

## Civic News Moraga

### What is Moraga Going to Look Like?

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The process to update the Moraga Sign Ordinance began seven years ago and was stopped by 1st Amendment considerations: a sign ordinance should not address the content of a sign – what it says – as a basis for regulation, which could be considered discriminatory. Samonsky constructed a draft of an ordinance that is content neutral and takes several components into consideration: time – is it a permanent or non-permanent sign; manner – is the sign on a wall, in a window, or free standing; and place – will the sign be in a residential area, open space, or commercial district? It proposes that some signs be approved administratively (by staff), while others will need a hearing before the Design Review Board.

“Signs that are illuminated from the inside should continue to be reviewed by the Design Review Board,” stated Samonsky. She also introduced novelties, such as non-permanent signs (A-frames) that would be allowed on the premises, one per business. “What do you define as the premises in a shopping center?” asked commissioner Christine Kuckuk

who was concerned with what the scenic corridors could look like if all businesses in the shopping center started lining A-frames along the road.

The discussion of how the visual character of the town could be impacted by new sign policies started at that point. Commissioner Tom Marnane, who recalled his own experience setting appropriate signs, thought a professional eye was needed and wondered if the town had such a specialist.

Commissioner Woehleke, who has served on both the Design Review Board and Planning Commission in the past, expressed the most concern about the look signs could give a town. “I hope we all look at this as helping to define the town character,” he said. “What you see in Portola Valley and what you see in other cities is very different. In some, (signage) is very sparse, in others it’s ‘everything goes.’ Shop owners say that they need signage... but the Design Review Board answers, ‘We’re in Moraga, everybody knows where everything is, why do you need signage?’”

Woehleke added that he thought that making it hard to get a sign is good, because it is a way to avoid excessive signage.

“The challenge is, how do we meet the different needs?” responded Schwartz. “The businesses are complaining that they do not have enough visibility and we want to support business; but we have to protect the esthetics of our town.”

Schwartz said that the solution to the problem requires more creativity and effort. When staff said that the process was expected to be finalized within two weeks, Schwartz rose to speak again, “We’ve been waiting for seven years for this, don’t rush it,” she said. “We need more input from the public.”

Planning director Shawna Brekke-Read agreed with Schwartz and indicated that more public input opportunities would be made available; at press time, the dates had not been set. The Planning Commission is scheduled to resume its discussion of the sign ordinance at its March 17 meeting; visit moraga.ca.us for details.

### Hetfield General Development Plan Approved

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Neighbors spoke out against parts of the plan. “I was disappointed, when I read the staff report, to see the access road, the parking lot and a bunch of lights,” said Daran Santi.

An emergency vehicle access road had been proposed by Wyro as a benefit to the town, connecting the Hetfield property to Sanders Ranch for emergency purposes only (fire or medical).

Planning commissioner Teresa Onoda, who lives in Sanders Ranch, said that she walked the proposed site and noticed that the path starts very flat, goes through wet land, and then takes a very steep climb to reach the end of Sanders Ranch, making it hard to build and requiring a lot of grading. “I talked to the president of Sanders Ranch (Homeowners Association),” she added, “and he said that the board has no interest what-so-ever in (creating an emergency route).” The commission decided that the

access road would not be constructed, that there would simply be a trail connecting Hetfield Estates to the Old Moraga Ranch Trail. The commissioners also asked that an easement be maintained along the trail so that in the event the fire district required the construction of an emergency access route to Sanders Ranch, it could be done.

The road along the new development was designed to be very narrow to limit grading. Street parking will not be permitted except in three pocket spaces and a four-space lot at the end.

Naturalist Malcolm Sproul asked that the curb of the road on its creek side be rounded. “Small vertebrates in particular, rodents, snakes, salamanders and even baby quails, can’t hop vertical curbs,” said Sproul. “If they can’t go up, they follow along; when they get to a storm drain they fall in and can’t get out.” Sproul

added that on the side of the road the homes will be on, there would be enough driveways that small animals could find ways to cross.

The emergency vehicle access road was removed from the plan, parking spaces were approved as proposed and limited to seven, and lights remained despite opposition from neighbors since lighting is an engineering department requirement for safety. Rounded curbs were added along the open space side of the road to allow the safe wandering of small wildlife.

The Moraga Town Council will discuss the formation of a Geologic Hazard and Abatement District that would be responsible for management of landslides and other geologic hazards on the property’s open space parcel. New homeowners will be advised that the area was formerly zoned high risk and will contribute to the district and a homeowners’ association.

## Civic News Fire Districts

### Lamorinda Fire News Briefs

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MOFD fire chief Stephen Healy receives a check from CAER's Tony Semenza. Photo provided

#### CAER Package for MOFD

Also in February, the Moraga-Orinda Fire District received a \$700 grant from the Community Awareness and Emergency Response Group of Contra Costa County, a non-profit whose mission includes providing emergency preparedness and training to the public. “We collect dues mostly from industry, and we use the money to provide funding back into the community,” said executive director Tony Semenza. CAER oversees a grant budget of \$11,000 and it screens 30 to 40 annual applications to determine how best the grantees will help the largest number of people. “The applicants have to explain to us how they will use the dollars,” said Semenza.

The district plans to earmark the money to sup-

port efforts for a Lamorinda community preparedness earthquake exercise. “We’ll probably print flyers and brochures for the schools promoting the Great California Shakeout in October and have the kids pass them out to their parents,” said MOFD emergency preparedness coordinator Dennis Rein.

This year, the Shakeout is scheduled for Oct. 16 at 10:16 a.m.

#### MOFD and Union Agree to Mediation

The Moraga-Orinda Fire District announced March 7 that it has accepted the request of the United Professional Firefighters of Contra Costa County to enter into mediation.

“I’m encouraged that the union reached out to us,” said John Wyro, board president. “If the union thinks that mediation will solve the problem, then we are happy to do it.”

“It’s a huge move on their part,” said Vince Wells, Local 1230 president. “They didn’t have to do it. It’s a great opportunity for more discussion to see if there’s a chance for a solution.”

The district declared an impasse with the firefighters’ union in January. Should mediation not be successful, the parties will continue with the fact-finding process. The board still retains the ultimate authority to impose its last, best and final offer following fact finding if it chooses to, explained Eddie Kreisberg, the district’s labor negotiator.

“The district really would like to reach an agreement with Local 1230 and is hopeful that retaining a mediator will help the parties do so,” said Kreisberg.



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