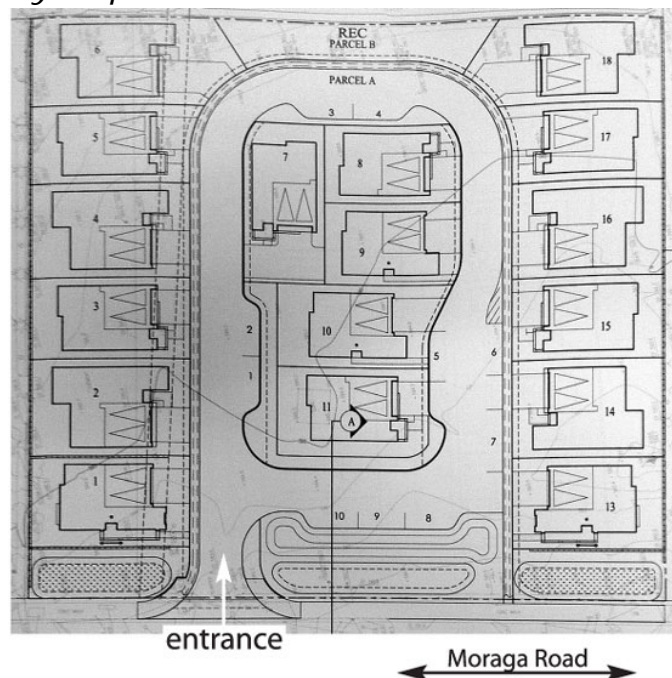


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Via Moraga Appeal: Concept Approved

By Sophie Braccini



The plan for 17 single-family homes, tightly packed on two acres along Moraga Road across from the Rheem Shopping Center, represents something new in town. Via Moraga features detached, two-story homes on small lots; existing developments of similar density have attached duplex or triplex homes. The project was recently approved by the Moraga Town Council on a 3-2 vote.

When Signature Homes' Via Moraga development was approved by the Planning Commission earlier this year, Councilmember Mike Metcalf and the developer lodged appeals. Revised plans were presented to the Town Council Sept. 10 that satisfied both appellants. The project won approval despite opposition from Councilmember David Trotter and vice mayor Roger Wykle, who were concerned about the height of the structures and view shed protection of the Rheem Ridge.

The owner of the property, which has been vacant for many years, studied multiple scenarios ranging from a boutique hotel to apartment buildings. In their July decision, planning

commissioners approved a project that was three years in the making.

The commission's approval came with a requirement that the developer configure the lots with a single entryway on Moraga Road instead of the two that had been proposed - the rationale was that with only one entrance, the project would have less impact on the roadway from both traffic and visual perspectives. The developer's appeal asked for the second access point to be reinstated but, after working with town staff in preparation for the council meeting, Signature Homes came up with a new proposal that included only one entrance on Moraga Road and considerably increased the setback of the middle front lot.

Metcalf's appeal arose from his concern over a "wall effect" created by two-story homes close together along the scenic corridor. When he saw the new plan he indicated that he was ready to approve the project.

Trotter and Wykle wanted to see either a computer-simulated rendition or new story poles erected to represent the revised plan before the council voted on final approval. Metcalf and Councilmember Phil Arth said that they didn't need further study to grant approval, leaving mayor Ken Chew as the swing vote.

Chew said that the project had been sufficiently studied by both the Design Review Board and the Planning Commission during the years it took to create a final draft, and he was confident that the visual impact along the scenic corridor had been taken into account as required by the town's General Plan. With Trotter and Wykle opposed, the council voted to approve the project.

Next steps include consideration of a general development plan and tentative subdivision map by the Planning Commission at meetings that will be open to the public. Important aspects such as how pedestrians might cross Moraga Road - a topic that many residents expressed concern about during earlier sessions - will be studied. The schedule for these hearings has not yet been set.

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