

From: [Andrea Chelemengos](#)
To: [Public Comment](#)
Subject: FW: march 23 city council comments re agenda item 9 halsey house
Date: Thursday, March 18, 2021 2:40:54 PM

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Sent: Thursday, March 18, 2021 1:52 PM
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Subject: march 23 city council comments re agenda item 9 halsey house

Council-I am delighted that you will be discussing next steps with regard to Halsey House. I would like to offer the following comments:

1. The staff report does not provide clarity on the differences between renovation and adaptive reuse, nor does it fully explain how the Secretary of Interior standards get applied. Based upon prior conversations with several of you, there are some misconceptions about what those entail. Unfortunately the subcommittee report by Pete Dailey only serves to reinforce those misunderstanding since there are numerous glaring errors which I previously outlined in a report that was forwarded to each of you. Restoration would involve bringing the house back to the way it was circa 1921. There has been no discussion by those interested in preserving Halsey House about restoration, so I would encourage that word be stricken from any future discussions.

In fact adaptive reuse gives the city the flexibility to change the interior in whatever ways that are necessary to meet programmatic needs. While the exterior does need to meet SOI standards (which are not onerous), the interior can be changed and selective changes to the exterior can be made as well. Adaptive reuse could include all or part of the building, with other alternatives for the unused portions (such as mothballing or simply not building out in the short term).

Given the overall lack of knowledge and exposure to adaptive reuse of historic structures, it would serve the Council and community to have a presentation by a qualified professional on what is involved in adaptive reuse and a walk thru of some successful examples that could model possible alternatives for Halsey House.

2. The staff reports discusses the process for demolition, but gives the impression that doing so is a straightforward process. It is not and more importantly even if the Council were to vote to demo the building it would be subject to challenge. While I have no way to handicap if any individuals or organization might bring such a challenge, based upon my extensive experience with Griffin House on the Foothill College campus I would not bet on the City prevailing if someone were to bring suit. The facts do not bode well for the City; economic

infeasibility is a very hard to justify in the best of situations. But rather than take my word, I would encourage the Council to have someone with the appropriate expertise to explain how the delisting process works, what is involved in a CEQA evaluation, what kind of circumstances would withstand a court challenge of the CEQA report, the cost/time for such as process, and the financial risks associated with going down that path..

3. There continues to be a major disconnect as to what facilities are required in order to bring back the same level and quality of programming that was in place at Redwood Grove prior to the closure of Halsey House. Just as a reminder that program served over 2500 Los Altos children and included over 900 who annually participated in summer camps at RG/HH.

While I do respect staff's professional expertise as described on page 6 of the report, in fact all of the staff who were directly involved in the prior programming at Redwood Grove/Halsey House are no longer with the city. The assertion that "the delivery of the desired programming is not dependent upon the availability of Halsey House, most can be provided outdoors or in adjoining structures". This is simply not correct and is not consistent of what took place previously. It is predicated, in part, on the impractical proposal to use the Community Center or Garden House for the indoor portion of the programs. This "solution" has been made by people who don't understand the logistics of programming and the value of an appropriate venue to co-exist with the outdoor activities. And it is inconsistent with the PARC prior recommendations made in 2010-2014 that included those who in fact did have that experience. In conversations with Keith Gutierrez, who ran the programming at RG/HH, he did confirm that the original PARC facilities recommendations are valid (2 classrooms, storage, office space, bathrooms etc) and the alternatives proposed by the current staff are not suitable for running robust programs similar to those run for 20 years while Halsey House was in use.

There also appears to be an institutional bias by City staff against efforts to adaptively reuse Halsey House. The staff response to facilities needs at Redwood Grove continues to oscillate- as mentioned above, staff is claiming no need for facilities. On the other hand Donna Legge's input in early 2021 to an independent effort by Jeff LaBoskey, funded by an anonymous donor to evaluate options at Redwood Grove, was the need for approximately 1000 square feet of indoor space. At a PARC meeting in September 2020 Legge stated that the Recreation Department could fill whatever space was made available. Another data point is that it took almost two years from the date of council approval of funding, for those funds to be spent on urgent, time sensitive repairs at Halsey House. Those included securing tarps on the roof, diverting hillside runoff water and securing the site from rodents and vandalism. We know from other directives that the former city manager gave staff (not to solicit input from community members on the EOC, etc), the best interests of the community have not always being front and center.

4. While there is some discussion on the cost of adaptive reuse (which one could peg at something north or south of the 2016 estimate of \$3.2M), in fact that sum is actually less than the contingency budget put in place for the Community Center project. Further, it is a small fraction of the 10 year projected revenues that the city will collect as part of the park-

in-lieu fees charged for commercial development, some of which can be used for Halsey House. I am disappointed that a sources and uses of PIL funds over the next decade has not been prepared and updated on a regular basis.

5. The staff report brings up the “concern” that bringing Halsey House back could risk overuse of Redwood Grove. The implication of this statement is that we should not properly maintain our parks since if we do people will want to visit. Adaptive reuse of Halsey House will not bring more people to Redwood Grove than it did during period that HH was operational. And if there is too much attendance, that can be managed. Others have suggested that parking is a problem if Halsey House is reopened. This is not a valid argument and given that there is now a path between Shoup Park and Redwood Grove, the issues around parking have been addressed. There is however the need to upgrade that path so it is ADA compliant, but that requirements exists regardless of the plans for Halsey House.
6. Best I can determine, the greatest argument against adaptive reuse of Halsey House is the cost of doing so. The city has claimed for several decades that it lacks funds, yet during that same period of time has undertaken numerous multimillion dollar capital improvement projects and allocated almost no money to maintaining Halsey House, much less undertaking the necessary steps to ensure its longevity. There are numerous other owners of landmark buildings in Los Altos who are held to a higher standard than the City has done for its landmark structure. Is the city council therefore saying that those of us who own landmark buildings no longer have an obligation to maintain our structures and be subject to penalties for such failures?

Further, the City does have money, from park-in-lieu fees and other sources which I would be happy to discuss with council members once there is a commitment to proceed with adaptive reuse. My reluctance to discuss this ahead of time is that it would be tempting to raid those funds for other purposes while continuing to claim there is no money to fix up Halsey House.

I would hope that all Council members will focus on getting good information, validated facts and appreciate the communities desire to bring back the extraordinary programming (and supporting facilities) at Redwood Grove. Halsey House was an integral part of the programs that enriched the lives of approximately 18,000 children who attended summer programs at Redwood Grove/Halsey House and tens of thousands who participated in other programming at the preserve during the 20 years that Halsey House was an integral part of that experience.