



MORAGA

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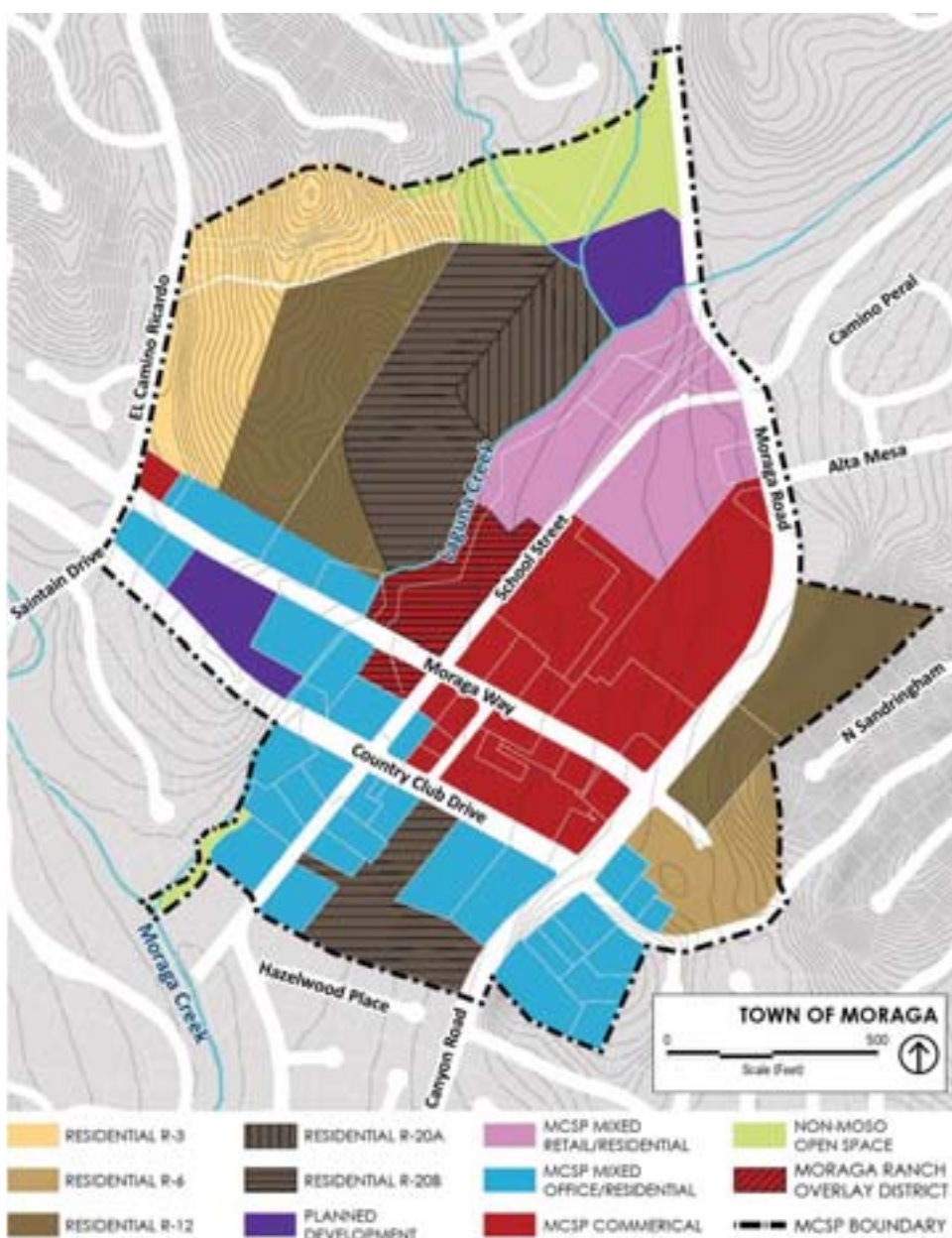
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MCSP update goes to Planning Commission after massive public input



By Vera Kochan

The Planning Commission held a public hearing on July 20 to consider the Moraga Center Specific Plan Implementation Project before giving its recommendation to the town council. The televised hearing drew roughly 40 email/letter comments from residents giving voice to their concerns about the project and its effect on the town.

The project includes a revised zoning map, updated zoning districts, amendments to Title 8 of the Moraga Municipal Code, and updates to the Town of Moraga Design Guidelines consistent with the MCSP document

adopted in 2010. The MCSP area comprises approximately 187 acres and is located around the Moraga Road and Moraga Way intersection.

