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Town to Pursue the Purchase of New Property

By Sophie Braccini



Vacant 331 Rheem Blvd., close to the Town Offices at 329 Rheem Blvd. Photo Sophie Braccini

raise everybody's taxes to pay for your dreams."

Segrest presented a financial plan that in essence proposes to swap two unused properties that belong to the town, to partially finance the new one. One of these two properties is located on Devin Drive, and the other is at the corner of Rheem and St Mary's Road. The initial payment on 331 Rheem would be \$700,000 (with a remaining note of \$500,000 to be paid within 2 years), plus \$600,000 to remodel 329 Rheem. The total cost to the town would be \$2.34 million, which includes a 20-year loan with payments ranging between \$100,000 and \$120,000 per year. The owner of 331 Rheem could trade the \$500,000 note for some of the town's unused properties; remaining properties would be sold.

The Hacienda Foundation, whose stated mission is to enhance, protect, and preserve the Hacienda de las Flores, came out strongly in favor of the project that supports two of their major goals: To move town staff, and the corp yard, away from the Hacienda. "We've always asked to move the corp yard," said Foundation President Judy Dinkle, "with improved access to the Pavilion we will be able to conduct dual events on the premises and increase the property's revenue." Vice-President Bob Reynolds added, "The Hacienda is a park and community center and should be used that way -- the corp yard and staff are in the way of that. Removing the yard is essential, and a Moraga Road presence will improve the functionality of the facility."

Council members asked if all possible sites to which the corp yard could be transferred had been studied. Jill Mercurio, Moraga's Public Works Director, indicated that there was no other location anywhere in town that would be more beneficial. "It may be a once in a lifetime chance," said Council Member Howard Harpham.

The next step will be a thorough review of 331 Rheem and appraisal of all the properties. Staff will come back for more public comment and discussion, and the Council must approved the final purchase agreement.



Town's corporation yard entrance off Moraga Road Photo Sophie Braccini

The Hacienda Foundation of Moraga has always wanted to see the town's corporation yard (corp yard) leave the Hacienda de las Flores. For years now, maintenance equipment and vehicles belonging to the Town have been parked among the trees near the Pavilion, blocking access to the property from Moraga Road. On December 2nd, Foundation members saw a ray of hope as the Town Council voted unanimously to direct staff to continue the process of purchasing the property located at 331 Rheem Boulevard; to which both the corp yard and the Town's public works employees could be relocated. "The project will serve a multiple purpose," said Town Manager Mike Segrest in his presentation. "It will remove the corp yard from the Hacienda grounds and will allow this property to be developed as it was always intended; it will generate the cash necessary to proceed with the final remodel of the Town Hall at 329 Rheem; it will place the corp yard at an ideal location, close to the Town Hall, with a building that does not require additional modification; and it will finally allow the town to monetize other unused properties to pay for more critical needs."

The financial feasibility of the project was of concern to some residents. "There is only one question," asked Dale Walwark, can we afford it?" Barbara Simpson stated, "We can't do it, we know we can't; we have the potential, but we don't have the money. Don't

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