

Rispin Mansion tapped to house cultural center

CAPITOLA — The City Council has taken the first step toward what is foreseen as a cultural center at the historic Rispin Mansion.

Council members accepted a report Thursday from their 10-member citizens' committee. Concurrently, they told City Manager Steve Burrell to pursue the idea.

The city of Capitola bought the 9,000-square-foot mansion and accompanying 6½-acre parcel adjacent to Soquel Creek and Wharf Road last year for \$1.3 million, the city's largest open-space purchase.

Ever since, the citizens' committee has been studying possible uses.

Committee member Barbara Reding compared the proposed center to Villa Montalvo, a public arts facility in Monte Sereno near Los Gatos.

Uses could include museum space for exhibit of art, recordings, furniture, books and maps.

Additionally, an artists-in-residence program is recommended, in which living accommodations for artists could be provided at the renovated mansion.

Meeting space could be set aside for classes. A small gift shop and food service could be operated in the summer.

The city could also renovate the landscaping to the formal gardens that once surrounded the site.

"We want to include a broad spectrum of uses, including botany and the outdoors," Reding said. "We just don't want to focus on one type of art, for instance."

Cost of the renovation has not been estimated. However, Reding said the committee believes a "large amount" of volunteer work will be needed. Work on the project seems to be at least a year away.

Reding said the committee hopes to host public tours of the mansion by summer, after repairs to stabilize the mansion are made.