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Town allows greater signage variety for business owners

By Vera Kochan

Moraga has simplified and streamlined the approval process for certain types of signs and allowed for a new master approval process to include greater variation from current standards and regulations for new commercial signage that includes wall signs, monument signs and portable signs.

The town's Senior Planner Steve Kowalski made a presentation during the June 10 council meeting citing a goal to "address a common perception in the business community that the Moraga Municipal Code contained numerous burdensome provisions regulating the opening of a new business in the town that were acting as a deterrent to businesses that may have otherwise chosen to locate in Moraga." Current business and property owners have had to deal with inflexible and rigorous requirements in order to install even small signs to identify their establishments.

Stakeholder input was sought from property owners of both the Moraga Shopping Center and Rheem Valley Shopping Center, as well as Moraga's Chamber of Commerce. Dave Bruzzone, of the Bruzzone family's Moraga Center, did not submit any input regarding the proposed amendments prior to the town council meeting.

Jay Kerner of U.S. Realty Partners, Inc., the primary owner of Rheem Valley Shopping Center, had already submitted an application for a new Master Sign Program in November. Upon hearing that amendments to the sign code were in the works, Kerner voiced his support and opted to wait before proceeding with its application regarding new signage in the hopes that much of what it had proposed would be accepted.

"We believe that the added flexibility and ease in permitting to be key to a more contemporary ordinance and less cumbersome process," stated the chamber's Executive Director Kathe Nelson, while pointing out the time-consuming approval process for even the simplest of signs. "Further, the reduction of fees, lessening the expense burden will be a very welcome change, particularly to our small businesses that are the backbone of our business community."

The town council voted unanimously to amend several sections of Chapter 8.88 "Signs" of the MMC with direction for staff to revisit the town's Design Guidelines pertaining to signs in order to confirm that none of the approved amendments require any amendments to those guidelines. During the June 24 town council meeting, a small number of final revisions to amendments was made and passed with a vote of 4-0, with Council Member Steve Woehleke abstaining. The council will conduct a second reading of the revised ordinance and consider adoption at its July 8 meeting.

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