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Town Council Approves New Sign Ordinance

By Sophie Braccini

The Moraga Planning Commission recently recommended and forwarded a new sign ordinance for consideration by the Town Council, which by and large accepted the commission's proposed revisions, with a notable exception - the treatment of existing multi-tenant facilities such as shopping centers. The ordinance will come back to the council for a second reading on June 26 and become effective 30 days later.

The planning commission's proposed text included an approval process for master sign programs in multi-tenant commercial areas, a system that allows new tenants to get their signs approved quickly as long as they fit within an approved framework. It specified that existing multi-tenant facilities that do not already have such a plan would have to submit one if a space of more than 5,000 square feet was renovated, or a new monument sign was envisioned, or a new conditional use permit was requested.

This language was opposed by Dave Bruzzone, whose family owns the Moraga Shopping Center near the corner of Moraga Road and Moraga Way - which does not currently have a master sign program.

Prior to the council's formal vote, based on feedback from the public and council members when the revisions were first presented on May 28, the text was modified to read that existing multi-tenant commercial areas would only have to develop a master plan for monument signs if a new one was requested.

Bruzzone came to the council meeting and asked that as much flexibility as possible be added to the text. "For our shopping center, the horse is already out of the barn," he said, since the center is already built out and the tenants are already there. "We have a tenant, Union Bank, who should be allowed to have a new monument sign without imposing a new sign regimen on the whole shopping center."

Councilmember Dave Trotter, who chaired the June 11 council meeting in the absence of mayor Ken Chew and vice mayor Roger Wykle, asked if Union Bank's application for a monument sign could be grandfathered, and therefore not trigger the necessity for the property owner to develop a master monument sign program. Although other council members agreed that having some coordination regarding monument signs was desirable, they supported grandfathering Union Bank's application. After deleting a requirement for existing multi-tenant facilities to adopt a master sign program for new construction of more than 5,000 square feet, the Town Council adopted the amended text. Highlights of the new ordinance include a longer list of signs that don't require a permit, such as a single illuminated informational sign (without movement and under two square feet in area, such as an "Open" sign) and temporary real estate signs. Several types of signs will be reviewed administratively, avoiding the long and costly design review process, such as temporary freestanding commercial signs, awning signs and externally illuminated signs. Some signs will still require a design review process, such as monument signs, marquee signs and internally illuminated signs. Electronic message signs will be permitted only if approved by the Moraga Town Council.

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[back](#)

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