

Planning department presents possible design standards for Rheem Park Area to town council



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The recommended style of architecture would be an adaptation of the Spanish-Colonial style such as at Saint Mary's College, to add a cohesive tie-in between the college and the Rheem Shopping Center.

By Vera Kochan

The town council received an informational report from the Planning Department with regards to the Draft Objective Design Standards for the Rheem Park Area during its Feb. 15 meeting; the purpose being to give feedback and input.

According to the staff report by Planning Director Afshan Hamid, Senior Planner Brian Horn, and Planning Consultants Aaron Welch and Barry Miller this step is necessary as "part of the Town of Moraga's Comprehensive Advanced Planning Initiative (CAPI) and Housing Element effort and builds on work completed as part of that effort."

In creating Rheem's Design Standards, the aforementioned team considered standards already adopted for the Moraga Center Specific Plan; considered applicable multi-family and mixed-use guidelines and concepts already in existence; examined concepts recently adopted by other local municipalities; made site visits to other recently updated shopping centers; and applied standards developed by Housing and Community Development (HCD).

After a Feb. 7 Planning Commission study session the following feedback was presented to the team: "Encourage outdoor seating and dining areas, similar to Canyon Club, open spaces, walking paths, public art, and places for gathering; avoid disjointed development, encourage designs that are cohesive and compatible with other properties; encourage building materials that age well even when they are not effectively maintained; consider color restrictions for buildings, such as principally earth tone colors; consider how Center Street will shape the development; regarding residential bicycle parking in multi-family developments, create a room for bikes, however, in town-home/rowhomes, bikes can go in private garages; be mindful

of onerous requirements for locating parking - requiring that it's in the back of buildings, etc.; make sure we are not double-requiring things; confirm that the proposed 25-foot setback would apply to Rheem Boulevard and Moraga Road adjacent to Housing Opportunity Sites; developments should only need to make improvements based on the size of their project; and review and clarify whether multiple types of glass would be counted as multiple types of materials and counted individually towards the three required materials."

During the presentation to the town council it was noted that the Rheem Theatre was exempt from any changes due to its unique architectural character and that any improvements would be processed through the current design review process.

With regards to site circulation and access, the intent is to create a network of smaller blocks as opposed to long continuous "superblocks" in order to encourage internal pedestrian connections. Another goal is to turn Center Street into a walkable and active internal street.

The design of the setback areas should encourage attractive facades and promote seating areas, outdoor dining, plazas, and landscaped areas that would draw community gathering and pedestrian activity.

Building massing and articulation should include requirements for differentiating upper and lower stories and provide distinctive architectural elements and details.

Building facades and materials should require regular doors, windows and window transparency between indoor and outdoor areas. It is hoped that this would avoid blank walls.

By having minimum size requirements for ground-floor building spaces the hope is to avoid any low-quality construction which would become more obvious if vacant.

With regards to vehicle

parking spaces, "the intent is to create parking and loading facilities that are easy to use while protecting pedestrian safety, minimizing negative impacts of car storage, and encouraging park-once opportunities for residents, workers, and visitors to the Rheem area."

Long-term bicycle parking for residents and workers should be in a covered and secure space within the building itself. Short-term parking for shoppers, guests and visitors would take the form of outdoor racks near building entrances.

Private open space would be established by a parcel's underlying zoning district. Concerning public space and landscaping, "there is no direct requirement for publicly accessible open space in either the Standards or the underlying zoning districts, beyond requirements for site circulation and pedestrian facilities." The Standards do include landscaping specifications for different types of trees, shrubs or ground cover and their maintenance.

While limited fencing and screening for residential security and privacy is allowed, the same will be limited along commercial sidewalk frontages and public streets; and pedestrian lighting along sidewalks and pathways will need to incorporate soft lighting in order to reduce light pollution.

Council members offered opinions about the style of architecture that would enhance the Rheem Shopping Center, with the point being made that by using an adaptation of the Spanish-Colonial style such as Saint Mary's College, the tie-in would make the short distant between the two locations cohesive.

Given the additional feedback from the council, Hamid stated that the team would continue to explore topics such as the impact of noise to units living above retail; public and private open space requirements; bicycle storage criteria; landscaping; and architectural style.

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