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Council Split over Budget Increase for Chambers

By Sophie Braccini

Moraga's new town council chambers will cost quite a bit more than anticipated. The Town Council recently approved a 30 percent increase in the budget for the renovation of the facility at 331 Rheem Blvd. as the price tag rose from \$770,000 to about \$1 million.

According to Town Manager Jill Keimach, the cost increase is primarily due to a shift in the construction market and bids that came in higher than expected. She proposed alternative roof configurations in order to lower the cost, but on Oct. 8 three council members chose to make what they viewed as the right investment for the town; while two voted against the most expensive option, calling it a waste of public funds.

The attractive Spanish style design for 331 Rheem Blvd. includes a tile roof. Keimach presented the council with three options for finishing the roof: tile only the front of the main building, which would not increase the budget; tile the entire front and part of the sides; or tile the entire roof for an extra \$232,000.

Since there were no safety or functionality differences between the options, council members' questions focused on what the views would be coming from the east and west along Rheem Boulevard. The architect explained that in order to present an attractive view, the front and all of the sides would have to be tiled. He recommended not tiling the very back of the building - but the contractor said that this would not significantly decrease the cost of the roof.

Mayor Ken Chew and Councilmembers Mike Metcalf and Phil Arth supported "doing things right" and making something the town would be proud of. "We don't want to be the council that approved the ugly building," said Chew. Councilmember Roger Wykle asked, "What other pressing facilities needs are out there besides continuing the tile roof along the side of this building?" His question went unanswered and he joined Councilmember David Trotter in opposing the cost increase they believed would be wasteful. The council approved tile for the whole roof on a 3-2 vote.

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