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J & J Ranch-Moraga Adobe EIR Available for Public Review

By Laurie Snyder



Long a late night party spot for local high schoolers, vandals have inflicted significant damage to the historic Joaquin Moraga Adobe over the years. Photo Ohlen Alexander

approval to rezone the 2.3 acres under and around the adobe from RL-40 to Parks and Recreation land, as well as a General Plan amendment "to allow for the use of the Moraga Adobe as either a cultural institution (art gallery, library or museum) or a recreational amenity for the development," according to the availability notice. Such planned uses would require city use permits.

A March 26, 2013 Memorandum of Understanding between developers and the Friends of the Joaquin Moraga Adobe conveys the title of the rehabilitated historic adobe to the Friends, subject to FJMA's compliance with terms of the purchase agreement. (See "Adobe Deal Sealed" in the Lamorinda Weekly's April 2013 online archives.)

Completion of the project-level EIR was necessary to assess potentially adverse environmental effects that could result from the project, and complied with the California Environmental Quality Act, according to the consultants who prepared the draft documents. Changes could include westward construction of a new access road from Donna Maria Way through the site to two cul-de-sacs, protected tree removal, installation of underground utilities, guest parking and pedestrian paths with landscaping, and construction of a basin to collect and treat stormwater runoff from developed areas. J & J, LLC also proposes repairing prior landslides with "well-compacted fill with appropriate subsurface drainage. With the exception of the roadway improvements and construction of the bioretention basin, the finished grade following completion of the subdivision improvements would be similar to existing grades on the site."

Per the draft EIR report, an open space easement would protect "7.95 acres of creek setbacks and the majority of on-site sensitive biological areas." Potential contact areas that will not be significantly impacted and need no mitigation are: agricultural and forest resources, greenhouse gas emissions, land use and planning, mineral resources, population/housing, recreation and other public services, and utilities and other service systems. Areas that can successfully be mitigated to less than significant impact include: esthetics, air quality, biological resources, cultural resources, geology and soils, hazards and hazardous materials, noise and traffic.

The documents also provide an overview of the project's history, along with five possible

Orindans still have time to provide input to the city regarding the nearly 300-page draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) and its accompanying 1,000-plus-page technical appendices for Orinda's proposed new J & J Ranch neighborhood, which also addresses the renovation of Lamorinda's historic Joaquin Moraga Adobe. City leaders and other residents are presently eyeballing these documents as part of a 45-day review period that concludes at 5 p.m. March 20.

The new subdivision, if approved, would be located at 24 Adobe Lane - an area currently zoned "RL-40 Residential" in the Orinda Municipal Code and designated as "Low Density Residential" in the city's General Plan. Situated near the heart of the 20.33-acre project site, the Adobe dates back to 1848 and is the oldest surviving structure in Contra Costa County.

Developers are seeking city approval to subdivide the non-adobe acreage into 13 single-family lots from 0.57 acres to 3.5 acres in size while retaining the RL-40 zoning. They also want

alternatives ranging from "No Project" to "Dolores Way Access" and "Donna Maria Way East Access." After the public review period closes, a response to comments and Final EIR will be prepared. The Orinda Planning Commission will then conduct additional public hearings to consider the project - tentatively projected for May 2015.

The draft EIR and appendices are available for review on the city's website at www.cityoforinda.org, or at City Hall or the Orinda Public Library. Comments should be directed to Christina Ratcliffe, AICP, Senior Planner by mail at: City of Orinda, 22 Orinda Way, Orinda, CA 94563-2519; via email: CRatcliffe@cityoforinda.org; or via phone: (925) 253-4213, or fax: (925) 253-7719.

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