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Via Moraga Concept Approved

By Sophie Braccini

After three years of discussion, the Moraga Planning Commission approved Signature Properties' conceptual map for the construction of 18 single-family homes on the two-acre property located at 489 Moraga Road - the empty lot across from the Rheem Shopping Center. Prior to giving its approval, the commission requested a major alteration to the plan.

When the meeting started on July 21, it appeared that only commissioner Tom Marnane was prepared to support the current proposal for a development that has been under discussion since 2011. "For single-family homes (this development) is just too dense," said commissioner Teresa Onoda. "People who come here want to have a yard for their kids to play." Onoda thought that six units per acre would be more appropriate than 10.

"I think this should be a location with more density," said commissioner Stacia Levenfeld. "What Moraga needs is more high density close to its commercial district to revitalize it." She said that townhomes would be more appropriate there.

The piece of land in question has been vacant for years. It was once home to a bowling alley; in the years since that business closed, many ideas have been floated to occupy the property, and the one that garnered the most support from the planning commission and design review board was this proposal for two-story, single-family homes of 1,900 to 2,500 square feet, with two-car garages on very small lots; a new concept for Moraga.

Planning Commission chair Christine Kuckuk argued that the plan's large, U-shaped road, starting and ending on Moraga Road, was not appropriate. "I don't mind that it's 'small lot single-family residential,' but I don't want it to look like it is in the middle of our commercial district." She conditioned her approval on the creation of a single driveway and a loop road.

Levenfeld and Marnane concurred with Kuckuk, while Onoda and commissioner Frank Comprelli maintained their opposition to the project.

All of the commissioners praised the work done by Signature Properties to create architectural design details and an extensive landscaping plan, and to increase the set-back to 31 feet to match existing constructions along Moraga Road. The commission approved the conceptual plan and the environmental impact report on a vote of 3 to 2.

The commission also approved the rezoning of the lot, which had been designated as limited commercial. The Moraga Town Council will review the zoning recommendation on Aug. 27. The next step for Signature Properties is to present a general development plan to the town before applying for a building permit.

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