

Historic House Building

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Two Buildings Recommended For Historical Status

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Two more venerable and appreciated buildings in the City of Santa Cruz have been recommended to the Santa Cruz City Council for designation as historical landmarks.

They are the Octagon Museum building—on Cooper Street and the residential structure at 417 Cliff St.

The recommendation was voted unanimously Wednesday by the city historic preservation commission.

If the council accepts the recommendation, the buildings

will be the 17th and 18th, respectively, to win the historical landmark designation.

In another action intended to protect historical landmarks and historic districts in the city, the commissioners instructed their planning aide, Joe Hall, to research whether they have the power to recommend official censure of John Funkey, a developer, who "knowingly" demolished a small house in the rear of 222 Mission St. in the historic Mission Hill district.

The commissioners expressed particular displeasure with this act because it had been assumed that the Mission

Hill area, where the City of Santa Cruz was cradled in the 1700s, was protected against such actions by its official designation as a S-U (1), or special use, district.

The ordinance that established this S-U (1) district was hailed by conservationists because it required a special permit before any demolitions could be done here.

Hall told the commissioners that a permit had been granted to Funkey "in error by the planning department," and that as a result of this error the area residents are circulating a petition to seek rezoning of the district to R-1-H, a designation that would require specific approval by the historic preservation commission before any building in this district could be demolished.

The council has already ordered a full investigation of how a permit to demolish the

building was issued to Funkey in contravention of the ordinance that established the special use district.

The recommendations made by the commission on the Octagon Museum and the Cliff Street residence involve two of the more notable structures in the city.

The building that now houses the county-owned Octagon Museum was constructed in 1882 to serve as the county's hall of records. It was designed by Oakland architect J. W. Newcom and is considered to be one of the last examples of the unique Italianate Octagon architecture which was used for commercial and office purposes.

The building served as the official hall of records and as a center of county administrative activities until recent years. After the county governmental center was built, the octagonal

building on Cooper Street was restored through a federal grant to serve as the county's historical museum.

The Italianate details of the structure are ranked as "superb" because of the bracketed cornice and pediment, corner piers and pedimented entrance.

The building is currently listed in the National Register of Historic Places, the California Register of Historic Places and has been awarded a certificate of merit by the Santa Cruz Historical Society.

The county supervisors previously had approved the designation of the building as a city historical landmark. With that act they made the building subject to rules which forbid exterior structural changes without the express approval of the city historic preservation commission.

Before their vote on this building the commissioners

were warned by Charles Griffen, chairman of the city's museum commission, that the Octagon Museum lacks restrooms and that these are required legally and might be difficult to install without exterior renovations.

Hall said the building has two problems: that it is not accessible to the handicapped and that it does not have restrooms. He said the first problem is being dealt with, but that the commission would indeed have to review any restroom project that would alter the exterior of the building in any way.

Commissioner Virginia Sharp said that "Hopefully the county supervisors were aware of the review process when they gave their okay to have the building designated a historic landmark." Sharp gave the building this accolade: "It's a beautiful example of its genre."

The residence at 417 Cliff St., which is owned by Vernon Nordby, was built in 1898 for the family of H.S. Deming of Terre Haute, Ind. Its architect was Edward L. Van Cleeck, the leading Santa Cruz architect of that day.

One of Deming's daughters, Dorothy Deming Wilson, was an internationally famous polo player and one of the founders of the Pogonip Club of Santa Cruz.

The house represents, architecturally, the Queen Anne and Colonial Revival style, being essentially Colonial Revival on its front facade, with Queen Anne details and materials on the shingled story. The balanced front facade, with a detailed entrance porch and terrace, rests on a stone foundation.

Other interesting features architecturally are the large front porch columns, spooled

bannisters and curved windows.

This home is listed in Guides to Victorian Homes of Northern California and in a city historic walking tour.

The commission also initiated city action to convert the historic Mission Hill District into a R-1-H district in conformance with petitions being circulated by the Mission Hill Association and set a public hearing for October. Any final action, however, would have to be taken by the city council.

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