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What's the Future of Two Vacant City-Owned Buildings?

By Cathy Tyson



Former doctors' office on Moraga Road

Lafayette recently authorized the creation of a volunteer task force to help analyze options that would be the highest, best, and most fiscally responsible use of two vacant, city-owned properties. At issue is 949 Moraga Road, the former doctors' office that was acquired as part of the purchase of four parcels that make up Lafayette's newest parking area, along with the old library building. For years rumors have been swirling about both properties, but no decisions have been made on either one for a variety of reasons.

The citizen's task force will feature representatives from a wide variety of stakeholders that potentially have some skin in the game, to come together and make recommendations about both properties. A list of 15 constituencies was drawn up, with slots for representatives from the Methodist Church, which is directly adjacent to the doctor's office, as well as from the Lafayette school district, a person from Senior Services, an architect, police and more. "Wow, that's a really big task force," said Steven Falk, city manager, echoing the sentiments of city clerk Joanne Robbins.

The more prominent of the properties is the old library

that the city is required to purchase under a 1994

Settlement Agreement with Contra Costa County and the now dissolved Lafayette Redevelopment Agency.

Questionable title issues have finally been resolved. "We may be jumping the gun here," said school board president Art Kapoor at the Oct. 15 City Council meeting, "but the School District is interested," in the library property. With Lafayette Elementary School right next door, the old library's parking lot is full to the brim with parents dropping off and picking up children every school day.

Falk said the structure is in "relatively good condition," but noted asbestos in the ceiling tiles and bathrooms that are not handicap accessible. Peering inside, there's nothing but cobwebs and worn out carpet, set in a mid-century modern shoe box.

Concluding that moving the city offices to the old library, instead of continuing to lease office space at Desco Plaza on Mt. Diablo Boulevard, where the rent is currently \$280,000 per year, even factoring in approximately \$4 million for acquisition and renovations, would mean significant savings over the medium and long term, according to city staff who crunched the numbers.

The former doctors' office has a lot of potential, but also needs some love. There had been some discussion in the past about turning the doctors' office into a new location for a senior service center or perhaps a location for the police department - possibilities that a fellow task force member representing the Circulation Commission could weigh in on to consider the impact of traffic on accessibility. It could be demolished to make room for additional parking, used for something else or even reserved for future housing.

Ultimately the task force will examine all the moving parts and make recommendations. To check out the full constituency list, read the staff report from the Oct. 15 city council meeting. For those interested in serving, contact city clerk Joanne Robbins at jrobbins@lovelafayette.org.



Old library building Photos Cathy Tyson

Reach the reporter at: cathy@lamorindaweekly.com

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