



Diane Varni

The Porter House may become a community center.

Porter House projected as Pajaro community center

By ELIZABETH SCHILLING
STAFF WRITER

The historic Porter House in Pajaro has been targeted by Monterey County officials as a potential community center.

Meals for the elderly, health care, a library and office space for the Pajaro Community Service District are some of the uses planned for the 9,500-square-foot, three-story building. The plans are now under study by the Board of Supervisors.

"Everything is very tentative at this point," said Bill Tibbetts, purchasing and facilities manager for the county. He is scheduled to report to the board with an appraisal on the property and an architect's evaluation of renovation possibilities in mid-January.

The first floor of the mansion was renovated recently, but the upper two floors would need considerable work to be usable for public purposes, county officials say.

A major concern about suitability of the structure is whether it can be modified for access by the handicapped and other requirements of a facility serving

the elderly.

The house was built for John T. Porter, appointed by President Abraham Lincoln in 1861 as collector of the Port of Monterey. Architect William Weeks remodeled the house in the late 1890s. The house is currently occupied by family members of owners John and Linda Swan of San Jose, who continue renovation.

If board members find Tibbetts' reports acceptable they may immediately make an offer for a six-month purchase option.

Asking price for the 120-year-old house at 29 Bishop St. is \$340,000. The county hopes to pay cash in the deal, which will involve some creative government financing from several pots of money.

The largest chunk of money would be \$150,000 from the state's senior citizen bond act. Since 1985 this money has been set aside to convert the now-abandoned Las Lomas fire station to a senior citizen center, but complications with the title of that property have just about ruled it out.

The county, now on its second extension from the

state, must use the \$150,000 earmarked for services for the elderly, or risk losing it.

Another possible source of money would be tax-increment funds from the recently formed Pajaro-Castroville Redevelopment Agency.

Since Pajaro has been designated as a redevelopment area for the next 20 years, any increase in property-tax assessment goes to a special fund to ensure improvements in the district.

Instead of owning the house, the county could allocate the \$150,000 to the Rural Health Project, a non-profit agency. The Rural Health Project would then lease portions of the house to other agencies.

"The Porter House has exciting potential," said Marc Del Piero. He said no public opinion on use of the site would be sought until the county has secured the property. "There is no question we want the building, but there will be a public hearing on the quality and type of services that will be offered."

Senior citizen and community groups from Pajaro, Las Lomas and Aromas would be served at the facility.