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Adobe Deal Sealed New details on terms of Moraga Adobe purchase released

By Laurie Snyder



Photos Ohlen Alexander

will also establish "a fund for ongoing maintenance and operation," said FJMA representatives. J & J will cover the remaining half of the restoration costs, according to the firm's president, Matt Branagh.

J & J's Michael Olsen, who praised the decorum of negotiations, observed that finalization of the deal simply came down to having an official group to help bring things together, adding that the agreement "concluded to the benefit of us all."

Additional terms released at the press conference stipulate that the learning center will be open to the public up to 30 days each year, and that FJMA will have up to three years from the day on which the Orinda city council approves revised plans for the J & J project to complete its payment to J & J. If FJMA is unable to raise the necessary funds, ownership of the adobe will pass to the J & J Ranch homeowner's association for likely operation as the private Adobe Community Clubhouse described in prior planning documents - but at least ensuring that the adobe would still be preserved and maintained for future generations.

As a result, J & J must now submit updated plans to the planning commission, explained Ursu. "After we receive revised plans the environmental review process will start. According to the draft schedule prepared by our CEQA [California Environmental Quality Act] consultant on the project, it will take approximately nine months to prepare an EIR [Environmental Impact Report] for the project. Planning commission hearings will likely not be held until early 2014." Ursu added that the city council authorized staff to retain the consulting firm of Lamphier Gregory to prepare the EIR.

Regarding work on the actual historic structure, said Ursu, "The developer may submit a plan to restore the adobe with its subdivision application or it may submit a restoration plan separately after the subdivision application is considered."

The members of Protect Adobe Lane (PAL), an advocacy group concerned about the environmental impact of both renovation and future operations on site, plan to follow the city's review process closely.

FJMA president Kent Long thanked the Orinda city council and Moraga town council for their support, and hinted at additional events to come as he brought to mind grand celebrations with music and dance once held on the adobe grounds. "We'd like to tap into that tradition," he said of plans to host FJMA's first fandango and fundraiser. More information will be available on the FJMA website as details are finalized: moragaadobe.org.

Moraga's mayor, Dave Trotter, expressed confidence that the communities of Moraga and Orinda will come together to raise the funds needed to make the adobe's restoration happen.

Lance Beeson, a direct descendant of the Moraga family, added, "It's time that this property becomes part of the public.... It is the founding structure of the entire valley."

A new page in the narrative of the Moraga Adobe was added by the Friends of the Joaquin Moraga Adobe and J & J Ranch, LLC at a joint press conference April 18. Held high on an Orinda hill under a spectacular blue spring sky, the event gave those attending a rare chance to go behind the adobe's protective fencing to learn about long-term plans for the site.

FJMA and J & J announced April 3 that they had reached agreement for FJMA to purchase the adobe and 2.3 acres of adjacent land for \$500,000, which will enable conservation of the "view shed" - an area in front of the home from which Orinda's earliest settlers looked out over the area's rolling hills and valleys. According to Orinda planning director Emmanuel Ursu, "Per the agreement, Lot 12 will be shifted southeasterly out of the view shed of the adobe. The lot on which the adobe is situated will become larger and both Lots 12 and 13 become smaller. The project still contains 13 home sites."

As part of the \$500,000 purchase price, FJMA will "pay up to one-half of the cost of restoration of the adobe to its original 1840's configuration and preparation of the site for public access as a museum and history learning center," and



FJMA's Kent Long presented a signed contract and check for \$10,000 to John French, treasurer of J & J Ranch LLC, on April 18 to purchase the Moraga Adobe in Orinda, along with 2.3 acres of adjacent land. The check was the first installment of FJMA's \$500,000 payment to J & J.



Visitors to the Moraga Adobe feel a sense of history oozing from the grass and old trees and surrounding one of Contra Costa County's oldest historic structures. Completed in the 1840s by Joaquin Moraga, the adobe was restored in 1941 by Katharine Brown White Irvine, widow of James Irvine and a member of the James Irvine Foundation's first Board of Directors. Photo Ohlen Alexander

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