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Published April 8th, 2015

## New Recreation Facility Faces Open Space Regulation Stumbling Blocks

*By Sophie Braccini*

Kevin and Sunshine Welch asked the Moraga Town Council March 25 to support their plan to renovate the old Moraga Swim and Tennis Club (MTSC), after years of vacancy, by considering a modification of the use permitted for the site and waiving application fees. Confronted with amending the definition of a conditional use within Moraga Open Space Ordinance (MOSO) territory, the council decided to postpone the decision until further study of the code is conducted.

The once popular MTSC located at 1161 Larch Ave. has been for sale by its owners, the Gongs, who ran the club. The couple has not been able to attract any buyers for the 26-plus acre property. One reason may be the land is protected by the voter-approved MOSO and therefore limited to the construction of some five new homes. The Olympic-sized pool, the seven tennis courts, the clubhouse and other amenities are still on the property, unused.

The Welches, who own Adventure Day Camp, proposed taking over the property and turning it into a facility that would not only house their summer camp business, but could be sublet to the town's recreation department to increase the variety of recreational options offered to the public.

Unfortunately, the zoning adopted by the town after the MOSO was approved stipulates that recreation activities are authorized on MOSO land only if operated by a nonprofit organization.

Assistant Planner Brian Horn noted that MTSC was a for-profit entity and that the operation had been a legal non-compliant entity. Former Moraga council member and mayor Karen Mendonca, whose home is located directly across from the club's entrance, spoke against changing the MOSO language. "To change the current MOSO language to include for-profit businesses seems, to me, to be ill-advised," said Mendonca. "This proposed new language would affect all MOSO properties in Moraga ... and would forever change the character and traditional use of the parcel located at 1161 Larch Ave."

Her husband, Clay Serrahn, and a neighbor Andrew Baxter expressed their concern over the risk of overflow parking and increased traffic along Larch.

The plan Kevin Welch presented included minor changes to the current footprint of the club. It involved renovating the pool and the clubhouse, replacing two of the tennis courts with a 14,000-square-foot synthetic turf field, and transforming two additional tennis courts into multi-use courts. The Welches would use the premises for their summer camp, Adventure Day Camp, which they have managed for years, as well as for a preschool, an after-school program for kids in kindergarten through ninth grade and various day classes for people of all ages. The Welches have met with the town's planning and recreation departments, and proposed renting facilities to the town for its recreation programs at a discount. In turn, they asked the town to waive application fees that can become quite substantial.

In their report, planning staff indicated that application fees depend on the amount of staff work needed. Staff added that it was too early to determine if the waiver request would be a good idea or not.

As far as MOSO is concerned, the council members asked that more study be done. "The staff report does not include ... the actual text of the MOSO so we can see how it applies to this application," said Councilmember Trotter.

All council members indicated that they supported the idea presented by the Welches and would support this project, but could not approve either request before gathering more information. After the meeting, Horn indicated that the project would likely be brought back to the council at the beginning of May with a more detailed analysis of the MOSO and zoning ordinance.

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