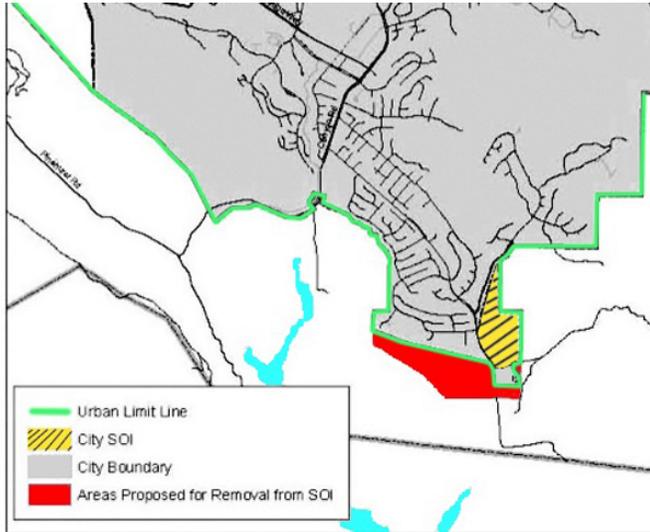


Published August 3rd, 2011

Moraga's Sphere of Influence Town has little control over large projects in some nearby unincorporated areas, such as those near Rancho Laguna Park

By Sophie Braccini



Map courtesy Moraga Planning Department

buy the Hacienda de las Flores property, determined boundaries that included the property which would later become Rancho Laguna Park, but left out the Carr Ranch lands and other open space properties surrounding the park-creating a strange map with a little pocket at its south-east border (see image).

Years later, when a piece of Carr Ranch was sold to developers for the Skyline subdivision, the Town objected to plans for a density of more than two dwellings per acre. "The County Planning Department agreed with the Town," remembers Chamberlain, "but the developer appealed the decision to the County Board of Supervisors, which overruled the decision. When the Town complained, the response was that the area was not within the Town's sphere of influence."

Typically, a sphere of influence is the territory a city or district is expected to annex. The Contra Costa Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) regulates spheres of influence (SOI). According to its mission statement, "LAFCO must adopt a sphere of influence (SOI) for each city and special district...The SOI serves as the ultimate planning boundary for a local agency." LAFCO reviews SOIs at least once every five years.

The Skyline issue prompted Moraga's then Planning Director, Jay Tashiro, to create a SOI for the Town. "We wanted to expand it to include Canyon and the unincorporated Bollinger area, but this was met with vehement opposition from the property owners," says Chamberlain. The SOI was therefore limited to what appears on the map pictured.

The Town has a say when subdivisions are proposed within its SOI, but its regulatory power is limited beyond the actual Town borders. "We typically do not see the plans or how each parcel is developed," says Chamberlain. Hence the Town could not stop the ridgeline development to west of the park; the subdivision of that land was determined prior to Moraga's SOI. In 2009 LAFCO removed that area west of Camino Pablo from the Town's SOI because, according to LAFCO's Director Lou-Ann Texeira, "the area is open space, there is no opportunity for the Town of Moraga to develop the land and extend its services there." Most of the lots that were created have already been built.

Moraga's current SOI includes only the Skyline development and the undeveloped hills that border Camino Pablo to the east between Rancho Laguna Park and Sanders Ranch. "We should not see more development up there," said Chamberlain, referring to the open space located all around Rancho Laguna Park, both within and beyond the Town's SOI, because "the rest of the land is part of EBMUD watershed."

Reach the reporter at: sophie@lamorindaweekly.com

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA