

'Historic' listings protested

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SANTA CRUZ — Thanks, but no thanks.

That was the message delivered to the Historic Preservation Commission Tuesday from a crowd of property owners protesting the listing of their old homes on the city's Historic Building Survey.

The owners of about 430 older homes and structures had recently been sent a letter from Commission Chairwoman Doni Tunheim, saying, "Congratulations! We are pleased to inform you that your property has been identified as a candidate for inclusion in the survey."

A listing on the survey means that requests for demolition permits and exterior additions must be reviewed first by the commission. Buildings deemed landmarks cannot be torn down. Minor repairs, interior alterations and painting are not subject to the review.

The commission will make a recommendation to City Council members, who are expected to make a final decision within 60 days.

Opponents maintain the review and requirement for "historic alteration" permits amount to an unnecessary layer of red tape and a violation of private property rights. They also argue many of the structures have been remodeled through the years to the point they barely represent the original architecture.

Most of those who testified from the crowd of 80 people at Tuesday's public hearing asked that their properties be crossed off the list of candidates.

After hearing a litany of hostile comments, commissioners decided to postpone until June 4 a decision on the properties whose owners object to being included on the survey. At that time — and after doing more

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research on the structures in question — commissioners said they would decide whether to comply with the property owners' wishes.

Affected property owners who do not protest — either verbally or in writing to the commission or the Planning Department — will have their properties included on the list, commissioners decided.

Tuesday's hearing addressed properties on the west side of the San Lorenzo River. Another hearing at 7:30 p.m. today at council chambers at City Hall will address those on the east side.

'The last time anyone in our family got a letter saying "congratulations" was to go into the Army.'

Most of the candidate structures are "vernacular" homes built between 1850 and 1930 that are not included in the current survey of 330 structures.

A few later-built structures also are candidates, including the modern Toyota car plaza at Front and Laurel Streets; the pink-stucco Teacup Restaurant at Front and Pacific; and Bud's Auto at Water and Branciforte.

John Chase, an architectural historian hired by the city for \$6,000 to help draft the list, explained the term "vernacular" to those at the hearing.

The vernacular structures include the common old buildings — the ones without the fancy towers and turrets, most of which are already identified in the current survey, said Chase.

These are the homes that are built when people "are not trying to impress someone. They are simply living their lives, from the barn to the mobile home," said Chase.

"You really haven't preserved the history of the town," if the common, old buildings are not preserved along with the fancy structures, said Chase.

It's this backdrop — this "ensemble" of vernacular buildings — that give "the real feeling that you are in Santa Cruz and not lost in some cul de sac in Cupertino," said Chase.

He said Bud's Auto is such a familiar type of architecture (early gas

station) that "by the time you get around to realizing there aren't any more of them, there really aren't any more."

Chase acknowledged the Teacup Chinese restaurant — an extensively remodeled 1860's flatiron building — "does present a problem in historical preservation."

The Teacup is "obviously a classic case of a building with historical merit but no architectural merit," Chase said. "The original building was a real gem — that is, the basic structure underneath that Chinese neon and pink stucco."

Lou Rittenhouse, the owner of the Teacup building, asked commissioners to take it off the list.

Rittenhouse questioned the criteria used to select the Teacup as a candidate for the historic survey.

Commissioner Edna Kimbro said the Teacup is assuredly a landmark structure built by one of Santa Cruz County's most influential pioneer developers, F.A. Hihn. The Hihn mansion was once located at the site of City Hall.

But Rittenhouse said the only thing original about the Teacup architecture is deep inside it and invisible from the public eye — the foundation and interior bricks.

"Yes, it has been dramatically remodeled," answered Kimbro.

"The exterior fell off," replied Rittenhouse.

Kimbro called the Teacup "a product of the flow of history — a landmark building."

Rittenhouse disagreed. "What we have is a pile of brick of what was an historical building."

Commissioners noted they and other volunteers had spent many, many hours to research the structures.

'I think the most significant thing about my house is the fact I live in it.'

"God save us from volunteers," remarked an older man from the audience.

The Rev. Robert Renfro, pastor of the Progressive Missionary Baptist Church on Center Street, asked that the church be deleted from the list.

When the church received the letter of congratulations, said Renfro, "we thought we were going to maybe get some additional funds."

He said the church hopes to expand and believes a listing on the survey could hamper those plans.

"We've worked 22 years to pay for our own church. We've worked real hard to get something to call our own," added church member Hazel Everly. "Now we find out it still is not ours."

Ernestine Bergstrom said the only thing original left in her "historic" home is "five boards and one door."

'What we have is a pile of brick of what was an historical building.'

She called the commission proposal "an insult to the intelligence of the homeowner."

Bergstrom joked about being congratulated for being on the list.

"The last time anyone in our family got a letter saying 'congratulations' was to go into the Army," she said.

Carol Manson, whose Mission Street "Greek Revival" home is on the list, said she compared her home to pictures of Greek temples to see if it really did resemble a Greek temple.

"It came up very short," she told commissioners.

She added: "This house is in such bad repair our insurance is being canceled."

Deming Stout, who also wanted to be crossed off the list, told commissioners, "The community was best planned before you people came, before the Planning Department...the community is not only the buildings, but the people in the buildings."

Added another property owner, "I think the most significant thing about my house is the fact I live in it."

Toxics discovered dumped in trench

CLEARLAKE (AP) — A 100-foot-long trench filled with possibly illegally buried pesticides and herbicides has been discovered at a Lake County landfill.

A hazardous waste cleanup crew from IT Corp. of Martinez uncovered the 8-foot-wide and 8-foot deep trench Tuesday.

The trench was filled with 55-gallon drums, half-gallon glass jars and five-gallon cans bearing an assortment of agricultural pesticide and herbicide labels, said Russ Mull, the county's environmental health director.