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Hacienda Proposal Excites Town Council

By Nick Marnell



Concept A: Community conference center and inn at Hacienda de las Flores Image Gould Evans

year-round social functions.

The arts park received little support from the public or the council, as it provided limited ability for the town to generate revenue. "The town can't afford concept B," said Councilmember Phil Arth. "It's not commercially viable."

"Concept A is exactly what we need," said Vice Mayor Mike Metcalf, noting that Moraga is in dire need of accommodation and could certainly use another restaurant. Councilmember Dave Trotter urged the firm to think even bigger along those lines, suggesting that the casitas be converted into two-story lodging units rather than the one-story model presented.

Bob Baum of Gould Evans projected that the price tag for the community conference center could reach \$22 million, double the expected costs for the arts park. He said that though he has received initial interest in the project from developers, the key to a successful public-private partnership will be how a request for proposal is structured, including the terms and incentives given to operators and investors, with the number of hotel rooms being a critical factor.

The firm will proceed with the next step in the design process, refining the community conference center concept and including a more focused cost estimate. The updated conceptual plan should be presented to the town this fall.

Parks and Recreation Director Jay Ingram captured the upbeat mood of the evening. "Dream big," he said, envisioning the reconstructed Hacienda as a top tourist destination. "If we want something bad enough, we'll figure out a way to make it happen."

The Moraga Town Council opted for function over form July 8 as it directed its design consultant to further enhance a conceptual plan for the development of the Hacienda de las Flores.

After hosting two community workshops and processing the feedback and information, Gould Evans, the architectural design firm chosen by the town to develop conceptual plans for the upgrade of the nine-acre property, presented two completely different visions for the Hacienda at the council meeting. Concept A featured a community conference center and inn, which called for the conversion of the main building into an inn, plus the addition of an expanded conference center, a swimming pool and up to 30 lodging units. Concept B pictured the Hacienda as a community arts and sculpture park, featuring plenty of open space and requiring the remodel of the main building into a community center and restaurant, plus the construction of a tented courtyard area to host

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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