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EBMUD Proposes Land Swap for Pumping Plant

By Cathy Tyson

The City Council took a preliminary step on Monday night agreeing in concept to a land swap for a new water pumping plant on the east end of Mt. Diablo Boulevard. Several important considerations will need to be ironed out before a final deal is approved.

It's easy to miss the vintage 1954 non-descript Diablo Vista Pumping Plant wedged between Ace Hardware and Svensson Automotive. The unremarkable, oversized shed is owned by the East Bay Municipal Utility District (EBMUD) and houses pumping equipment that moves millions of gallons of water every day. The pumping plant was built when Dwight Eisenhower was president and has serious mechanical and electrical issues along with seismically unsafe construction. "We need to completely rehabilitate that site," said EBMUD representative Bill Kirkpatrick. "We can't spend time and money without an approval in concept, then we can go forward with a collaborative effort." EBMUD has asked if Lafayette would consider a land swap to get the job done. Just down the street, near Diablo Court and adjacent to the cemetery, is a parcel of city-owned vacant land that could be used to construct a new and vastly improved, energy efficient pumping plant. When the new facility is operational, the tentative plan is demolish the old one and possibly turn it into a parking lot.

Building on this site offers a number of benefits to the city, moving it outside the center of town is more cost effective, and easy accessibility means faster construction. Details like sidewalk improvements, the ultimate design of the exterior and screening from the street are all issues that will need to be addressed.

It's estimated the entire process may take up to three years. EBMUD wants to move quickly to avoid an incident like the fire and explosion that occurred at a pumping plant of about the same age on Geary Road in Walnut Creek.

Reach the reporter at: cathy@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

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