



Photo by Kurt Ellison

Developer Howard Dysle stands before the concrete hulk of the old Rispin Mansion.

Senior housing proposed in old mansion

By BOB SMITH

The Rispin Mansion has been part of Capitola's history for 60 years.

Built in 1923 by San Francisco oil millionaire Henry Rispin, the mansion is now a derelict, stripped by vandals to its still-sound concrete shell, its opulent fixtures and decorations gone, a magnet for vagrants.

Builder Howard Dysle, who is also chairman of the Capitola Planning Commission, wants to give the old mansion a new life as the focal point for an approximately 100-unit senior citizen complex on the banks of Soquel Creek.

An environmental impact report released for public comment earlier this month seems to give Dysle ammunition for the restoration-construction project, but also maps out an obstacle course that the builder will have to negotiate successfully before completing the job.

Dysle wants to restore the four-story mansion, which was constructed of reinforced concrete, and build two new buildings — one on either side of the existing building.

The larger of the new buildings would be constructed on the north (upstream) side of the Rispin Mansion. It would range up from two stories on the street side to four stories on the creek side and would be approximately 400 feet long, generally parallel to Soquel Creek.

Divided into two wings, east and west, the building would contain 83 living units for ambulatory senior citizen residents. Each unit would house one or two people in a studio or one-bedroom apartment with a private deck. Residents would take their meals in a central dining facility in the mansion.

The other new building would be

much smaller. Built to the south of the mansion, it would contain 13 units for non-ambulatory residents and a nursing staff area.

The mansion would be used as a central administrative, dining and recreational facility. The building's exterior would be restored to its original appearance, and the interior would be restored to its original condition in some areas and modified for new uses in other areas. According to the plan, the formal gardens that once existed in the area between Wharf Road and the mansion would be restored. The solid masonry wall along Wharf Road and the wooden well tower on the site would be retained.

Bringing the mansion back to its original state, the report notes, is a major undertaking.

"... The mansion has been continually and completely vandalized. It is only because the building is constructed of reinforced concrete that it still stands today. The interior of the building has been stripped down to bare walls. All the lighting fixtures are gone, as are the doors and the intricate wood paneling on the walls and ceilings. Stair rails and even marble fireplace mantels have been either removed or destroyed."

The structure itself, however, is still structurally sound, according to a 1979 engineering survey, the EIR adds.

"The roof and roof supports are in good condition. The roof does not appear to be leaking. The exterior walls are between 9 and 12 inches thick, with the equivalent of No. 4 steel reinforcing rods at 12-inch centers horizontally and 24-inch centers vertically. Strength of the concrete in interior and exterior walls and in concrete beams ranges

from 2,500 pounds per square inch (psi) to 4,000 psi.

"Based on these figures, the building appears able to meet the current earthquake resistance standards without additional strengthening."

There is presently a small colony of monarch butterflies wintering on the southern end of the property, but the report questions whether the colony is permanent. It suggests another winter of observation to see if the butterflies are breeding on the site.

The report recommends that if the colony is only temporary, the city prohibit construction on the site during winter months when monarchs are present, minimize tree removal on the southern portion of the property, maintain ground cover there, and enforce a 20-foot building setback from the clustering areas where feasible.

The EIR notes, in the project's favor, that "if left unused and open to vandalism, the mansion is at risk of irreparable damage by arson. Fire damage beyond the damage which has already taken place could severely diminish the potential for restoration or rehabilitation of the mansion.

"Restoration of the mansion now is a significant beneficial impact of the project on historical resources," the EIR adds.

But it continues:

"The design, mass and scale of the proposed new structures have the potential to put the mansion in a subsidiary role and diminish its importance in the context of the site. Due to the major site changes necessary to locate new structures, no matter what their configuration, in close proximity to the mansion, the project will have a moderately adverse impact on historic resources."