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Moraga Center Specific Plan Zoning Changes Discussed

By Sophie Braccini

The difference between conventional zoning and form-based code might make an interesting technical discussion for many planning experts, but the consequence of using one zoning code versus another makes a significant difference in the shaping of a city.

The Town of Moraga chose the form-based code to rezone the area covered by the Moraga Center Specific Plan. The purpose is to create a predictable framework that future developers will use to construct the residents' vision for their downtown. The MCSP Implementation Project steering committee comprised of councilmembers, members of the planning commission, design review board and parks and recreation commission started a series of public meetings with the town's staff and consultant Stefan Pellegrini from Opticos Design to define the new zoning.

The introductory meeting was held at the Hacienda de las Flores June 3. Moraga Planning Director Ellen Clark explained that the conventional zoning code does not address important elements such as the relationship between building facades and the public realm, the form and mass of buildings in relation to one another, and the scale and types of streets and blocks, while form-based zoning does.

Pelligrini opened the meeting by explaining the differences of form-based code. "A form-based code is a land development regulation that fosters predictable built results by using physical form as the organizing principle for the code, rather than separation of uses," he explained. Instead of "single family residential" zoning, for example, the code would be called "traditional neighborhood," with a description of the physical form of that area, regardless of the type of use. Form-based code also articulates transitions between the most rural to the most densely populated habitats, also called transects.

The regulations and standards in form-based codes are presented using both words and visual interpretations.

The consultant asked the members of the steering committee what their vision was for the MCSP. Most members wanted to create a real town center along a street that would be the extension of School Street along the Ranch area reaching St. Mary's Road. The committee indicated a need to integrate pedestrian and bicycle use downtown, create gathering places, and minimize the visual impact of car parking. Councilmember Dave Trotter said he would like to see the Lafayette-Moraga Regional Trail meander along the creek in the Ranch area.

The only member of the public in attendance, Dave Bruzzone, whose family owns most of the MCSP land, agreed that the family's vision includes taking advantage of the charm of a promenade along the creek, but not as part of the Lafayette-Moraga Regional Trail.

The meeting documents are posted on the town website at <http://www.moraga.ca.us/dept/planning/MCSP-ImplementationProject>. A community-wide meeting will be organized this fall. The next committee meeting is tentatively scheduled for June 25 or 29 and will address design principals. The exact date will be posted on the town website at moraga.ca.us.

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