

Controversial house is historic, city planners say

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SANTA CRUZ — The battle of architectural taste continued Thursday night over the looks of a house at 1010 Laurent St.

City planning commissioners voted unanimously to include the 1940's "international modern style" home on a list of historic buildings to be preserved for posterity, even though its owner, Albert Russo, has a building permit to remodel the house into a two-story English country-style place. The commissioners' vote will be forwarded to the City Council for final action.

Neighbors opposed to the remodeling of the one-story house went to court last week to try to stop the issuing of the building permit. Plaintiffs in the case are Jane Podesta and Randall Nelson.

Superior Court Judge Harry Brauer ruled there were not sufficient grounds to stop the building permit.

The city issued the permit last Thursday and remodel work began Monday, said Russo's lawyer Kent Washburn.

The city Planning Department uses a book called the

"Santa Cruz Historic Building Survey" to decide what houses should be preserved from remodeling or destruction.

The survey, however, only covers the houses built before 1930. There is an addendum at the back of the survey that recommends later-built houses that ought to be preserved as good examples of architectural styles.

The Laurent Street house is included in the addendum.

Planning commissioners agreed with the recommendation of the city Historic Preservation Commission that Russo's house deserves to be moved into the official list of houses to be preserved.

But by the time the City Council decides the issue, the

house may look a lot more country and a lot less internationally modern due to the ongoing remodeling.

Said Washburn Friday: "I feel the commission was considering the building as it once was, when they should have been considering the building as it now is and will be, pursuant to validly-issued building permits."

The lawyer for the opposing neighbors, Clarke Dixon-Moses, alleges strings were pulled on behalf of Russo at City Hall to get the building permit issued.

Dixon-Moses says the house is designated on a planning map used by city planners as an historic building site.

Dixon-Moses maintains the city planners were "per-

suaded" to delete the parcel from the historic building site designation "on the theory that the house is not included in the Historic Building Survey."

City Planning Department Director Peter Katzeberger called Dixon-Moses' charges "absurd."

"Maybe our interpretation favors Mr. Russo, but our interpretation was not made to favor him," said Katzeberger.

Added Katzeberger: "We are administering the city zoning ordinance and city regulations. Obviously there aren't always satisfied people. When they don't get their way, they come up with their own conclusions."