

Published June 23rd, 2021

## Town contemplates Hacienda lease agreement with Wedgewood Weddings

By Vera Kochan



Hacienda de las Flores hosts many events around the fountain. Photo Vera Kochan

For years, the town of Moraga has been looking for a partner, as it were, to share the costs involved in the upkeep of the Hacienda de las Flores located at 2100 Donald Dr. At one point, there was a possibility of turning the property into a bed and breakfast. A more feasible concept was to turn it into a restaurant. In May 2018, La Finestra nearly became a tenant, but backed out due to liability and improvement concerns.

During October 2019, the town held a community meeting to gain feedback as to what type of restaurant residents would like to see at the Hacienda. Later that month, the town council directed staff to issue a Request for Proposals in the search for a restaurant operator. The RFP was released in January 2020, with COVID creating a stumbling block for any interest from potential operators who were fearful of opening such a venue during the pandemic.

However, the town did receive one proposal from Hacienda Partners, LLC, a joint partnership between Thomas Capital Investments and Pacific Meritage, a Danville-based restaurant business. It proposed a public-private partnership with the town. The first phase of their plan did not include an on-site restaurant, but would allow for catering and alcohol service for future events. While Wedgewood Weddings didn't submit a proposal, it was interested in the Hacienda's property with regards to exclusive event management rights and a public-private partnership with Moraga. Eventually, Hacienda Partners' interest waned, while Wedgewood continued its discussions with staff.

In March of this year, the town received a lease proposal from Wedgewood. According to Parks and Recreation Director Breyana Brandt's June 9 staff report to the town council, "The proposed lease would: assume management of the private events already occurring at the property; retain community access to the park as it does today; allow the Parks and Recreation Department to continue to operate out of the Hacienda; maintain the availability of the Garden Conference Room, La Sala, and the Casita for general public use; and reduce the town's operational subsidy of the Hacienda."

Additional benefits for the town include "a net impact to the town's finances [of an] estimated \$160,000 in additional revenue and cost savings and would enable the Hacienda to almost fully cover its cost of operations; in addition to the base revenue, which will increase 1.5% annually, the town will receive percentage sales on gross sales receipts over \$1.5 million annually; and commencing in year three, an additional \$4,000 per month (\$48,000 annually) would be contributed to the Hacienda Capital Improvement Program for mutually agreed upon improvements." The term of the lease covers an initial 10 years with two options to extend an additional five years each. In other words, a total of 20 years.

Wedgewood is a family-founded business operating since 1986. It promotes itself as the "country's leading wedding and event specialist" with 46 venues; holding "6,000 weddings and 2,000 events each year."

The town held a community meeting via Zoom on June 7 to introduce Wedgewood's representatives, Chief Executive Officer Bill Zaruka and Vice President of Business Development Kevin Lyons to residents and answer any concerns regarding the "marriage," of this partnership. There was a concern about public access to the Hacienda grounds during private events, to which assurance was given that it would remain open access. Citizens were curious as to what capital improvements Wedgewood plans to make.

Improvements to the kitchen, flooring, furniture and external lighting are planned, all the while maintaining the historic integrity of the facility. Noise levels were a concern to immediate neighbors, but Wedgewood assured that their in-house music vendors would constantly take decibel readings to monitor the levels, as they have every intention of being a good neighbor.

Further concerns were about the town signing such a long-term lease in the event that dissatisfaction or complications arose; whether there be enough parking; if Wedgewood handled events other than weddings; and who would pay the utility costs? Since the maximum capacity of guests at the Hacienda is 200, the 88 parking spaces available could easily handle that number of guests, because usually people arrive in groups of two or more, the Wedgewood reps said. Wedgewood often handles more than just weddings and is happy to extend their services for any occasion. The utilities are included in the base monthly costs, but if there is a marked increase in charges then the cost will be reviewed by the town.

While the town council is excited about the partnership with Wedgewood, there are three sticking points to the lease agreement. Just as members of the public pointed out, a 20-year commitment contract is too lengthy. The town would rather have a 10-year term with mutual consent for the additional two options of five-years each to extend. Because neighbors in the near vicinity weren't given enough advanced notice regarding the lease agreement, the town will work on mailing an informational letter to all residents within 500-feet of the Hacienda. Lastly, the council would like an assignment provision in the event that Wedgewood decides to sell its interests to a company that may not have the town's best interests at heart. These directions were provided to staff and will be revisited during the June 23 town council meeting.

Reach the reporter at: [vera@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:vera@lamorindaweekly.com)

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA