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Town council attempts to further clarify development guidelines

By Nick Marnell



The Moraga Town Council unanimously adopted a resolution Nov. 10 that established new guidelines for the aesthetic development of the Moraga Center, a 187-acre area of the town that includes the Safeway shopping center and adjoining roads and property.

The 121-page Town of Moraga Design Guidelines document, the culmination of numerous Citizens Advisory Committee, planning department and town council meetings, includes guidance to developers for what is appropriate in character and quality for the town, and assists the town in evaluating proposals for development. The guidelines align with but do not supersede local zoning standards.

Mixed Residential/Retail areas within the MCSP should be a unique combination of different land uses, including but not limited to retail, residential, office, commercial, service, entertainment, and recreation.

The design guidelines feature eight guiding principles for town development, including the maintaining of a semirural character, protection of ridgelines and hillside areas and "thoughtful design" to residential neighborhoods.

landscaping, cul de sacs and even retaining walls. The document features not only detailed written descriptions but also visual examples. "The inclusion of photos is particularly helpful in illuminating the desired intent," Council Member Steve Woehleke said.

The guidelines are exhaustive, and include the design of

As the newly passed design guidelines are exactly that - guidelines - they are subject to interpretation for development approval. Two sentences on Page 11 of the design guidelines document further add to the subjectivity. "Compliance with these guidelines does not, however, guarantee approval. Similarly, needing to request an exception to the guidelines does not mean that the application will be disapproved," the document reads.

"This is not going to be helping the town whatsoever," local property owner Dave Bruzzone said.

Mayor Kymberleigh Korpus summarized the council discussion, and she encouraged Bruzzone, the only member of the public to speak up, to collaborate with the town planning department. "We have a product that is going to work hand-in-hand with the (Moraga Center) zoning to encourage as much as possible the kinds of development that will work here," she said. "We've got a starting point. There is some discretion. There is flexibility."

Vice Mayor Mike McCluer concurred that the new guidelines were a start and not the final word on town development. "This is part of the journey, and this journey will continue," he said.

To view the guidelines discussed, visit the Town of Moraga website and download the agenda packet from the Nov. 10 council meeting: <https://ca-moraga.civicplus.com/AgendaCenter/Town-Council-2>

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