



Published September 2nd, 2020

Planning Commission provides forward motion for MCSP

By Vera Kochan

Moraga Center Specific Plan Zoning Codes and Design Guidelines were the topics at hand during the Aug. 17 planning commission meeting.

Senior Advisor David Early of Placeworks, a community design firm, during a previous meeting made it known that state law requires consistency between a Specific Plan and the zoning provisions that implement the Specific Plan. The zoning provisions provide the development standards (height, setback, density, allowed uses, and often include lighting, landscaping, parking) that implement the plan's goals and policies. Development of zoning codes consistent with a Specific Plan can include a mix of current codes and development of new codes.

Addressing public concerns put forth during the July 20 planning commission meeting in which overwhelming comments centered around timely evacuation during an emergency, given the potential increase in housing and new residents, Early mentioned the Moraga-Orinda Fire District's implementation of a more aggressive vegetation management program. He also noted the various evacuation drills performed in conjunction with the Moraga Police Department, along with the fact that Fire Hazard Severity Zones can require fire resistant construction.

The July 20 planning commission recommendations incorporated into the zoning code include interpretive signage design guidance; a specific thematic character of Moraga Ranch; an updated Senior Housing definition; the allowance of privately owned and maintained pocket parks and congregate care in more districts; moving street types and standards to MCSP Design Guidelines; removing a 30-foot MOFD height limitation; revising R-6 (Six 21 Dwellings per Acre Multifamily Residential District) and R-12 (Twelve Dwelling Units 32 per Acre Multifamily Residential District) minimum lot requirements; and replacing the development capacity table to mirror the table from MCSP.

While public comments were again expressed during the Aug. 17 meeting, there were not as many as last month's session. Although, the concerns echoed high-density housing paired with timely evacuation; loss of open space; and building retail in a COVID-19 climate. The lone pro-retail/housing increase comment was to point out the influx of tax dollars that would be generated for the town.

With an approval vote of 5-1, with Commissioner Suzanne D'Arcy the lone no vote, the commission made a recommendation for the Town Council to approve an ordinance to adopt a new zoning map within the MCSP Area and update Title 8 of the Moraga Municipal Code. The Planning Commission also recommended establishing several new chapters within Title 8 of the MMC and decided to move discussion regarding revised design guidelines to its Sept. 21 meeting.

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