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Capitola - 1970 - 1979

Residents fear city's old homes may be destroyed

An historical preservation ordinance may be in Capitola's future.

Concerned about the possibility that many older, historically-significant homes and commercial buildings in the city may soon crumble under the bulldozer, a group of Depot Hill residents approached the city planning commission Monday night about saving them.

The commission responded by establishing a subcommittee to lay the groundwork that could lead to a recommendation to the city council early next year, asking that the city take legal action to encourage or even mandate the restoration of the city's early homes and commercial buildings.

Larry Veysey, a college professor and Depot Hill resident told the commission:

"There is a danger of the decimation of the historic atmosphere, charm and flavor of Capitola.

"Capitola now has a reputation for its historical flavor but we keep hearing of the threats to tear down buildings dated from 1900."

One Depot Hill home, belonging to William Sessions at 220 Saxon Ave., is in imminent danger of being demolished by a bulldozer to make way for a complex. It was built in the early 1900s.

Another, in Capitola Village, is up for sale and will probably be torn down also if sold, realtor Jim Reding told the planning commission. It's one of the oldest homes in the village.

Veysey compared Capitola today with Laguna Beach in Southern California a few years ago. "It lost its atmosphere through a ruthless modernization, that including parks and open space.

"You can see the same forces at work here. There is concern by many people," Veysey continued, "that Capitola — by one building here, another building there — will lose its atmosphere.

"There has been discussion of having a six-month moratorium on the destruction of any old buildings," he told the planning commission.

In setting up a subcommittee, the commission said it wanted to explore the need for an historical preservation program in the city, and assess its impact on the community, and possible ways to manage it.

Robert Garcia, president of the Depot Hill Association, said his group will assist the subcommittee in any way they can.

Planning commissioners Lewis Deasy and Alvin Wilder were appointed to the subcommittee by commission chairman Howard Dysle.

Wilder said the subcommittee's tasks can probably be divided into two areas.

"First, we must figure out if we have enough historical buildings. We must count them and figure out what could be done with them.

"Then we must preserve them. Our aim," Wilder said, "is to preserve them and keep Capitola from dying out.

"Capitola is a city of charm and character," the retired Army Corps of Engineer colonel said. "Its downtown has the character and atmosphere that the community thinks is desirable. It is

apparently city policy to enhance this desirability and preserve it. The Esplanade is the key factor in the flavor of the village.

"There is another business area — Capitola Avenue — which may or may not have historic value, but it is certainly a gateway to the village," he continued.

"As for the residential neighborhood, the most prominent historic neighborhood is Depot Hill. Now that the old hotel is gone," Wilder said, referring to the hotel that burned in 1929, "those homes are perhaps the most significant.

"West Hill is another area.

"Already in the village and in these two residential areas, money is being spend in haphazard preservation. But without community sanction or municipal sponsorship, and without some sort of organized plan for the basis of the legal status, all the efforts will come to nought," he feels.

"Such a program must be economically feasible," he added. "But even more important, it must have public participation and public acceptance all the way through.

"And it would seem that whatever we do must not create substantial increased costs to the city — so it must be done by volunteers and interested property owners."

The commission approved a lot split application for William Sessions and Delia Contreras to divide the parcel now occupied by Sessions' home at 220 Saxon Ave.

But heeding the pleas of Reding, the commission tacked on a condition that the building must be advertised for sale in local newspapers for minimum of 30 days before it could be demolished.

"The house is in much better condition," Reding told the commission, saying he had recently toured it with the owners, "than mine prior to restoration. My personal opinion is that the house is restorable.

"I think it is a shame that people come into the community, purchase homes and then tear them down. They are neglecting their responsibility to the heritage of our community."

To builder Robert Hughes, who will be doing the work for Sessions and Mrs. Contreras, "it's an old, old subject.

"Clearly, when you people granted a duplex there, it was knowing that the building would be demolished."

Reding said it is economical to move or restore an old building, once demolition is ruled out.

And with city cooperation, building code requirements can be phased to allow a home owner to stagger his improvements, Reding said, and not create a severe economic hardship.

"That's up to the building inspector," Deasy said.

Commissioner Jack Nicol sarcastically pointed out that some building code requirements are already being waived by the inspectors. "He's blind," Nicol snorted.