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Rispin Mansion judged to be structurally sound

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CAPITOLA — The historic Rispin Mansion is structurally sound enough to be renovated for use as a library, according to a engineering feasibility study just completed.

The results of the \$10,000 study — and recommendations for the city to pursue purchase of the 9,000-square-foot, 63-year-old mansion — will come before the City Council Thursday night. At the same meeting, council members will have a recommendation for approval before them for a 15-lot residential subdivision on a 6½-acre Wharf Road property.

The residential development is seen as an alternate proposal by current lessee of the estate, Howard Dysle. Dysle has already told The Sentinel he would prefer selling the property to the city for renovation as a library. The residential development is "something to fall back on if the city doesn't go ahead with the library," he said.

Numerous hurdles face the city and its library plans — not the least of which is the reported \$1.5-million purchase price. Another \$1 million is estimated to be needed for renovation of the mansion, with \$500,000 for off-site work like landscaping and parking, according to City Manager Steve Burrell.

Burrell's recommendation calls for acceptance of the feasibility study and authorization to conduct

an appraisal of the property, as well as authorization to discuss an "installment sale" approach with Dysle.

In a memo to the council, Burrell notes that the city would not be able to undertake both the purchase of the property and renovation of the mansion at once. The city presently has a hefty debt service it owes for the purchase of Pacific Cove Mobile Home Park, which eventually will be partially converted into a parking lot for Capitola Village.

However, Burrell also maintains "some sort of installment sale" could be negotiated.

"If this was accomplished," he added, "then the city could hold a competition to select an architect and go through the public hearing process to determine the proper use for the property and a timetable for its restoration."

Burrell envisions the overall design and implementation process on anything on the property would be at least a year to 18 months, if the city decides to proceed.

According to Higgins and Root Elmore Titus Architects, who conducted the feasibility study, the mansion is structurally sound for renovation as a library or some other public use.

Steven Ellmore called the mansion "very well-built, exceeding today's standards for lateral earthquake resistance." Floors and roofs, however, would have to be replaced.

Some 40 cars could also be accom-

modated on the south end of the property with minimal grading. A 40-car lot would meet city requirements, based on an 8,000-square-foot building.

Donald Urfer, a civil and structural engineer hired by the architects, confirmed that the mansion "lends itself well to structural upgrading." He added, "You should not expect the construction effort in the proposed remodel to be extraordinary."

The alternate 15-lot residential subdivision proposal, meanwhile, calls for the sale of 13 as single-family lots. One would be retained as a common garden area and another would contain the mansion, which would be renovated for use as a bed and breakfast inn. The city Planning Commission unanimously recommended approval of plans.

The development proposal is scheduled to be heard at Thursday's council meeting. It begins at 7 p.m. in the council chamber at City Hall.

The mansion, built in 1923 by San Francisco oil millionaire Henry Rispin, has been vacant since 1960 when the St. James Monastery of Poor Clares moved.

The city has been without a library for several years, since the Library Board was forced to close the small branch due to budget cutbacks. A city-operated library would fly in the face of plans by the Santa Cruz Public Library Board for a 17,554-square-foot regional library to serve Capitola and Live Oak.