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Town Council Approves Draft Housing Element

By Sophie Braccini

On June 24 the Moraga Town Council approved the Draft Housing Element prepared by staff and consultant Baird and Driskell Community Planning.

The State's housing requirement for the Town of Moraga is to plan for the development of 307 new housing units within 5 years, including 144 very low and low income dwelling units. According to Baird and Driskell, "This is the opportunity for the town to review the situation of the housing of its population and reflect on its needs for the years to come."

Much of the planning and public input was done as the town was worked on its Specific Plan for the Moraga Center area. The objective given to staff was to have the draft housing element approved and sent to the State Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) by the end of June.

The Council reviewed the 70-page document page by page and made several changes in preparation for the submission to HCD, including the removal of a bond-funded energy efficiency and solar power proposal, the setting of minimum universal development guidelines that are geared towards accommodating senior needs and opening of the possibility for the town to give developers general assistance in finding funding.

Dick Loewke, speaking for the Bruzzone family which owns most of the land where the new development could take place, expressed his concern that the numerous constraints placed on developers in Moraga (impact fees and lengthy process among others) impair the ability to ever develop Moraga.

He added that the modifications the Council made to the last version of the Specific Plan, with a cap on the number of houses that could be built, put at risk the ability to fulfill the requirements of the Housing Element. Council Member Harpham suggested that rushing such an important document for approval was not a good idea. He recovered his peace of mind when told that the Council would get a second pass at the document after it is sent back by HCD with comments.

This next part of the process, before the final housing element is approved, should take place in the fall.

Reach the reporter at: sophie@lamorindaweekly.com

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