

Published July 26th, 2017

Moraga will streamline commercial permitting process

By Sophie Braccini



Moraga officials promised at a recent council meeting that it would take only three months to do what years of discussions could not achieve: streamlining the commercial permitting process. It took the determination of a property owner and the persuasion of the Moraga Chamber of Commerce to kick-start a process that had stalled for years.

According to chamber executive director Kathe Nelson, some businesses think that Moraga's commercial permitting process is "the kiss of death." Jay Kerner of U.S. Realty Partners, which owns a large part of the Rheem Valley Shopping Center, explained that in retail time is of the essence and he added at the July 12 council meeting that he welcomed any attempt to simplify Moraga's process.

Rheem Valley Shopping Center Moraga Shopping Center

a Commercial Planned Development district for Moraga. Under that new framework, a commercial property owner could ask for the establishment of a CPD district with predictable parameters such as building height, parking constraints, and types of use. Once the general framework is approved, any new business, or change in existing business, would simply have to demonstrate its compliance within the framework to be approved.

Ellen Clark, the planning director, presented to the council a solution to avoid years of meetings by creating

This would be quite different than the current process. Today, any modification to a use permit for a commercial space requires staff to make a series of findings, some of which are completely at odds with current standards: per current code, a finding has to be made that "a use won't generate pedestrian traffic flow between abutting uses."

This process is long and can be appealed, which leads to uncertainty. Clark noted that staff recommended this code simplification to support U.S. Realty Partners' desire to attract new tenants and revitalize the Rheem center. She noted that the commercial planned development mechanism is widely used in the Bay Area.

Dave Bruzzone, whose family owns the Moraga Center (Safeway shopping center), said he supported the idea of simplification and asked that his property be included in the new CPD. At this time the Moraga Center is regulated by the Moraga Center Specific Plan and a committee has been working for over two years on the zoning of the MCSP.

The ad hoc committee will develop a proposed CPD ordinance and proposed permitted uses and development standards in any future CPD-zoned commercial areas of the town. After that, the planning commission will review the proposed ordinance before the Town Council considers it for adoption. When a property owner asks for an area to be constituted as a CPD the same process will be followed: review by the planning commission before consideration by the council. Once approved, adjoining properties can ask to be included in an existing CPD.

Council members Kymberleigh Korpus and Dave Trotter were appointed to be part of the ad hoc committee. The first meeting of that group, which is open to the public, is scheduled for 10 a.m. Aug. 9.

Reach the reporter at: sophie@lamorindaweekly.com

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