

Moraga Center Specific Plan Executive Summary

Introduction

Lush landscaping, decorative paving, and a gentle curve in the road combine to form a captivating new “Main Street” in the center of Moraga. Welcoming benches, sturdy bicycle racks and attractive window displays draw residents into the commercial core to linger, shop and socialize. Vintage street lamps extend the day as residents embark on an evening stroll or assemble for dinner at a new creekside café. Fresh coffee, warm cookies and icy cold gelato satisfy the cravings of a community enjoying itself. The pace is relaxed. The quality is high and it is all within walking distance, in the heart of Moraga.

As an infill development project, the 187 acre Moraga Center Specific Plan (MCSP) presents excellent opportunities for new residential development, enhanced circulation, and commercial and recreational activity in the Moraga Center area. Essential to the design of the plan is the extension of School Street from the front of the Moraga Ranch to a new four-way intersection with Moraga Road and Saint Mary’s Road. Preliminary concepts for the extension of School Street include diagonal parking with planting pockets containing significant landscaping and wide sidewalks for outdoor dining. The School Street extension also presents opportunities for the extension of the Lafayette Moraga Regional Trail either along the sidewalk in front of new businesses or along the creek. While new development near the creek must be sensitive in its design, the proximity of the creek to the School Street extension creates a tremendous opportunity for creekside living, dining, shopping, socializing and recreation – all important elements of the Moraga Center Specific Plan.

Location and Background

The MCSP is the result of a seven year planning process involving Moraga residents, Town leaders, neighboring communities, property owners, consultants and interested persons. As designed, the plan is an economically viable, environmentally sensitive approach to development that calls for the creation of a mixed-use village with local serving commercial development and a range of residential opportunities. Essential to the plan are the revitalization of the existing shopping center and Moraga Ranch complex, construction of new residential units and preservation of the creek corridor. A program level environmental impact report (EIR) has been prepared for the Specific Plan and the Town could consider a development agreement to expedite and allow for implementation of the plan over time. While the Plan does not authorize immediate construction, it is an important step in defining the future development potential of the area. Construction of new dwelling units will enhance the customer base for the existing shopping center and the addition of new businesses could help to reduce sales tax leakage and contribute to the local economy.

Recognizing the excellent opportunity for housing based infill development in the MCSP, the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG), Bay Area Air Quality Management District (BAAQMD), San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC), and the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) have designated the MCSP area as a potential Priority Development Area (PDA). These regional agencies are responsible for programs and grants to support PDAs in the creation of complete communities. The FOCUS Program has worked to help connect PDAs with a variety of funding opportunities. Although these funding programs are still highly competitive, jurisdictions with designated FOCUS PDAs and whose goals are closely aligned with the program's objectives can be more successful in securing financial assistance than other areas. In other words, the MCSP is the kind of development that will meet local housing needs, potentially improved air quality by increasing pedestrian activity and reducing the length of car trips, and potentially increase the use of transit. In so doing, the MCSP will be competitive with other jurisdictions in the pursuit of PDA funds. The Specific Plan fosters the kind of development that the Town needs to meet the demands of an aging population in an increasingly congested environment.

Commercial Development Potential

While much of the Specific Plan focuses on new construction, it also provides for the revitalization of the existing shopping center and Moraga Ranch. The intent of the new development is to provide local shopping and commercial opportunities for Moraga residents, thus reducing their need to shop out of town. By allowing up to 90,000 square feet of new retail/entertainment space and 50,000 square feet of new office space, the Town hopes to capture a meaningful portion of the approximately 75% of the current taxable purchases that are presently made by Moraga residents outside of town.

By providing better shopping opportunities in Moraga, it is anticipated that residents will not need to travel to neighboring jurisdictions for basic goods and services. The sales tax that is paid on these new purchases will accrue to the Town of Moraga rather than another city. Furthermore, by increasing local shopping opportunities, the Moraga quality of life will be enhanced by residents enjoying the company of their friends and neighbors while dining out or shopping locally. Residents will be able to save time by buying what they need in town, and they can save money, improve air quality and conserve fuel by driving short distances to Moraga destinations. In sum, revitalizing and expanding the Moraga Center improves the quality of life in Moraga, supports the local economy and contributes to the sustainability of the environment.

