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Specific Plan Zoning Committee: Residents Are Out

By Sophie Braccini

The town this year will work on defining the zoning of land planned for development in the 2010 Moraga Center Specific Plan (MCSP). At the April 8 meeting, Moraga Town Council members decided that the steering committee assigned to work on the MCSP zoning would be composed of members from the Moraga Town Council, Planning Commission, Design Review Board and Parks and Recreation Commission. The committee will work with the consultant the town hired to carve new zoning rules. Property owner representatives and the general public would not be allowed on the committee - a shift from an earlier decision by council in February to allow these members to be involved. The council agreed that the committee would have a maximum of seven members.

The Moraga Center Specific Plan defines how to develop the 187 acres of land located near the crossing of Moraga Way and Moraga Road. The MCSP land includes 630 potential new housing units, 90,000 square feet of new retail/entertainment space and 50,000 square feet of new office space. The land includes the Moraga Shopping Center, the undeveloped hills toward Camino Ricardo and land to the south of Moraga Way, including the vacant lot next to the fire station.

Currently, this land is zoned according to the General Plan and does not conform to the MCSP. The current zoning includes suburban office (pink), community commercial (bright orange), and 3 to 6 housing units per acre (tan) - see map. The MSCP, however, authorizes up to 20 housing units per acre, which is one of the discrepancies between the plan and the present zoning. The zoning defines such elements as building height, setbacks, and general development standards.

Councilmember Teresa Onoda asked to be seated on the committee as well as Councilmember Dave Trotter. Before supporting Onoda's participation, Metcalf asked Onoda if she was supporting the MCSP.

"I listened to what you had to say about the Specific Plan on a couple of occasions," he said to Onoda, "and it's pretty clear to me that you disagree with what has been done over the years." He added, in his opinion the council member would need to learn a lot about the genesis of the plan. "It's almost like you'd want to go back and revisit all that, and that's not what this is about; it's about putting substance on the parameters set in the Specific Plan," he added. "If I have your assurance that you're going to work objectively and get this thing completed satisfactorily, then you'll have my vote."

Trotter agreed that this process was not going to be an amendment to the Specific Plan. Onoda said that she was looking forward to putting together the vision that's in the MCSP but add the necessary details. For example, setbacks are not defined in the MCSP. "We want a vibrant community and the Moraga Center Specific Plan has set that up," she said, "and now it is time to get it done." Onoda and Trotter will be the council's representatives on the committee.

The Moraga Center Specific Plan steering committee meeting announcements will be posted on the town website at www.moraga.ca.us.

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