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Scaled Down Plans and Phased Approach for the Hacienda de las Flores

By Sophie Braccini

The conceptual remodeling plans for the Hacienda de las Flores, which were sized down from a cost of \$24 million to \$6.3 million by architect Gould Evans and shown at the Feb. 10 Moraga Town Council meeting, were well received by the council members and the public, but the economic study that went with it was sent back to the drawing board.

The first of three proposed phases of the project no longer included the 20 casitas, the wine cave and crush center, or the community pool and spa. The new plaza entrance was also thinned out. What was left for the first phase was a restaurant and large indoor banquet center on the ground floor and five bedrooms upstairs, including a large suite - enough amenities to generate an estimated income of over \$2 million a year.

With phase one of the plan, the public would continue to have access to meeting rooms on the

Gould Evans' new plan for the Hacienda
Image provided

ground floor of the Hacienda and to the new restaurant, unless it is rented for a big event. The architect added that if all goes well with the first phase of the project, the next phases would include the creation of a wine cave and crush facility, as well as an improved community center where the Pavilion is located, possibly with the reconstruction of the original pool and the addition of a spa. A consensus is forming that could lead to a Request For Proposal to implement the plan before the end of the year.

The part of the report that was unanimously criticized was the economic study conducted by PKF Consulting. Mayor Mike Metcalf noted that the town paid little for the study and should expect little in return.

Gould Evans noted that the scope of the study, which stated that the five- or six-bedroom facility would only have a 25 percent occupancy rate, was limited to the viability of a hotel in Moraga. "Saint Mary's College alone, with visiting families and guests, would fill more than this," said Metcalf. The mayor asked the architect why it painted such a pessimistic picture of the economic potential of the Hacienda at a time when investors will be sought to partner with the town in developing the property.

Several people, including resident Edy Schwartz and Wendy Scheck, the president of the Moraga Chamber of Commerce, added that PKF should have studied the Hacienda in the context of greater Lamorinda, not Moraga specifically. Scheck offered to organize a local think tank to conduct a more meaningful economic study of a remodeled Hacienda.

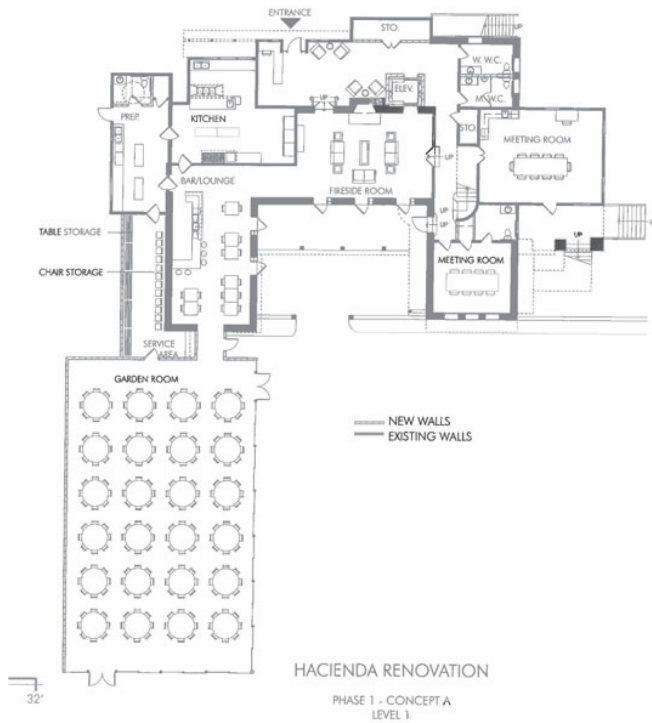
The proposed change of access to the Hacienda was also scrutinized. While all agreed that a new access had to be designed, preferably from the Moraga Road side, they also noted that the slope and low visibility of the current asphalt throughway that comes from Moraga Road to the Hacienda does not offer safe access. This road is currently only used by maintenance vehicles and pedestrians. Councilmember Teresa Onoda proposed that the historic entry point, on Moraga Road close to Devin Drive, be explored. While the rest of the council supported the idea, the architect noted that an access point close to an intersection was not recommended.

Gould Evans is planning a community open house at the Hacienda on Feb. 25. The council will



review the final concept plan and seek additional public comment at several more open house events before considering approval.

What will happen then and how the project will move forward is unclear at this time. The staff person in charge of the project is Park and Recreation Director Jay Ingram. When asked, he was not sure if the task of conveying the concept of the Hacienda plan to possible partners/investors would be his job alone or if the council would appoint another consultant. Ingram confirmed that he was meeting with the Chamber of Commerce. Scheck added that she was assembling a small group of local business people with experience in the development or hospitality industry to support the market research efforts of the town.



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