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Leisurely Progress on Water Pumping Plant

By Cathy Tyson



Image provided by EBMUD

pumping plant at a recent meeting of the Design Review Commission.

While every other project that gets built in Lafayette must go through a rigorous process, utilities are exempt. EBMUD volunteered to work with the city to develop a mutually acceptable plan for the structure and landscaping. While technically not required, EBMUD staff presented their plans for a new pumping plant located at the east end of town near the intersection of Mt. Diablo Boulevard and Diablo Court. Commissioners appreciated the opportunity to take a look and made constructive comments, mostly about the landscape plans.

In 2011, a land swap was proposed between the city and the utility, under which city-owned land on the east end of town near Pleasant Hill Road would be traded for the current pumping plant location. Once the new plant is up and running, the old facility would be demolished and turned into a city-owned, off-street parking area.

The functional building has to allow for emergency access into the structure, parking, and ongoing low-maintenance planting, along with a fence around the perimeter. Commissioners offered compliments on the "clever and cool" grasses and low ground cover, but they weren't fans of the large driveway, calling it a "sea of asphalt." Niroop Srivatsa, planning and building director, recognized that it must be frustrating for commissioners to comment on a project where the city has no authority. She assured them that EBMUD would take their comments seriously.

Larry Blodgett, who owns the adjacent parcel, wants to be a good neighbor but is concerned that construction of the facility and ripping up 1,200 feet of Mt. Diablo Boulevard to install a new pipeline might deter customers from his family-owned store, Blodgett's Abbey Carpet & Flooring.

The utility will be soliciting bids on the project by the end of the year, with the board of directors approving construction in early 2015. The construction process is estimated to take a year and a half.

Pumping water since 1954 to customers in Lafayette, and portions of Walnut Creek and Pleasant Hill, the existing Diablo Vista Pumping plant can move 12 million gallons of water per day; that's a lot of water through those aging pipes. Given the cramped confines of its existing garage-like space near Ace Hardware, the East Bay Municipal Water District decided a whole new plant is needed to increase reliability and efficiency, along with increased capacity - a new proposed facility will be able to handle 16 million gallons per day. At 60 years old, more than a facelift is needed to upgrade this workhorse.

It has been three years since the Lafayette City Council agreed in concept to the unique land swap proposed for the new plant, to be located further east on Mt. Diablo Boulevard; the utility finally presented proposed drawings of the new

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