



Independent, locally owned and operated!

www.lamorindaweekly.com 925-377-0977

Published May 6th, 2015

A New Future for the Hacienda de las Flores

By Sophie Braccini

Councilmember Dave Trotter called the process to transform the Hacienda de las Flores one of the most interesting things he's worked on over his eight years on the Moraga Town Council. The April 22 council meeting hearing was indeed the beginning of a process that could completely change the property from a charming but often sleeping beauty, to a vibrant world-class destination.

The idea came a few months ago when Moraga resident Joao Magalhaes proposed asking top architectural firms to study different uses at the Hacienda de las Flores through a public-private partnership. Magalhaes suggested transforming the town property by possibly adding a boutique hotel or a restaurant, or a wine storing and tasting facility, as well as preserving some public use. Council members agreed that the property is a financial challenge and in need of extensive updating. Since the town does not have the means to renovate the property alone, or the tools to make it more profitable, a request for proposal was sent to five architectural firms. Two responded. The council interviewed Gould Evans and HKS Architects, which were competing for the chance to create the new design concept. The selection process was on merit only and not based on a specific design or compensation package.

During its presentation, HKS, which has more than 1,000 employees, 20 offices around the world, and a very strong presence in the international luxury hospitality market, showcased some of its previous achievements. The firm said it would engage the community in online and live outreach and do a market study to see what could be supported by the local economy. Afterward, HKS would select a developer that would want to partner with the town of Moraga to develop the concept.

Gould Evans also presented some of its past achievements, including projects similar in scale to the Hacienda, such as local wineries and public-private recreation facilities. Pacific Union Development Company, a developer that had worked with Gould Evans on U.C. Berkeley's Maxwell Family Field and Garage, expressed an interest in the Hacienda. The firm said Pacific Union could be included in the feasibility study from the onset. Gould Evans is a 40-year-old firm with five main U.S. locations, including one in San Francisco. It employs 110 associates.

Both firms responded to questions from council. Particular emphasis was put on the outreach to develop a concept that would get a wide support of all the stakeholders, on the importance of preserving the historic character of the building, on the challenges that the Hacienda carries, such as deferred maintenance, lack of parking, inclusion in a single family residence neighborhood, and on the firms' experience with a public-private partnership.

The two firms sketched different ideas for the Hacienda including a wine cave for receptions, a small hotel and the restoration of the original pool at the Pavilion. Both firms were careful to state that they would involve the community in the decisions. As for the public-private partnership, they both explained that it would be the town's responsibility to craft the rules and policies to allow operators to conduct their business and generate revenue, while preserving the community center use.

Both firms impressed the council members, but the elected officials liked that Gould Evans was working with Pacific Union, and the developer had already expressed an interest in the project. Staff will negotiate with Gould Evans and bring back a contract for council's approval. If all goes according to plan, Gould Evans will conduct meetings this spring and summer to reach a final design decision by the end of September.

Reach the reporter at: sophie@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA