

Deal on Moraga Adobe



D. ROSS CAMERON/STAFF

The historic Joaquin Moraga Adobe, built in 1841, is believed to be the oldest surviving structure in Contra Costa County.

Building to be converted to museum, Friends group says

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ORINDA — An adobe structure that once housed the family after which the town of Moraga is named has been sold to a historical preservation group planning to convert the building into a museum and learning center.

Friends of the Joaquin Moraga Adobe announced Wednesday that it had reached an agreement with developers J&J Ranch LLC to purchase the structure and a surrounding 2.3-acre parcel of land. The group will pay \$500,000 for the building and land, which will in turn

pay half of the \$1 million estimated cost of the adobe's restoration, said Kent Long, the group's president. Fifty-thousand dollars will be set aside for operations and ongoing maintenance, and the developer will pay for the rest of the restoration costs.

The deal caps years of discussions about the property and ends several months of negotiations between the Friends group and J&J Ranch. The developers had hoped to convert the building — built in 1841 and believed to be the

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— Kent Long, president of Friends of the Joaquin Moraga Adobe

Online extra: Read a brief history of the Joaquin Moraga Adobe at www.contracostatimes.com/extra.

See **ADOBE**, Page 6

Adobe

Continued from Page 1

oldest surviving building in Contra Costa County — into a private clubhouse for future residents of a subdivision planned on 20 acres encircling the adobe.

“We are thrilled that it will finally be available for the public to appreciate, after being privately owned for all of its 170-year history,” Long said in a

statement Wednesday. On Thursday, Friends of the Moraga Adobe presented development partners John French, Michael Olson and Matt Branagh with a \$10,000 check for the initial deposit. “We’ve always actually been in concert with the group,” Olson said. “(The negotiations) concluded to the benefit of us all.”

According to the terms, the Friends group has three years to raise the \$500,000 needed to pur-

chase the adobe, Long said. Should it fail to make the deadline, the developer will revert to the original plan where the adobe would be managed by the homeowners association, and the structure would be used as a private clubhouse. Public access would be subject to the homeowners association.

Long is confident the group will be able to raise the money. Individual donors contributed the \$10,000 used for the de-

posit, and the group has received additional pledges, including \$100,000 from the Moraga Historical Society, he said.

The agreement also includes a revision of the project plan placing the adobe on a smaller 1-acre parcel but does not reduce the number of homes. The revision will need to be approved by the Orinda Planning Commission after the developer withdraws the application and submits plans reflecting terms of

the new agreement. An appeal of the project’s October approval by the Friends group will also be withdrawn, Long said. A group of neighbors also appealed the project.

The additional land is an important win for residents who argued historic views would be lost as a result of the development.

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Long said.

The structure will be restored by J&J Ranch under the supervision of a preservation architect chosen by the Friends group and the developer. Nonhistoric sections of the building will be removed.

A small external structure with bathrooms will also be added, and up to 30 days each year will be dedicated to opening the adobe to school groups and the public, per the agreement.