

LARKSPUR HERITAGE PRESERVATION BOARD
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES OF OCTOBER 28, 2021

The Heritage Preservation Board was convened at 5:41 p.m. by Chair Culhane via teleconference due to the Coronavirus (COVID-19).

Commissioners Present: Chair Hillary Culhane, Carol Goldberg, Richard Storek

Commissioners Absent: Sonia Gallant, Leila Lanctot

Staff Present: Senior Planner Kristin Teiche

OPEN TIME FOR PUBLIC EXPRESSION

There were no comments.

PLANNING STAFF'S ORAL REPORT

- Staff is struggling to hire additional staffing and the Planning Department continues to be partially staffed.
- The City Council met last week regarding the work that will be required to bring City Hall up to modern standards. Staff provided the Council with options about relocating services including modular buildings at the proposed Community Facility site (Rose Lane). The future use of City Hall has not been discussed. The building is on the National Register and will not be demolished.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

- 1. H #21-37, 20 Monte Vista (APN: 021-182-07); Polsky Perlstein Architects, Applicants; Spencer and Susie Doyle, Owners; R-1 (First Residential) Zoning District. The applicants are requesting the Heritage Preservation Board recommend the City Council remove (de-list) 20 Monte Vista Avenue from the Inventory of Historic Resources due to: 1) Damage from past neglect, leaks and rot, and the need to create a safer environment and replace the residence to accommodate their growing family; and 2) The architectural integrity of the home does not meet the minimum standards to support inclusion on the historic inventory. The applicant has submitted a historic evaluation prepared by Stacy DeShazo, Architectural Historian which supported this conclusion. The City's Historic Architect has evaluated the building and has also determined that it does not meet minimum standards to support its continued listing on Larkspur's Inventory of Historic Resources.**

Senior Planner Teiche presented the staff report. Staff received one item of late mail in support of the request to de-list the building.

Chair Culhane opened the Public Hearing.

Mr. Spencer Doyle, owner, made the following comments:

- The house had twelve leaks last weekend and the basement flooded.
- The family's lifestyle is being impacted.
- The intent is not to change the look and feel of the neighborhood or property.
- The structure is past the point of no return and needs to be updated and modernized.
- The building needs to be fundamentally changed and altered.
- They are asking the Board to de-list the property so these changes can be made.
- The plan is to stay true to the design of the neighborhood.

Board member Goldberg asked how much they plan to stay true to the design of the house. Mr. Doyle stated they will stay true to the aesthetic of the bungalow style with that same welcoming feel that currently exists.

Board member Storek asked if a contractor has come up with an estimate to restore the building. Mr. Doyle stated “no”.

Elizabeth, architect, made the following comments:

- This is not the classic example of a bungalow.
- The building is in bad shape.
- They plan to keep the traditional style and fit in with the neighborhood.
- The owners need more space for a growing family.

Mr. Doyle made the following comments:

- The structure previously scored 50 out of 100 points in terms of the standards for assessing a historic building and was recently revised to 35 out of 100 points. Senior Planner Teiche noted this score does not qualify the building for inclusion on the inventory.
- They have done some superficial improvements to make it safe.

Chair Culhane asked about the reference in the DeShazo report about a “demolition”. Mr. Doyle stated they love the look of the house but it is “beat up” and unsafe. They will not build something that is out of character and would like to copy bungalow style in the design.

Senior Planner Teiche recommended the Board focus on the scoring system and whether the building should be listed on the inventory based on the criteria adopted by the Board.

Mr. James Holmes, Larkspur, made the following comments:

- De-listing proposals used to be rare.
- The arguments in this proposal are not convincing.
- This resource is completely unaltered from the streetscape view and occupies a conspicuous corner in the neighborhood.
- The basis for the de-listing is the City’s evaluation. The comments had a dismissive tone and are very debatable.
- The evaluation downgraded three items- historical significance (from 10 to 5 points), style (from 20 to 10 points, and individual architectural setting (from 10 to 5 points).
- The downgrades were not explained in a narrative sense.
- He discussed statements made in Larkspur Past and Present.
- There is strong evidence that the house was built by prominent Larkspur builder William Wegner.
- Five points should be added for the “Builder”.
- This application should be denied.

Chair Culhane asked Mr. Doyle if they talked to some of the neighbors about changing the house. Mr. Spencer stated the nextdoor neighbors, the neighbors to the rear, and those across the street expressed support.

Board member Goldberg asked if they have found more deferred maintenance items they did not expect since buying the house five years ago. Mr. Doyle stated the sheer amount of damage to the overall structure was surprising- wall, asbestos pipes, leaks, and permeability. They would be happy incorporate design elements into the new home, including bay windows, put slats above the dormer, and preserve a porch on the corner.

Senior Planner Teiche cautioned the Board not to make a decision based on what is being said about a future application.

Chair Culhane closed the Public Hearing.

Board member Storek provided the following comments:

- He is concerned about setting a precedence of de-listing a historic building.
- It appears to be in good shape.
- The extent of the damage is unknown.
- The building fits the criteria of being “of an architectural style that is attributable to a historic period”.
- He acknowledged it is not a pristine example of the California bungalow.
- The criteria for de-listing are thin.
- This is a prominent site and everybody knows the house.
- He is not ready to make a decision and would like more information.
- He would like to get an independent opinion about whether this house can be saved.
- He cannot accept the assertion that this building is a total loss.

Chair Culhane provided the following comments:

- When they de-list a property they rely on the evaluations but also need to consider the ramification.
- There are a lot of old houses in Larkspur that need a lot of work.
- She is concerned that the owners did not consider repairing the existing house.
- She has mixed feelings and cannot deny the numbers and the downgrading.
- She appreciate Mr. Holmes’ take on the merits of the house.
- What they have are the scores.

Board member Goldberg provided the following comments:

- She supported having someone representing the Heritage Board evaluate the building.
- She would like an additional opinion.

M/s, Storek/Goldberg, motioned and the Commission voted 3-0-2 (Gallant, Lanctot absent) to continue H #21-37, 20 Monte Vista Avenue, to allow for a better explanation from the City’s Historic Architect about the scoring that has been given, and request that the City arrange for an independent evaluation of the structure.

Senior Planner Teiche clarified the request: the Board would like a second opinion on the historic evaluation and an inspection of the building by someone with a background in historic preservation and construction who could weigh in on the condition of the building itself. She would discuss this request with the Planning Director.

BUSINESS ITEMS

1. Reimbursement request from Marilyn River, Heritage Volunteer

Senior Planner Teiche presented a staff report.

It was the consensus of the Board to reimburse Heritage Volunteer River the amount requested.

2. Board member reports

There were no reports.

3. Approval of Minutes- September 23, 2021

M/s, Storek/Culhane, motioned and the Commission voted 3-0-2 (Gallant, Lanctot absent) to approve the minutes from the meeting of September 23, 2021 as submitted.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Toni DeFrancis,
Recording Secretary

I HEREBY CERTIFY that the foregoing minutes were duly and regularly adopted at a regular meeting of the Larkspur Planning Commission on January 13, 2022.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kristin Teiche".

Kristin Teiche, Senior Planner