

Supervisors get cranky during 'historic' debate

By KATHARINE BALL
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A tired and cranky Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors finally designated a tentative list of 200 "historically significant" houses yesterday after five hours of public complaints and board in-fighting.

The upshot appears to be that anyone who made the effort to complain to the board yesterday about having a house on the county Historical Inventory got it removed, unless it had been previously designated as historically significant in the county General Plan.

The General Plan had listed 144 structures; now the list stands at around 200.

Owners of any structure listed on the Historical Inventory must consult with the county Historical Resources Commission if they want to remodel or tear down their houses.

Numerous property owners complained about the additional red tape they feared would ensue if their house was designated.

Many also contended that the county had no right to label their homes as "historically significant."

"You are saying that because a property has a unique quality, it's public property. That's a false assumption," said Mark Sundberg, who said he was an

architect who had worked on San Francisco's Ghirardelli Square.

Debate focused particularly around the home of 91-year-old Eva Jane Johansson, a modest bungalow built before World War I that stands on 41st Avenue near Opal Cliffs Drive. History buffs maintain it is a perfect example of old, pre-condo Live Oak.

But Mrs. Johansson's son-in-law, Konrad Baumert, said the elderly lady might need to cash in her house — sell it to developers — to cover any extraordinary medical expenses that might come her way.

The property is zoned for multi-unit residential, like the

condo developments that surround it.

"This is not a question of preserving a historic building anymore. It is a question of the freedom, property rights and pursuit of happiness that are guaranteed in our Constitution," said Baumert. "America, wake up. America, what are you doing to yourself? America, I love you. Therefore, I ask you to remove the property from the historical inventory once and for all."

Gerda Sundberg, the mother of Mark, and a friend of Johansson, told the board, "You are making an old woman's life just miserable. She is worried sick."

The board did end up removing the house from the inventory.

But other speakers argued forcefully for the community's right to preserve its architectural history.

"The past is being ripped out from under us daily," said Jim Houston, the owner of a West Cliff Drive Victorian, which he said he was proud to have on the list.

Supervisor Gary Patton said he strongly agreed with Houston.

To have historical buildings preserved only if their owner wants to "is not a principle to which I can ultimately subscribe," he said.

"All over the world, human beings see it as their task to tear down and build over whatever is front of them, whether it be the rain forests of Brazil or historical buildings," Patton said.

He accused the complainers before the board of creating a "hysterical resources list."

"They are afraid something bad would happen to them ... There is no merit for making public policy on fears unless there is a rational foundation for them," Patton said.

He then moved that the board approve the whole list of historical properties, including those protested.

See DEBATE page 2 ►

DEBATE

► From page 1

But Supervisor Robley Levy interjected her own motion, calling for approval of all those properties previously in the General Plan and any new properties about which the board had received no complaints.

She specifically checked to make sure her motion would get the Corralitos home of Florence Wyckoff off the list. Wyckoff is a strong Levy supporter.

(Wyckoff did not appear in person before the board, but wrote a letter asking that her house be removed from the list).

Levy's motion passed 3-2, with Levy, Sherry Mehl and Joe Cucchiara for it.

But the motion had to be voted on again after about 30 minutes of confused discussion, when Cucchiara said he had misunderstood Levy's "intent" and wanted to change his vote.

But the motion passed again, this time with Dan Forbus joining Levy and Mehl for the majority.

Forbus said he thought the motion was wrongheaded, but it appeared the only way to get properties such as the Johanson house off the list.

"Hell, you do what you gotta do," Forbus said.

During the half-hour interval between votes, the board had refused to eliminate from the list several other properties Forbus had proposed individually.

Several crabby exchanges occurred among board members as they tried to climb out of their motion-muddle mire.

Patton had made reference to the destruction of the Victorian-era McHugh-Bianchi grocery building that used to stand at Water Street on the Pacific

Garden Mall in Santa Cruz.

It was torn down in 1974 to give way to the bright orange stucco World Savings that now stands there, almost unanimously deplored as ugly.

Patton said Santa Cruz would never be the same, having lost the Bianchi building.

Forbus told him, "You can sit down on the sidewalk in front of the Bianchi building and cry if you want to, but it's not the same case as the Skyland Church." Forbus was trying, unsuccessfully, to remove the Summit Road church from the list.

Church members feared historical designation would make it more difficult for them to add a new Sunday school classroom.

Meanwhile, Cucchiara was busy re-adding San Lorenzo Valley properties to the list that Levy's motion had removed.

Forbus jovially voted approval of all Cucchiara's motions.

"If you want something back on there, just let me know, as long as it's not in my district," Forbus said.

"All they want is more, more, more," Deretich said, "and I just think that's wrong."

However, City Manager John Radin said Haile's salary is a matter of public record and could be obtained through a phone call anyway.

Council members agreed they would interview only the top five candidates for the position, selected by a committee consisting of Mayor Betty Murphy, Councilwoman Gwen Carroll and Councilman Rex Clark.

Clark said it's conceivable only three applicants would be recommended to the council, to which Deretich replied, "We might not have over two applying, either."

Council members bandied about the idea of hiring a consultant for \$10,000 to \$15,000 to tell them what to look for in a candidate, but decided to do it on their own.

Councilman Dennis Osmer asked that the brochure be a little slicker than that devised for the police-chief search.

"I saw the brochure for the police chief," Osmer said, "and I hope we get a better-quality applicant than we did a brochure."

—Jennifer Koss