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## Residents and Developer Discuss Future of Moraga Adobe

By Andrea A. Firth



The Moraga Adobe (left), boasts a spectacular view of Mt. Diablo Photo Andy Scheck

was once part of a 13,000-acre land grant to famous area settler Joaquin Moraga and his cousin Juan Bernal. Constructed in 1841, the Joaquin Moraga Adobe is the oldest of the five remaining adobes in Contra Costa County. The property has always been privately owned, and the adobe's original three-room structure has been altered several times over the years.

Olson and his partners John French and Peter Branagh purchased the property in October of 2008. Olson, city staff, the HLC, and the Friends of the Adobe have met several times to discuss design, use, and ownership options for the adobe. Landers and Long both acknowledged the developer's cooperation in the process, however no formal agreement has been reached between the parties.

One of the primary concerns of the citizen interest groups is the amount of undeveloped land that will surround the adobe. As currently proposed, the adobe will sit on a one-acre parcel and serve as a clubhouse for the subdivision residents. Broader community access to or ownership of the adobe would be subject to approval by the future home owners' association.

Orinda's neighbors from Moraga were also on hand to express their support for the preservation of adobe site. "There should be sufficient free space around the adobe to protect view corridors, provide room for visiting groups to assemble, and allow gardening." said Ron Louis, President of the Moraga Historical Society. Louis explained that former owners of the adobe, Donald and Jean Manuel, explored remodeling the structure in the 1960's and were told by the County that the adobe site should be surrounded by a minimum of five acres of undeveloped space.

Even five acres was not a sufficient buffer from development for some adobe preservation advocates. Lance Beeson, a descendant of Joaquin Moraga, told the Commission that surrounding the adobe with a new development of homes would destroy the context of what was once a sprawling ranch, and he advocated that the property be developed solely as a historic site. "It is time for this adobe to go back to the public...it existed before the town of Moraga and the city of Orinda," said Beeson.

"This is not just an issue for Orinda, it's an issue for Moraga as well," said Dave Trotter, a Council member in Moraga and former President of the town's Historical Society. Trotter encouraged the Planning Commission to design the adobe project with the east view in mind, eliminate rooftops that might obscure views of Mt. Diablo, and secure adequate outdoor space for public gardens. "You only have one chance to get this right. This might be the most important decision the five of you make in your time here," said Trotter.

What's next? Orinda's Historical Landmarks Committee will review the developers' pre-design report regarding the rehabilitation and development of the adobe at its next meeting on February 22nd at 3:00 p.m. in the Gallery Room of the Orinda Library. Orinda's Planning Department expects to have a complete initial study and mitigated negative impact report for the adobe property available for public review in about a month and a public hearing on the project will be subsequently scheduled.

Reach the reporter at: [andrea@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:andrea@lamorindaweekly.com)

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