

Published August 8th, 2018

Indian Valley safety concerns frustrate Canyon residents

By Nick Marnell



Photo Andy Scheck

referred to a Feb. 1 letter from Fire Marshal Kathy Leonard to the Moraga acting planning director in which Leonard explained that the conceptual design of the development had one public road and an emergency vehicle access road as a second entrance into the project, but that the EVA was gated and locked.

"Locked gates slow fire agency response times and force residents to have only one way out if they have to evacuate," Leonard wrote. She recommended the elimination of the EVA for a road with no gates or locks that can be used by either the public or by responders. The access road Leonard recommended lies about 100 feet from the main entrance to the development, as the district determined that other possible locations for the access road were unsafe.

But Canyon residents complained that the second proposed access road should be separated from the entrance by approximately 0.6 miles, citing their interpretation of the fire code. "The plan approved by MOFD has these two access points very close together and this compromises safety," said community resident Jonathan Goodwin. "One disruption could block both access points and entrap residents while preventing ingress of emergency personnel."

"Canyon Road is very unsafe," added another community resident. "There is a blind curve at the access road entrance to the development." Other residents urged the Indian Valley developer to add an access road on the far north side of the canyon or to consider reducing the number of housing units to 25, obviating the need for a second access road.

"If the development cannot be built safely, it should not be built at all," Goodwin said.

Winnacker stood by the recommendation of his fire marshal: The development requires two fire apparatus access roads, plus other mitigation efforts including a dedicated water supply, hydrants outside and within the project, paved code-compliant roads, risk-reducing vegetation management and fire-resistive construction. Winnacker said those requirements have been submitted to the town.

"Our requirements as applied will result in the development being as safe as it can be," Winnacker said.

Indian Valley remains a long-range project for the town. "My best guess is, we're looking at a year, maybe two, before this thing gets anywhere close," Moraga Council Member Kimberleigh Korpus told the MOFD board. Korpus said that the next step is the preparation of an environmental impact report.

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