The historic Lent home, a funky 1915 Craftsman-style bungalow overlooking Capitola Village, may face the wrecking ball when it is sold.

*Historic Houses - Capitola*

# Sold:

## A PIECE OF CAPITOLA HISTORY

Officials wonder if the

landmark Lent House

can be preserved

**By JANE PARKS-McKAY**
SENTINEL CORRESPONDENT

### CAPITOLA

For 85 years, a chateau-style home has stood on the bluff overlooking Capitola Village.

The wood bungalow with its old-fashioned tank house sits on Prospect Avenue above Soquel Creek, overlooking the train trestle and Venetian Court apartments. Built by Al Lent in 1915, it has long been considered a Capitola landmark.

But it now has an uncertain future. Molly Lent, Al Lent's widow, has sold the house with escrow contingent on its demolition.

Mayor Bruce Arthur, who owns a historic home himself, is among those who are concerned.

"The Lent House is history," he said. "It sits on a promontory that is as identifiable as Capitola itself."

The Craftsman-styled home appears to have been influenced by architect Bernard Maybeck, a contemporary of Julia Morgan of Hearst Castle fame, according to a city report.

Area historian Carolyn Swift said Lent was a prominent figure in Capitola history, a sportsman and real estate dealer who once owned the sprawling Rispin Mansion along Soquel Creek. Lent died in 1969. His widow is known for her wood carvings.

The Lent property was listed at $3.5 million. But the house, which is vacant, is hardly in move-in condition. A lack of maintenance has taken its toll, and Ann L. Butler, the Lent family attorney, said the weather-beaten home is structurally unsound and almost impossible to heat.

The demolition, though, is not a done deal.

Butler is working with city officials to determine whether the plans trigger the need for a complete environmental-impact report. It's likely one will be needed, she said.

That process includes public hearings and a call for input from various state and local agencies.

Ultimately, the plans will go before the City Council. It's unclear whether any demolition

# Lent House

plan also would need approval by the state Coastal Commission, which has some say on projects in the coastal zone.

Butler said she hopes to have the environmental-review question answered by the end of September.

But even if the home is found to have historic value, it does not mean the city or state can forever halt its destruction.

A historic designation is no guarantee of preservation, said former state historic preservation officer Kathryn Gualtieri, who lives in Capitola.

"It's hard to protect a building from demolition if the owner is intent," she said.

Butler said the family understands there is some sentiment to keep the home intact, but it may come down to a matter of structural integrity.

"The Lent family loves the house," Butler added. "They grew up there, ... but it's time for them to move on."

The Lent House is one of the oldest in Capitola. A small piece of the house may date to 1888, when the Cleals, a San Jose couple, bought the parcel from land speculator Dennis Feeley and built a 1½-story cottage. Lent tore most of that down and completed his rustic cabin in 1915. He added an octagonal addition in 1925.

When the city commissioned a survey of historic buildings in 1986, the Lent House was included. The report featured a photo of the structure on the cover.

Although the mayor and others consider the house significant, it isn't listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Such a listing could assist the property-owner secure state or federal money for repairs. Butler estimated the cost of repairing the home at $2 million to $4 million.

Capitola officials, meanwhile, have been looking for ways to preserve the city's history. Two years ago, the city formed a committee to study historic resources and develop a preservation strategy. A policy on historic buildings is scheduled to go to the council in September.