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Moraga Historical Society Rallies to Preserve Adobe

By Sophie Braccini



FJMA members speak with Michael Olsen in the living room of the Moraga Adobe Photo courtesy Friends of the Joaquin Moraga Adobe

explained how legal fees bankrupt the family as it tried to maintain the estate when California became part of the United States. Using historical pictures, he showed the decay of the original building in the early 1900s, followed by restorations in the 1940s and 1960s by subsequent property owners.

A year and a half ago the 20-acre property where the Adobe sits was purchased by Michael Olson and three partners, with the expectation to subdivide and develop the land. This plan and the uncertainty that surrounds it resulted in the formation of FJMA in 2009. The non-profit now counts more than 70 members, about a third of whom are from Moraga.

"The development proposes 13 to 16 houses surrounding the Adobe that would sit on only 1/2 acre," said Long, "the Adobe would be too close to the road and it would be too cramped." He urged the Moraga Historical Society to join in to help preserve and enhance the historical benefits of the Adobe. "We want this oldest site in the East Bay to be an asset to the public," added Long, "it could become a museum of Moraga and Orinda life where educational program would be run."

That vision was shared by Trotter, who added a few words after Long concluded his presentation. "The real game is in Orinda," he said, "You will have to show up at meetings there, and make your views known."

Trotter recommended that the group also speak directly to the developer and indicated what he saw as the four goals that a preservation action could have. "There should be a big enough buffer zone between the Adobe and any future homes to preserve the current spacious look and feel as well as the view down the slope across the Moraga valley and toward Mt. Diablo in the distance," said Trotter. He also suggested that conditions for approval of any future development should include requiring the developer to provide paved public access and on-site parking, that the Adobe parcel should be dedicated to a public agency or local historical preservation group so that in the future it can be open to the public as a historical resource, and that as a condition of subdivision approval the property owner provide funding to start the restoration of the Adobe.

Trotter stressed the need for residents and historical societies to mobilize and work together to persuade the developer of the need to "play ball" with the community to preserve the Adobe. "The Adobe is a big piece of Moraga's history, and the current development proposal offers a real opportunity to finally save the Adobe from years of physical deterioration." Trotter said.

For more information or to join FJMA emailing list go to their web site: <http://moragaadobe.org/>.

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