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## New Hacienda Plan Falls Short With City Council

*By Sophie Braccini*

What was supposed to be the final presentation of the conceptual plan to the Moraga Town Council for the renovation of the Hacienda de Las Flores was met with unanimous skepticism last week. While the council did not decide to scrap the plan, members were put off by the financial feasibility of the proposed renovations.

The council will again take the project under its wing and work on a scaled-down version.

The architectural firm Gould Evans started meeting a year ago with residents and staff to define a vision for the renovation of the Hacienda de las Flores. The historic building is underutilized and cost the town about \$200,000 a year for upkeep. It is in need of repair and Americans with Disabilities Act upgrades. The April 27 presentation was the second one made by the architects, incorporating revisions that had been asked by the council in February.

The new draft included a 200-person banquet room; a restaurant opened year-round; a five-room boutique hotel; and wider access from Moraga Road. But as soon as the presentation was over, comments from the public started eroding any confidence that the project would be approved that night.

The barrage of critics started with Wendy Scheck, president of the Moraga Chamber of Commerce, who explained that the return of the \$6.1 million estimated investment would not be sufficient to attract investors. Most critics focused on the banquet or garden room that residents found either visually intrusive or too expensive for the site.

Different ideas were shared in the public comment, including stopping holding weddings at the Hacienda, tenting large events instead of building an out-of-scale addition, or increasing the size of the Casita to make it a real community center.

Some indicated they liked the visuals proposed by Gould Evans, but that the lack of financial feasibility made spending any more money on the proposed option unwise.

The council decided to create a two-person committee, Vice mayor Dave Trotter and Councilmember Teresa Onoda, to take over the project and work with partners such as the Chamber of Commerce to assess the cost of different alternatives. No timeline was defined for this next phase.

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