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Saranap General Plan proposals nearing completion

By John T. Miller

After three contentious projects roiled the Saranap community in the past decade, the County Department of Conservation and Development is nearly ready to finalize policies to be added for the Saranap Avenue-Boulevard Way Planning Process Study Area.

Sean Tully, Senior Planner with the DCD, announced there will be one additional meeting taking place in the new year. "After that county staff would initiate the process for having the vision statement and policies adopted." This would conclude with a vote by the Board of Supervisors to add language to the existing General Plan for the study area.

Some of these proposed policies would discourage changing single-family residential land use designations to other urban designations; improve pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure where feasible, especially along the full length of Boulevard Way; and designate a location for a neighborhood park or other community space that could include such elements as a playground, lawn areas, dog run/park, picnic area, exercise equipment, and community garden.

Policies for the Boulevard Way Mixed-Use corridor include encouraging mixed-use projects over single use, and should consist of neighborhood-serving commercial use and multiple family dwellings; limiting roof heights to 50-55 feet; discouraging projects with a density exceeding 40 units per net acre; and making sure each building's scale, massing, and architectural style will be harmonious with its surroundings and contribute to a visually pleasing streetscape.

The Boulevard Way right-of-way, from Saranap Ave east to the Walnut Creek border, which was originally designed as a four-lane thoroughfare, would be reduced to two lanes with diagonal parking and bicycle facilities on both sides. In addition, proposals include traffic calming devices, a traffic circle, metered angled parking, crosswalks, parklets, widened sidewalks, street trees, landscaping, decorative streetlights, street furniture, water features, public artwork, and other amenities, as appropriate.

These proposals were the result of three public outreach meetings over the course of last year, an online community survey, and a property owner's meeting.

However, both Tim Lynch and David Dacus, presidents of the Saranap Homeowners Organization and the Saranap Community Association, respectively, expressed concern that the process needed more input, at least through the summer of 2019.

In a joint letter to John Kopchik, director of the DCD, and to Supervisor Candace Andersen, Lynch and Dacus spoke for their cooperative working groups requesting "at least three more meetings to achieve increased input." The letter noted that only about 3.5 percent of the Saranap population had weighed in on the planning process, representing "an inadequate level of community input."

The letter pointed out that the three public meetings were not advertised beyond the memberships of the two neighborhood groups representing 250 of the well-over 5,000 residents (based on the 2010 census), and asked the county advertise to all residents of the Saranap area.

The fact that both the SHO and SCA groups are working together represents great progress since the neighborhood's intense fights over the King Estates project, the Sufism Reoriented Sanctuary and Hall Equity Group's Saranap Village development proposal.

In response to Lynch and Dacus's requests, Kopchik replied, "If the community wishes to have another meeting (after the public outreach meeting on Oct. 16), I have no objection. However, I think it is important to recommend amendments to the General Plan to the board soon." Kopchik added that they are working on a comprehensive overhaul of the General Plan for the entire county, to be completed by the end of 2020. According to Lynch, the Saranap neighborhood groups will meet again in early December to discuss what feedback they want to give to the county.

There may still be some pushback on the height limits, both higher and lower than the 50-foot proposal, and Dacus expressed concerns on the impact of other parts of Saranap, especially the Olympic Boulevard corridor.

Citizens wishing to view the agendas, PowerPoint presentations, and draft vision statement and policy documents, can access the webpage at <http://www.contracosta.ca.gov/6914/Saranap/Saranap-AveBoulevard-Way-Planning-Proces>. NOTE: Proces is spelled with one 's' in this case.

An email address is available on the webpage to propose an edit or comment on the policies, which can be done through this Sunday, Dec. 2.

Reach the reporter at: john@lamorindaweekly.com

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