

Published August 5th, 2020

Moraga welcomes new planning director

By Vera Kochan



Moraga Planning Director Afshan Hamid Photo provided

Coming from her previous duties as the city of Vallejo's planning manager, Moraga's new kid on the government block is Planning Director Afshan Hamid. "I started July 6," stated Hamid, "and that was the same day as my first Planning Commission meeting. So, I was excited to jump right in!"

Hamid holds impressive educational credentials with a master's degree in architecture from MIT, an undergraduate degree from the University of Illinois at Chicago and membership in the American Institute of Certified Planners.

The town's size won't prove any less challenging than her previous position. "Although Moraga is a smaller town, it has all the complexities of development and land use that a larger city like Vallejo has," Hamid said. "One of the greatest opportunities is that due to a smaller scale, I am less removed from the process and able to be more hands on. I am able to engage with all levels of project review and provide more flexibility with my skills."

Having recently completed a zoning update in Vallejo, Hamid's experience with General Plan and Specific Plan policies will hold her in good stead when the Moraga Center Specific Plan begins rolling into fruition. She looks forward to creating improvements along corridors, in the commercial center, and in general, making Moraga a better place to live.

"I am also well versed with recent state law, and recognize development challenges and opportunities for improvements and streamlining," said Hamid, noting that Vallejo's growth and flexibility allowed for economic development in a managed way. "The MCSP implementation is similar in that it creates walkable, pedestrian friendly spaces that are connected and allow for improvement and new development over time. The MCSP-Implementation Plan respects the town character and the importance of having design guidelines."

With a master's in architecture, Hamid is using her strongest asset in design experience to provide input with the town's Design Guidelines. As future projects come up, she looks forward to maintaining the town's character while making recommendations to applicants with the knowledge that these important tools can shape a community and point it in the direction of positive economic development.

Besides the massive MCSP, other planning projects on the horizon incorporate some of the town council's goals for 2020. An initial re-evaluation of the development process, regulations and needs, and design guidelines while incorporating a town grant for improvements and taking into account resident and stakeholder feedback is one of Hamid's priorities. Another is to update the zoning code to incorporate new accessory dwelling unit legislation to comply with state regulations. Additionally, California will require all cities and towns to update the Sixth Cycle Housing Element to conform with regional housing needs assessments.

Hamid lives with her family in Danville, but is excited to be part of the entire Moraga community. "I am open to listening and hearing from residents, business owners, and boards and commissions to make improvements that align with the town's vision."

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