

City's old homes face moratorium

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SANTA CRUZ — A temporary ban on building permits and zoning changes affecting some 430 old houses will go into effect this week when public hearings begin on a proposed amendment to the city's Historical Building Survey.

The amendment would more than double the number of historical houses now listed on the survey and controlled by historical-preservation regulations.

Houses listed on the survey cannot be legally demolished or undergo substantial exterior remodeling without a special "historic-alteration" permit.

The temporary moratorium on permits for houses proposed for the amended survey will last for as long as two months, or until the City Council makes a decision on the proposed amendment.

The Historic Preservation Commission will hold hearings at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday and Wednesday in the council chamber at City Hall to solicit comments from the owners of properties whose houses are candidates. Structures located on the west side of the San Lorenzo River will be discussed Tuesday and the east side, on Wednesday.

Most of the houses in the proposed amendment are categorized as "ver-

nacular" — "your basic wood-frame structure built in the 1890s through the 1930s," said Valerie Young, commission staff member.

They were common houses for the times. Many were built from kits costing about \$1,500 from companies like Sears and Roebuck, Young said.

"Today's equivalent would be a condominium or tract house," she added.

Other candidates include houses built between 1930 and 1955 that are considered good examples of architectural styles from that period.

If a property owner objects to being on the list, "it will depend on the building," whether commissioners will agree to the wishes of the property owner, said Commission Chairwoman Doni Tunheim.

But Tunheim said she expects the list will not be significantly trimmed before commissioners make their recommendation to the council for a final decision.

"We will probably remove very few. We've spent a long time going over each building," she said. She said most property owners she has heard from are supporting the commission proposal.

In recent days, the owners of houses built between 1890 and 1955 have received letters from the commission, saying:

"Congratulations! We are pleased to inform you that your property has been identified as a potential candidate for inclusion in the survey. The survey recognizes those structures which are important to the city's history and overall architectural fabric.

"Being placed on the survey means the historic and architectural integrity of the structures is recognized as important to our community."

It also means any substantial exterior changes would have to be reviewed by the commission. There would be no fee for permits. Minor repairs, painting and interior alterations are not affected.

Young said most property owners who have contacted her office have general questions.

Of those who have already taken a stand, said Young, the reaction has been divided "about 50-50" between those who feel congratulation are order and those that don't.

The only real benefit to being on the list, she said, is that the buildings are recognized as historically significant.

There are financial benefits available to the owners of buildings listed on the National Register of Historic Places, but few local structures are included on the Register. They include the Santa Cruz Mission Adobe,

DeLaveaga covered bridge, the old Hall of Records (Octagon Museum) on Cooper Street, Carmelita Cottages on Beach Hill and the Cooper Street branch of County Bank.

The city's original survey was adopted in 1976 and contains about 330 structures, selected primarily for their "major" historic, architectural and engineering significance, according to the letter from the commission.

The proposed amendment will update that list.

"When we did the first survey, we missed a lot of swell buildings," remarked Tunheim. "This (the proposed amendment) should have been done the first time we did the survey."

The temporary moratorium would not apply for changes for health or safety reasons approved by building officials.

The idea of the moratorium, said Tunheim, is to prevent property owners from making a last-minute rush to demolish or change houses on the list before a final decision is made by the council — "to keep someone from ruining something that shouldn't be ruined."

The letter to affected property owners contained no information on the temporary moratorium on permits for affected houses.