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Planning Commission Approves Controversial Development Project

By Sophie Braccini



Rendering of the Moraga Center development. Image provided

vacant 3-acre lot.

The meeting started with a staff presentation that highlighted recent modifications to a plan that began over two years ago with a 55-unit configuration. Ella Samonsky, associate planner, discussed the 35-foot landscaped buffer, 20 feet from the town's right of way; the increased setback of the third story from the street; and the 90 planned parking spaces. She stated that the project complies with the Moraga Center Specific Plan, which governs this lot.

Most of the residents who spoke during the public comment period were opposed to the project. "I can accurately attest to the fact that at no time has any developer tried to inflict on Moraga anything as ugly, massive, and high density. The very reason we incorporated Moraga 40 years ago was to make sure that no development such as the one proposed by City Ventures would ever be approved," said Dick Olsen. Others criticized a density not compatible with the scenic corridor, including resident Scott Bowhay who described it as a good design in the wrong place. Many residents of Moraga Country Club expressed concerns over parking and traffic along Country Club Drive. Two residents said they support the project - they view it as a well-conceived project that adds density and vibrancy to the town center.

Commissioners Stacia Levenfeld, Steve Woehleke and chair Christine Kuckuk noted that the extent of the commission's power was to decide whether or not the plan was compliant with the Moraga Center Specific Plan. "I can't find any reason to say no," said Woehleke. They noted that the project was true to the spirit of a plan that seeks to bring higher density downtown, and encourage bicycling to shops.

Commissioner Tom Marnane expressed his approval for the concept, and so did new commissioner Alexandra Babcock - in terms quite fresh for the commission. "Funny to see how all of you residents who came here 15 to 30 years ago to build a family, now are opposed to the kind of development that would allow your own children to build a family here," she said. Babcock also inquired if the developer would pay traffic impact fees that could be applied to a Lamorinda-to-BART shuttle.

Only commissioner Frank Comprelli opposed the adoption of the plan. His opposition stemmed

The Moraga Planning Commission approved the conceptual plan for 36 attached units, townhomes and duplexes, located between Moraga Way and Country Club Drive, next to fire station 41. The commissioners found that the project was in compliance with the Moraga Center Specific Plan that was approved four years ago. The commission's decision was appealed by a trio of residents, Richard Olsen, Denise Coane, and Scott Bowhay, who are opposed to a project they believe is misplaced along the scenic corridor. The Town Council will review the project de novo at an upcoming meeting.

It was one of those nights when staff have to pull additional chairs into the library meeting room to accommodate a large crowd as numerous residents came to the Nov. 17 Planning Commission meeting to express their opinions about the project proposed by City Ventures on the

from a proposed 10,000 square foot park that he found grossly inadequate and misplaced.

Commissioner Teresa Onoda, who was just elected to the Town Council, recused herself from the meeting so that her participation would not be challenged when the council makes a final decision regarding the Moraga Center Homes project.

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