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Council Seeks Funds for an Elevator at the Hacienda

By Sophie Braccini

While renovation and development plans for the Hacienda de las Flores have not been finalized, and the upper floors of the Hacienda are underused, the Moraga Town Council asked staff during its Jan. 13 meeting to pursue a grant that would provide partial funding for the installation of an elevator at the facility. Staff identified a grant opportunity through the Contra Costa County Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program. Moraga could get \$96,000 from that fund, which would cover a little less than one-fifth of the half million dollars needed for the project.

Former mayor Graig Crossley, who uses a wheelchair, spoke at the meeting, saying, "I am interested in accessibility at the Hacienda. Location and money have been key issues." But Crossley asked if the town was not moving ahead of itself, adding "I'm not making the assumption that Gould Evans (the architect in charge of designing the renovation of the Hacienda) is going to go through (with the completion of their plans), so the access to the second level should be pursued." Crossley added that he wanted to know how those upper levels would be used.

The council members also questioned the timing, and councilmember Teresa Onoda, asked if the architect had weighed in on where the elevator should be located. Gould Evans is scheduled to present its plan to renovate and develop the Hacienda in the coming months. Jay Ingram, the parks and recreation director who was presenting the project, assured Onoda that the two possible locations for the new elevator made sense for them.

Onoda also questioned the town's use of the upper floors at this time. "The upper levels are not ready for prime time," she said. "It would cost a lot to have classes up there."

Mayor Mike Metcalf made a strong argument for going after money while it is available. "It would be utterly stupid not to take advantage of an opportunity to get a good chunk of the money to put an elevator there," said the mayor, noting that he had no idea where the rest of the money would come from, but that ways could be found to get the missing \$400,000. "If Moraga does not take advantage of this, it's silly," he added.

The council unanimously approved the decision to submit an application for the CDBG grant.

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