

Community Design

Four wall posters with a total of 48 images were “scored” by participants. Poster One included 14 multi-family housing images. Poster Two included 12 townhome images. Poster Three included 10 mixed use images. Poster Four included 12 public realm images (streets, plazas, crosswalks, etc.). Participants were asked to rate each image using a numeric scale ranging from minus 3 to plus 3. A score of minus 3 indicated a strong negative reaction to the image. Scores of minus 2 and minus 1 corresponded to negative and somewhat negative reactions. A score of plus 3 indicated a strong positive reaction, while plus 2 was positive and plus 1 was somewhat positive. A score of zero indicated a neutral reaction or no opinion. Most participants were able to score all images in the 15-minute interval; a few left some lines in their scoresheets blank.

A cumulative score between minus 3 and plus 3 was calculated for each image. The score equaled the sum of all votes, divided by the number of votes received for that image. In general, scores were lower for multi-family housing images than for the other categories. The highest scores tended to be in the public realm category (average +0.98), followed by the mixed-use category (+0.24).

Multi-Family Scores

The overall average for the 14 multi-family images was -0.645. Five of the 14 images received positive cumulative scores and nine received negative cumulative scores. The highest scoring image (+1.44) is an early evening photo of a four-story multi-family project (Alexan Kendry Apartments in the San Gabriel Valley). The photo includes contemporary residential architecture, with outdoor common space and decorative lighting. Another high-scoring image (+0.66) is 914 Brown (The Mill) in Lafayette, a new condominium project. This project is three stories, featuring contemporary architecture and earth-toned multi-colored siding.

The lowest scoring image in the multi-family series (-2.11) is located on Ascot Drive in Moraga. It is an early 1970s-era multi-family project with tuck-under parking and two stories of housing above. The other low-scoring projects included one that was more urban in profile (built to the street with no front setback), one that included parking in the foreground and repetitive awnings at the first and third floor, and another that incorporated more eclectic architecture.

It is worth noting that a number of participants selected “minus three” for every multi-family image, making the cumulative scores in this category lower than the others.

Townhome Scores

The overall average for the 12 townhome images was -0.043. The number of positive scores and negative scores was roughly equal, and the overall response was more positive than the multi-family category. The highest scoring image (1.46) was from Danville and featured a mix of wood and stone exterior materials, earthtone colors, craftsman-style architectural elements, and a landscaped corner setback.

Also scoring high (1.39) was an image from Portland featuring a row house incorporating wood and stone exterior façade, trellised entryways, and units set back a considerable distance from the street.

The lowest scoring image in the townhome/attached single family series was in Carroll Ranch in Moraga. This image had a composite score of -1.35 and included grayish-green exterior color, double garages, driveways, and side yard entrances. Another low scoring image (-0.97) also was from Moraga, featuring a beige three story townhouse off Rheem Boulevard with a garage on the first level and small deck facing the street. In general, images of two-story townhomes scored higher than three-story townhomes; photos with dominant garages tended to score lower than those where garages were not visible.



Attendees complete the Visual Preference Survey

Mixed-Use Scores

Overall, mixed-use projects scored higher than multi-family and townhome projects. The Mercantile in Lafayette (office/retail/restaurant) scored highest among the 10 images. Two images of this project were included in the Survey and they received cumulative scores of 1.57 and 1.19 respectively. The third highest ranked image (0.85) was a new mixed-use development on Fourth Street in Downtown San Rafael that includes 10 units of housing over ground floor retail. It features three stories, mediterranean-inspired architecture, and a rounded corner element. The Danville Hotel mixed use project (16 units and ground floor retail) also scored well.

The lowest score was given to a two-story mixed-use project at the corner of Short Street and Railroad Avenue in Danville. This development includes multiple exterior materials, including brick, stone, wood, and stucco, and also features multiple colors (beige, white, green, brown).

Public Space Scores

There were 12 images of public space included in the survey. These included the highest-scoring image out of all 48, which is an outdoor dining area at Santana Row (San Jose). This image scored 2.19, with 34 out of 36 scores indicating a positive impression. The Santana Row image includes decorative lighting, large trees and mature vegetation, live music, and people seated outdoors enjoying what appears to be a warm evening. Another image from Santana Row, showing young adults sitting around a fountain with a gateway feature behind them, also scored very well (+1.83). Although Santana Row is a large, urban project, the images used focused on more intimately scaled public spaces.

An image of the exterior of Pizza Antica in Downtown Lafayette scored +2.00. This image, taken from Mount Diablo Boulevard, features a streetside dining patio with umbrellas, a wall with planters separating this space from the sidewalk, and the decorative front façade of the retail building.

The lowest scoring images depicted street infrastructure. These included a tall lighting standard (-0.53) and a brick pedestrian crosswalk (-0.06). Many of the scores for these images were zero or -1/+1, indicating relatively neutral opinions rather than a dislike for the features. In general, photos of infrastructure did not score as well as those of landscaped outdoor spaces with people.

Using the Results

An important benefit of the Visual Preference Survey is selecting appropriate images to use in the General Plan Community Design Element, the Rheem Park Illustrative Guidelines, and other documents showing examples of “good” design. Several of the images ranked very well and provide good examples to inspire and guide future projects in Moraga. Other images ranked poorly and include features that would be less well received. The results also may be helpful in shaping future design policies for multi-family and mixed-use development as well as public space.

It is important to keep in mind that the Visual Preference Survey has limitations. Much of the reaction to an image may depend on the quality of the photograph, lighting, and weather, as well as external factors such as landscaping and the presence of people. Additionally, the rankings reflect the views of a group of 40 people who attended a community meeting, and do not necessarily represent the community at large. Even with these limitations, the Survey provides at least some degree of insight into what might “fit” in Moraga, and what might be less well received.