Residential Development Potential

While significant market demand to renovate the shopping center currently exists, it will be further supported by new residential development in close proximity to the

commercial core including up to 630 new dwelling units within easy walking distance of the center. Because the Specific Plan covers a large geographic area, the opportunities for Moraga residential development are significant and diverse. Along the Camino Ricardo corridor and extending to the top of the hillside, low density single-family development consistent with the existing neighborhood is proposed. In this area, a minimum of 40 single-family residences could be developed at a density of up to 3 dwelling units per acre. Similar to the 41 lot Sonsara development across the street, this neighborhood is planned to provide traditional single-family residential development on 10,000 square foot minimum lots. The MCSP allows for the clustering of single-family development in this area to minimize impacts to scenic corridors and riparian areas and allow areas of open space and/or orchard preservation.

The highest density residential development in the MCSP area is planned for the relatively flat area across the creek from the Moraga Center. In this area, a minimum of 148 active senior dwelling units are planned at a density of up to 30 dwelling units per acre. Potentially ranging from studio apartments to 2-bedroom condominiums, these units are intended to be smaller than traditional single-family residences and meet the needs of a growing senior population. By clustering development along the creek, this housing opportunity would provide seniors with easy access to new and existing opportunities for shopping, dining, socializing and recreation within the Moraga Center area and nearby facilities such as the Moraga Commons and Moraga Library.

The demand for senior housing in Moraga is currently strong. Moraga has fewer youth and more seniors than the county as a whole. Eighteen percent of the population is over age 65 (versus 12% in the county) and 18% of the population is under age 18 (versus 24% in the county). In addition, the future demand for senior housing in Moraga is growing and will nearly double in the next ten years based on current migration rates and life expectancies. The maximum 30 dwelling unit per acre active senior housing is only one form of housing for seniors. The plan also includes up to 150 units/rooms of assisted living/congregate care for seniors who need increased assistance as they age.

An area of moderate density residential development is located on the "Village" hillside facing the shopping center, above the higher density senior development. This area is intended to accommodate compact single-family residences such as condominiums and townhouses. At a density of 10 to 12 dwelling units per acre, this area is comparable to the townhouse development at the Moraga Country Club. The Specific Plan provides for a minimum of 100 units in this area and on the hillside at the end of Moraga Way between Canyon Road and Country Club Drive.

Adding to the diversity of the residential options within the Specific Plan area is an opportunity for up to 100 St. Mary's College and/or workforce dwelling units. These units could be located above or adjacent to new commercial development in a mixed-use environment. By creating opportunities for student and/or workforce

housing, commute trips into and out of Moraga are reduced and peak hour traffic on the arterials in Lamorinda will not be adversely affected. In addition, recruiting efforts for talented employees at the college, in the school districts and fire district, in local business and the Town are enhanced by affordable workforce housing options in Moraga. The workforce residents will add vitality to the shopping center through their purchasing power and presence in the community, and contribute to the Town's economy by providing local employers with necessary employees.

The 388 potential dwelling units described above, are significantly less than the 630 total dwelling units that could be accommodated in the Specific Plan area. The remaining 242 dwelling units are unspecified so as to allow flexibility and a timely response to market opportunities. If demand is shown to be strong for senior housing, more senior units could be constructed. Similarly, if demand is strong for conventional single-family housing, more units of this type could be constructed. Future housing construction, however, will need to consider impacts on peak hour, peak direction traffic as different types of units are associated with varying levels of traffic generation.

One way of thinking about the total residential development potential of the MCSP area is to think about dwelling unit equivalents. For example, a single family residence generates approximately three times the number of trips as an active senior dwelling unit. The economic benefits of constructing these larger more expensive residences should be balanced with the lost opportunity for more senior units where the residents tend to shop and socialize locally.