Senior Advisor David Early of Placeworks, a community design firm, began the meeting with an overview of MCSP's progress to date, noting the number of dwelling units, which is consistent with the adopted Housing Element; the allowance for a higher density infill and mixed-use, transit-oriented development; the economic/market assessment and a comprehensive traffic study; the range of housing types; and a completed analysis of environmental impacts.

Early also reminded everyone of the formation of a Citizens Advisory Committee which conducted four meetings between July and October 2019 in order to advise solely on issues about zoning and development standards. As a result CAC made 17 recommendations to the MCSP with some of the key discussions revolving around zoning being consistent with the Specific Plan; the entire MCSP being based on the principle of Transit Oriented Districts; providing step-backs on taller buildings to create visual relief; portraying full build-out allowed under the Specific Plan; retaining Moraga Ranch as focus for a hotel; extending School Street to St. Mary's Road; and including the Lafayette-Moraga Regional Trail along School Street.

The prospective land use entails both residential and non-residential buildings. Residential housing would include between 510 to 630 units total for active seniors, single family, workforce housing and compact single family. Non-residential facilities include retail/entertainment (90,000 sq. ft.), office (50,000 sq. ft.), bed and breakfast/boutique hotel (85 rooms), and assisted living/congregate care (150 rooms).

According to the staff report by Early, his associate Carey Stone and Moraga Planning Director Afshan Hamid, there are many positive points to creating a mixed-use "Village." It would "address current resident concerns about lack of shopping choices; provide a range of housing types; encourage residents, visitors and workers to walk and avail alternate modes of transportation; and locate the community's needed higher density housing uses within walking distance of existing and planned retail uses and services."

Moraga Deputy Town Attorney Karen Murphy discussed the recently approved (January 2020) Senate Bill 330 aimed at ensuring zoning-compliant housing projects. While it has many provisions, the ones that apply to MCSP-IP are that the new zoning regulations may not reduce the allowed intensity or number of units for residential land uses/parcels. They also cannot impose or enforce a moratorium on housing development or any new non-objective design stan-

dards on proposed developments. Additionally, they may not implement or enforce limits on the number of residential building permits issued.

The complete Draft Zoning Code would reflect the MCSP's land use and policy direction along with CAC recommendations regarding topics such as shared parking, Moraga Center design requirements, a Town Square, trail design standards along with creek and channel setbacks.

The town was awarded a \$140,000 grant fund in May 2018 from the Metropolitan Transportation Commission to implement the MCSP, not to revise it. The completion and implementation of the MCSP grant expires by the end of 2020.

Moraga Police Chief Jon King discussed emergency evacuation issues that could be hindered with an increase to the town's population, noting that there are only three major roads out of town (Canyon Road, Moraga Road and Moraga Way). The best-case scenario would be to turn these two-way roads into one-way roads leading out of town.

The bulk of the public comments and concerns entailed safe and swift evacuations in the event of fire, earthquake or other disasters. With the possibility of an additional 630 dwelling units comes the concern that many additional vehicles would need to evacuate the town. Running along those same lines is the possible addition of a minimum of 630 commuters adding to the morning and evening rush hours.

More issues raised included tall buildings in the center of town ruining the open space sightlines and the destruction of areas that harbor wildlife habitats. The coronavirus topic came up regarding an unstable economic climate. Would retail and office space remain empty given the health mandates still in effect now and in an unforeseeable future?

After nearly three hours, Planning Commission Chair David Stromberg determined that further discussions on the MCSP topic would continue during the next planning commission meeting scheduled for Aug. 17. In the meantime, commission members requested additional information and clarification from staff to also be presented during that time.

Town Council
 Wednesday, Aug. 26, 7 p.m.
 Council Chambers and Community Meeting Room,
 335 Rheem Blvd.
Planning Commission: Monday, Aug. 17, 7 p.m.
 Council Chambers and Community Meeting Room,
 335 Rheem Blvd.
Park and Recreation Commission: Tuesday, Aug. 18 7 p.m., Council
 Chambers and Community Meeting Room, 335 Rheem Blvd.
Moraga School District Board Meetings :
 Special Board Meeting Tuesday, Aug. 11, 6 p.m.
 www.moraga.k12.ca.us. See also AUHSD meeting page A2

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