

Rispin Mansion proposal advances

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CAPITOLA — The City Council Thursday night unanimously took the first step toward a possible purchase of the historic Rispin Mansion for renovation into a library.

Council members not only accepted a feasibility study that shows the 63-year-old mansion is structurally sound enough for renovation, but gave authorizations to get an appraisal of the property and also to discuss an "installment sale" approach with the current leasee of the property, Howard Dysle.

Maybe just as important, Dysle asked for — and was granted — a 90-day continuation on his 15-lot residential subdivision he has also proposed on the 6½-acre Wharf Road property.

The mansion sits next to Shadowbrook Restaurant and Soquel Creek, and is mostly hidden due to a seven-foot concrete wall. It has sat empty for the last 25 years, since the St. James Monastery of Poor Clares moved. It was originally built in 1923 by San Francisco oil millionaire Henry Rispin.

The residential development is seen as an alternate proposal by Dysle, who has already made it known that he would prefer selling the mansion to the city for renovation as a library.

The council's action was met by applause from the two dozen people in the audience, most of whom were members of the Friends of Rispin Estate. The grassroots organization formed three years ago when Dysle originally proposed a 100-unit residential care facility on the property, which was eventually denied.

Numerous hurdles now face the city and its library plans — not the least of which is the estimated \$3 million that will be needed for purchase and renovation. City Manager Steve Burrell projected it will take at least 18 months just to work out a possible purchase of the parcel and subsequent design plans for a library.

He estimated some \$1.5 million would be needed for the land acquisition, another \$1 million for renovation of the mansion and \$500,000 for off-site work like landscaping and parking.

At this time, the city doesn't have the money to even buy the property, Burrell added. However, that's why he included in his recommendation authorization to discuss an "installment sale" approach with Dysle.

Mayor Michael Routh cautioned the audience that the city has a "real big job" ahead. "But the main thrust is to acquire the land, put it in public trust and go from there," he said.

Barry Staley, chairman of Friends

of Rispin Estate, lauded council members for their action. He cited the historical significance of the mansion, pointing to the importance of preserving it "for our kids."

Another resident, Chrissy Carlson, said she was amazed the city even has an opportunity to buy such a treasured mansion.

The mansion has deteriorated to the point owners two years ago warned the building might have to be torn down if nothing was done.

According to Higgins and Root Ellmore Titus Architects, who conducted the feasibility study for the city, 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." Donald Urfer, a civil and structural engineer hired by the architects, said the mansion

"lends itself well to structural upgrading." He added, "You should not expect the construction effort to be extraordinary."

While floors and roofs would have to be replaced, a 40-car parking lot could be constructed on the property with minimal grading.

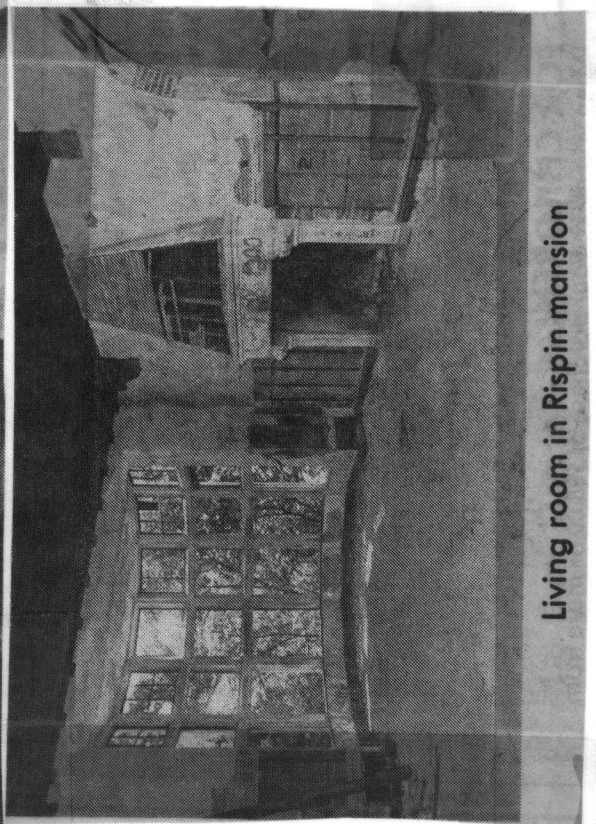
The idea to renovate the mansion for use as a city library originated from Mayor Routh earlier this year. Capitola has been without a library for several years since the Library Board was forced to close the small branch due to budget cutbacks.

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 both Capitola and Live Oak. Routh and fellow council members, however, envision that the 9,000-square-foot mansion would be ideal as a library to serve city residents' needs.



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Rispin Mansion in a 1983 photo



Living room in Rispin mansion

REFERENCE

~~ARTS BRANCH~~
~~70~~
~~Apr 10, 1985~~