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Infusion of Contemporary Design for Rancho Laguna II

By Sophie Braccini

Summerhill Homes met with Moraga's Design Review Board on Aug. 25 to present the design for the 27 homes they are approved to build along Rheem Boulevard and the hills above. The three types of homes, with different color schemes and seven different elevations, were conceived with a classical base, but Summerhill Homes' architect, the Dahlin Group, proposed multiple modernistic features creating a refreshing new style for Moraga.

Design Review Board members had a few concerns, but mostly praised the effort to create something different but well integrated with the site.

The large single-family homes will have a lot going for them, including great views of open space. The architectural choices of the Dahlin Group are commensurate with higher-end homes - wood, stone, crafty architectural details, with some modern simplifications and integration of indoor and outdoor spaces that will appeal to young, affluent families.

In its report, staff called out some details it found to be at odds with the rest of the design: a flat roof above a bedroom and optional porch, a tower rising above the ridgeline, cable elements supporting a flat roof above an entry that staff found to be too industrial-looking. Board members reacted positively to the design as a whole, and opinions were divided about the modern elements; some liked the roofs they found appealing and interesting, but not the cables, and vice versa. The board's decisions are based on approved design guidelines to which every project in town must conform.

Two neighbors on Birchwood Drive asked questions about the landscape. Now the hills are bare - the result of years of grazing - and the residents were concerned that creating rows of trees along the road that will serve the development would look odd. The board recommended that the developer smooth the landscaping and integrate it seamlessly into the natural surroundings.

The board also approved the installation of wood fences along the back yards of the properties that will be built on Rheem Boulevard to give homeowners some privacy - the entrances to these homes will be from a private road and their back yards will be seen from the boulevard. Board member John Glover cited the Sonsara development, where thick, varied landscaping between the fencing and Camino Ricardo creates a pleasant feel for passers-by.

Final approval by the Design Review Board is expected in the coming months.

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