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Donald Drive Home Appeal Continued

By Sophie Braccini

Noting that some technical questions remain unanswered, the Moraga Town Council decided to continue the hearing of an appeal challenging the approval of the design of a new home on a steep hill off Donald Drive to Jan. 22.

The futuristic green home proposed for the lot at 1800 Donald Drive by Orinda architect James Wright has been on the drawing board for more than two years. Since the start, Wright worked with town staff to understand the rules and make sure that no grading permit or variance would be required.

Wright designed a home that conforms to the topography of the hill, rather than excavating a flat building pad. The architect believes the amount of grading is zero, since foundations are not counted in the amount of dirt moved. The Town Council did not adopt staff and planning commission's recommendation to approve the design, but instead argued that the excavation could be much larger than is anticipated by the architect and required an evaluation of the dirt that will have to be moved, other than the foundation itself, to place the building on site. If that amount were to be higher than 50 cubic yards, a grading permit would be required.

The second item that concerned the Town Council was whether the driveway that sits above the house and is supported by posts would require a variance for approval. Staff's position is that the driveway is integral to the house and does not need a variance; some of the council members declared they need legal certainty. The Town Council's questions should be answered at its Jan. 22 meeting.

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