prefer to see the bridge built at its former northern location, along with a new crosswalk to the skatepark. Moraga's police chief, Bob Priebe, also supported the original plan. "A crosswalk by the skatepark makes a lot of sense," he said.

The town now needs to resolve an inconsistency. The project plan, as approved by the Planning Commission, includes a southern bridge; while the development agreement supported by the Town Council includes a northern bridge.

What's a council member to do? "You can approve this (the development agreement), and give direction back to the Planning Commission that your expectation is to have a bridge (in the northern part of the property)," Jill Keimach, the town manager, advised the Town Council. Town staff has strongly supported the northern bridge and crosswalk that would allow visitors to park their cars at the Commons, have a straight route to the proposed passive park and create a link from the new development, and the Sonsara and Corliss Drive neighborhoods, to the Commons and existing trails.

The development agreement defines other conditions that the developer agrees to satisfy in order to gain certainty regarding the rules and regulations applicable to the development over time. In addition to the park, the bridges and the crosswalk, Summerhill Homes will include an "outlook point" including a seating area; construct a sidewalk along Camino Ricardo in front of the development and continue it to Moraga Way; and designate Moraga as its

point-of-sale for the construction material used in the project, meaning that the town will collect the applicable sales tax. Shawna Brekke-Read, the town's planning director, highlighted the fact that Summerhill Homes went beyond what the Moraga municipal code requires – according to current code the developer was obligated to dedicate only 0.265 acres of park land and to build a sidewalk only in front of the development.

Councilmember Dave Trotter tried nonetheless to convince his colleagues to drive a harder bargain with Summerhill Homes in negotiating the development agreement. He wanted the developer to pay for the second bridge and a portion of a third, more southern, access in the future; he also wanted Summerhill Homes to pay for the maintenance of the park. He was not met with much support – staff, advocacy groups and neighbors who have worked with this developer over the past two years have praised its exceptional community spirit and Keimach noted that asking Summerhill Homes to pay more could result in a diminution of the quality of the project.

The development agreement will come back to the Town Council for final approval Feb. 26. A date for the Planning Commission to re-examine the project has not yet been set.

## Improving Access to Sports Facilities in Moraga

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"We have to be creative," said Weaver, "but some parents complain that the children do not get enough practice."

The discussion about joint use agreements between the parties will begin at the next meeting. For example, the town and school district will talk about special conditions for use of the field at Camino Pablo Elementary School; in 2011 the town used \$700,000 from its Measure WW funds to restore the school's sports field. Other examples in-

clude the former use of Campolindo fields by the Moraga Baseball Association and the college facilities that are used during the summer by the town to offer camps to young residents.

Finally the subcommittee will discuss possible joint projects for the future. One of them could be the renovation of nine acres at Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School; the fields have great potential but need a lot of work. Another project that could come to the table is a multi-

generational community center, a structure that would be similar to the Wagner Ranch gym in Orinda – an 8,000 square foot building that is operated under a joint use agreement between the city and the Orinda Union School District.

The subcommittee will meet the first Monday evening of each month at the Hacienda de las Flores. The agenda is publicized on the town's website – from moraga.ca.gov go to the calendar – and the meetings are open to the public.

## Civic News Orinda

# A Bridge to the Future: Improving Orinda's Aging Infrastructure Piece by Piece

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Photo Ohlen Alexander

Her father moved their family from the Ygnacio Valley in 1945 because he disliked the heat. "He needed to be near the fog... We were able to keep one head of livestock per acre," she recalled. He built their home on their lower acre near a rivulet feeding into the San Pablo Creek; her horse grazed happily on the acre above. She fondly remembers waiting with classmates for the school bus at its stop near the bridge, and still keeps in touch with several of those friends.

There were days, though, that were worrisome. In 1947, her family's property took a beating as much of its fill washed into the feeder creek. "Our house was just hanging ... just teetering there." While working at UC

Berkeley in the early 1960s, she was unable to reach home when rising waters made the bridge impassible. By 1987, it was "pretty dicey driving over it" yet again. "That little creek ... to think it could go up 13 or 14 feet and wash over the bridge."

So, the Manzanita upgrade began – part of a larger effort to enhance bridge safety across California. City officials and staff sought public input, secured project approval from review authorities and pulled together the necessary funding. Reassured by a July 2012 public hearing that the California red-legged frog and other sensitive flora and fauna would be protected, the Orinda City Council authorized staff to open the construction bidding process.

"I was very impressed with the naturalist that was hired," said Elsberry, remembering his efforts to document native trees and other species. "We had a family of mallard ducks ... he took care to find that it was part of their flyway."

The bridge replacement was important, explained Chuck Swanson, public works director, because the bridge serves a large neighborhood. Although the final tab is still being computed, the city's budget will most likely not take the hit one would expect from so massive a project. Recent estimates indicate that about \$2.5 million of the roughly \$3 million total cost will be covered by state and federal grants.



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