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Published September 26th, 2012

Camino Ricardo Development

By Sophie Braccini

SummerHill Homes is proposing to build 28 homes on a lot off of Camino Ricardo, above Moraga Way. On September 19, the Town of Moraga held the first meeting of a roughly two-year process leading to the construction of the homes.

Doug Herring, a consultant working for the Town, made a pedagogical presentation of the process. According to California law, the environmental impact of a proposed development needs to be assessed and then certified by the Town in order for a developer to seek building permits. These impacts can be in the area of air or water quality, geological or archeological impacts, traffic, and noise, among other things.

This first public meeting was held so the community could weigh in about environmental concerns. The Town will investigate each of the aspects and assess how the proposed development will impact the environment. It will be up to the developer to mitigate these impacts.

The piece of property is the first chunk of land to be developed as part of the Moraga Center Specific Plan that was adopted in January, 2010. This document, which is available on the Town's website, authorizes types of development and density for the large downtown area that lies roughly between Moraga Way and Moraga Road. It includes the Moraga Shopping Center as well as many undeveloped parcels such as the pear orchard east of Camino Ricardo.

In the Specific Plan, the SummerHill property is defined as a "transition" area between the existing single family neighborhood on Camino Ricardo and higher density development authorized in the pear orchard. The density is defined as three dwelling units per acre. Most of the land addressed in the downtown specific plan belongs to the Bruzzone family, but not the lot where these 28 homes are proposed. This oddly-shaped lot belongs to the Che family, who also owned the land that became the Sonsara homes.

Some of the neighbors who came to that first meeting are veterans of the Town's planning process. They offered comments and weighed in when Sonsara was developed and when the Specific Plan was approved. On September 19, many of the concerns they voiced referred to that development.

"When Sonsara was developed, the final design was a result of a compromise between all the parties, and it succeeded in preserving the semi-rural character of the town," said one neighbor. "This is not what we have here; these are tract homes like in Daly City."

The design presented by SummerHill is, at first glance, of a much higher density than the 3 dwelling units per acre authorized by the Specific Plan. This results from massing the homes on the eastern portion of the lot, leaving a large expanse of land for a park and permanent open space.

This visual impact was only one among many concerns of residents, including traffic, safety, noise, a potential health hazard, grading, wild life, parking, visibility from the scenic corridor and more.

The first joint meeting of the Planning Commission and Design Review Board regarding this project will be held on October 1st. It is a public meeting that starts at 7 p.m. For the location check the Town's website, moraga.ca.us.

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