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New Spirit of Collaboration Emerges Between Council and Moraga Center Property Owner

By Sophie Braccini

Economic feasibility and market constraints are some of the elements that the Bruzzone family, which owns most of the Moraga Center Specific Plan (MCSP) area property, would like to see taken into account as the town develops the zoning of their property located in the heart of Moraga.

A recent walk-through by the Bruzzones, elected officials, staff and planning commissioners seems to have fostered an improved dynamic between the owner and the town. While some councilmembers who have been dealing with this owner for over 10 years are urging staff to move forward no matter what, others are celebrating what appears to be a new spirit of collaboration.

"The field trip was the idea of Councilmember Onoda and Commissioner Kovacs, who are both also serving on the Steering Committee (for the implementation of the MCSP)," said Planning Director Ellen Clark. Dave Bruzzone, who came to the town meeting on Feb. 11 when the council reviewed the first draft of the MCSP implementation plan (see the Feb. 10 article, "Implementing the Moraga Center Specific Plan" in the online archives), said that he felt fortunate the field trip took place with the members of the steering committee. "It was a productive exchange," he said, adding that it is important for the committee to listen to what the property owner has to say about market constraints, engineering requirements and phasing of the project, so a viable downtown could emerge. Bruzzone reiterated his desire to continue working with staff and Opticos, the consultant working for the town on the zoning, in order to have a successful process.

"We're meeting with Opticos, Mr. Bruzzone and his engineer in a couple of weeks," confirmed Clark in the days following the council meeting. "The goal is to better understand the Bruzzones' ideas and concepts for the Specific Plan area. To the extent we can reflect these in the zoning standards, without deviating from the direction set by the Steering Committee, Planning Commission and Town Council, we will try and do so." If there are any substantial changes from that established direction, or alternate ideas that staff feels are appropriate to look at, then Clark says those proposals would need to go back to the Steering Committee as a first step for consideration.

Mayor Mike Metcalf reminded the council that the Bruzzone family had refused to negotiate a development agreement with the town when the MCSP was approved, after seven long and arduous years of negotiating. He warned staff not to stall the process, but agreed that involving the property owner was positive. "We want this to be approved in 2016," concurred Vice Mayor Dave Trotter, who also has extensive experience on this topic.

Staff is scheduled to bring the first set of draft zoning standards back to the Steering Committee before sending them to the Planning Commission for review.

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