

# History list: Homes given extra protection

Historic Houses

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County leaders placed 20 Live Oak homes on the historic register Tuesday, following a fierce debate that pitted homeowners afraid of losing their property rights against residents seeking to preserve neighborhood character.

About 50 people packed the Board of Supervisors chamber, most to argue against placing a home they own on the county's historic register. Once a house is deemed historic, owners are limited in what they can do to renovate or develop the building or the property. Razing the house is generally not allowed.

That, supporters of the provisions say, is the point.

"I understand private property rights, but I also understand what development does," said Supervisor Jan Beautz, who represents Live Oak. "I've seen the history of Live Oak leveled to put more units in."

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SUPERVISOR JAN BEAUTZ

The board's vote was unanimous.

The historic register has proved to be another tool residents wary of growth have employed in their fight to preserve the character of their neighborhoods as developers increasingly demolish older, smaller homes and replace them with larger ones.

Forty-four homes were originally proposed for the list; 20 made Monday's final cut.

But that didn't make most audience members feel any better. Some accused the board of punishing those who keep up their older homes. Others said supervisors gave neighbors, who can still tear down their homes and rebuild, an

unfair monetary advantage. Still others wondered if the historic building rules allowed for modifications like a wheelchair ramp to accommodate relatives.

Critics also fear the potential restrictions on building and remodeling that come with such a designation could dampen their chances of selling their homes. It could also lessen property values, they say, if the current home can't be torn down and replaced.

"This process is taking our money without proper compensation," said Joel Harrison of Los Gatos. His in-laws live in the house he owns three blocks from the beach on 9th Avenue. He also worries about building a wheelchair ramp on the

house to help his wife's aging parents.

Anthony Silveira, who lives at on the 2200 block of Soquel Drive, said he felt supervisors were disciplining him for spending thousands of dollars and many weekends renovating his home.

"I'm just being punished for my hard work," Silveira said.

To accommodate those like Silveira and Harrison, supervisors asked staff to clarify rules for historic homes that they agreed are now confusing and contradictory. Board members also asked staff to return with ideas for compensation — like expedited permit processing or reduced fees — for those who own homes on the historic register.

"In some cases, people are going to have to forfeit property they could develop," said Supervisor Ellen Pirie, "and I think they should be compensated."

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