A key element in the MCSP is that it proposes no more peak hour peak direction traffic than the 2002 Town of Moraga General Plan, but the total number of dwelling units is higher because the plan calls for a range of lower-traffic generating housing opportunities in the specific plan area. This range of housing opportunities is necessary to address the Town's Regional Housing Needs Allocation. Housing that is developed at a minimum density of 20 dwelling units per acre, including senior housing and workforce housing, is planned to meet the requirement in state law for affordable housing for low income households. State law, however, only requires the Town to make these housing opportunities available; the Town is not required to build the housing itself. The State of California recognizes the importance of affordable housing in all communities. To encourage the creation of affordable housing, it has created a streamlined approval process and additional incentives for this type of housing. While the MCSP does not actually approve the construction of housing, it does create strong incentives for its development through the completion of an environmental review process, increased density and a streamlined approval process. In the end, property owners may be sufficiently motivated by the MCSP to propose development and work with the Town for its implementation.

Technical Studies

Before preparing the Specific Plan, the Town commissioned three important technical studies to analyze the economic viability and traffic implications of any development in the Moraga Center area. The three studies are (1) the February 2006 Town of Moraga Market Assessment prepared by Economic and Planning Systems of Berkeley, California;(2) the December 2006 report by Fehr and Peers of Walnut Creek, California entitled "Effects of Planned Development at the Moraga Town Center on Community-Wide Travel Patterns"; and (3) the February 2008 Retail Market Analysis prepared by Pitney Bowes MapInfo Corporation of Ann Arbor, Michigan. All of these studies are included in the Specific Plan appendices. In commissioning these studies, the Town purposefully identified necessary sustainable development for the Town of Moraga while not increasing the 2002 General Plan peak hour, peak direction traffic impacts on Orinda or Lafayette.

Special Opportunities

To provide limited Lamorinda traffic generating sustainable development that is consistent with the character of the community, the Moraga Center Specific Plan presents two additional important opportunities. One opportunity is for the development of a small hotel and/or bed and breakfast and the other opportunity is to accommodate a multi-generational community center/gymnasium.

As a four-year college with graduate programs in liberal arts, business and education, Saint Mary's College of California attracts approximately 200,000 visitors each year. Visitors include but are not limited to prospective students and families, parents of current students, prospective faculty and staff members, athletic teams and fans, and guests of the college. With no overnight accommodations available in Moraga, these visitors and the visitors of Moraga residents must stay outside the Town. Providing for the development of a small hotel in Moraga would be both beneficial to Town residents' for their guests as well as the numerous guest of the College.

In addition, the Moraga Center Specific Plan has been identified as a potential site for the development of a 20,000 square foot multi-generational community center/gymnasium. The Moraga Parks and Recreation Master Plan calls for the development of a community center use on an appropriate site based on a community-wide search. The list of permitted uses in the Community Commercial District (Table 4-3) could accommodate such a use, as could the Planned Development District."

A similar rare opportunity exists at the Moraga Ranch. Distinct in its architectural style, the Moraga Ranch is a collection of red painted wood framed buildings with white trim and characteristic white ranch fencing. Located at a key intersection in the Specific Plan area, the Moraga Ranch is home to several existing businesses and ranch related activities. In addition, two recently renovated buildings on the ranch property present immediate business opportunities. Substantial infill opportunities also exist on the ranch property. One suggestion for new commercial

development in this area is a small winery producing wine from locally grown grapes and providing related goods and services.

Conclusion

The MCSP was designed to address a number of important issues in the Town of Moraga. It provides for the economic and physical revitalization of the existing shopping center through reinvestment and increased residential and commercial development. It meets the needs of residents by providing increased shopping and dining opportunities and a range of housing options especially senior housing for an aging population. It helps local employers attract and retain necessary employees by providing housing opportunities for the local workforce. It addresses the traffic impacts of new development on neighboring jurisdictions and it recognizes special opportunities for recreation and hospitality. Consistent with state law, the MCSP also streamlines the approval process for new residential development and addresses the Town's legal requirements for affordable housing. The MCSP does not build affordable housing but it uses provisions in state law to create incentives for the construction of affordable housing that meets the needs of the Moraga residents.