

Casey Richardson

From: roryvantuyl [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, October 2, 2020 3:25 PM
To: Donna Legge
Subject: Input for Parks Commission
Attachments: To Parks Commission 10-1-2020.pdf

Donna:

Please distribute this proposal to members of the Parks Commission in advance of the October 14, 2020 meeting.

Thanks,

Rory Van Tuyl

Sent from [Mail](#) for Windows 10

To: Los Altos Parks and Recreation Commission

From: Rory Van Tuyl

Subject: Halsey House and the Future of Redwood Grove

Halsey House, situated in the Redwood Grove Nature Preserve, has fallen into complete ruin over the past decade. It is no longer an asset to the City. It is a liability and a complete disgrace. Reconstruction of Halsey House would be objectionable from cost standpoint, and out-of-character for a “Nature Preserve”.

Along with many of my neighbors and other Redwood Grove enthusiasts, I ask you to demolish this relic and put the land to use as a Nature Preserve.

The 1920s plantation of redwood trees that has given this property its name comprises less than half the area of Redwood Grove Nature Preserve. This portion of the park is well-used and appreciated by many visitors. The demolition of ruined Halsey House would create an opportunity to put more land to use for nature-based activities to be enjoyed by visitors of all ages.

Specifically:

1. Demolish the ruined structure and reclaim the land beneath it.
2. Devote this land and adjacent sections to uses such as these:
 - a. Community Vegetable Garden
 - b. Community Rose Garden
 - c. Community Botanic Garden
3. Plant native trees, such as oaks, that are well-adapted to the area and would ensure the natural character of the park for future generations.

These uses would give an opportunity for visitors to enjoy the park in both active and passive roles. From a recreation standpoint, this would give Los Altans of all ages a chance to “get back to nature” in a non-manicured park-like setting.

You should be planning the future of this magnificent resource as a *Nature Preserve*. Let nearby Shoup Park serve the organized activity role. Let Redwood Grove do what only it can do, but do it better!

Respectfully,

Rory Van Tuyl

Council Members

I was a Parks and Recreation Commission member for 11 years so I am quite familiar with the Halsey House as a facility in Redwood Grove. I also did the video on Halsey House for the Friends of Redwood Grove with Katherine Halsey Buss, so I also understand the history of the house.

There are many facts on the house that we all need to consider:

- Past Councils have made de facto decisions on the house through continued inaction. They have placed low to no priority on the house with little to no urgency to maintain it over many years.
- When it was decided to do an adaptive reuse study, Council would not fund it – Friends of Redwood Grove raised the \$25K.
- Halsey House has been red-tagged as not usable since 2008. In the last decade, Recreation programs have proceeded satisfactorily without the facility. Halsey House is not necessary for Redwood Grove programs.
- Would the City ever choose to spend \$3-4 million on doing adaptive reuse? Given the current budgetary outlook and other much higher priorities...nope
- Could Friends of Historic Grove raise \$3-4 million? Raising just \$25K for the last study was difficult and took some time.
- If an angel or the city would pay \$3-4M to “restore” Halsey House, how much of the original house would be used? It’s full of rot, mold, rodents, water damage and carcinogenic material. It would be like a tribute cover band – it would be a tribute to the house, but it wouldn’t be the actual house.
- Does the city have the funding? Price out the various options and let the Finance Commission check in on how the City could fund the project in this time of reduced revenue.

- PARC has looked at restoration of Halsey House in the past. As soon as you restore it, it triggers numerous ADA regulations. All restrooms have to be ADA accessible, the house has to be ADA accessible. There has to be sufficient ADA parking, and perhaps more regular parking. The road to the house needs to be ADA – the current slope not compliant. Remember, this is a **Nature Preserve**, not a destination city event facility.
- To protect the structure, the bridge would need to be rebuilt to accommodate current firefighting equipment.
- The essence of the Halsey House is already gone.
- Let's say a miracle happens and a replica Halsey House was built. It's in an inaccessible area that is difficult to police. It likely would be a magnet for vandalism and other illegal activities.

This is a patient that has been on life support for a long time – it's time to let it go.

Larry Baron
Los Altos Resident

Casey Richardson

From: Donna Legge
Sent: Thursday, October 15, 2020 1:02 AM
To: Los Altos Parks & Recreation Commission
Subject: FW: thx
Attachments: Insights on Halsey House5.pptx

Chair Lindermeier and Commissioners,

See email below from Jon Baer.

Sincerely, Donna

From: Jon Baer [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, October 14, 2020 9:30 PM
To: Donna Legge <dlegge@losaltosca.gov>
Subject: thx

Donna-thanks to you and the entire commission for allowing me a chance to present this evening. I have attached an updated copy of my presentation that you might want to have for the files etc.

Also, to the question that Jonathan asked re integrity, Sean provided a far better and more complete answer than I did (once again proving the value of having a talented staff member present). The entire commission might find the attached article of value relative to condition versus integrity issue since condition is often brought up as the reason for demolition.

<https://historichawaii.org/2014/12/19/whats-the-difference-between-integrity-and-condition-and-why-does-it-matter/>

Insights on Halsey House:

Background

Landmark Status

Other Considerations

Recommendations

Jon Baer





Background-History

- **1923-1972** Halsey family, etc. private residence
- City purchased house and land to preclude development
- **1974-2008** Los Altos City facility
 - Hundreds of programs,
 - Thousands of children and adults
 - Little or no maintenance
- **2008-present** Abandoned and neglected

Background

- City reports 2014-2020: building can be made functional again
 - Less expensive than new construction
 - Footprint can meet requirements of PARC
 - Urgent need to address roof, rodents and groundwater
- City continued to spend money on everything but building
 - **2009+** Acterra/GR improves grove, City spent ≈\$300K to date
 - **2014** \$750K spent on walkways as part of overall program
 - **2018** Council authorized \$25K for urgent repairs-2 years to fix
 - **2020** City does update to 2016 cost estimates
- **2011** San Antonio Club restored
- **2018/9** New community center \$25M, ballooned to \$38M
- **2019** Fremont land purchased \$2.85M
- Only City historical structure yet to be restored/adaptively reused

Landmarks

- Designation for buildings which have architectural and/or historic significance
- Structure is evaluated by expert, sometimes with scoring rubric (no longer in Los Altos)
- Landmark status has meaning at the local and state level
- Buildings are protected-duty to maintain, repairs/changes to meet SOI standard
- Most local landmarks have undergone modest exterior changes and often significant interior modifications
- 22 properties in town, 3 City, 5 commercial, balance residential
- Los Altos does not regulate changes to interiors
- Historic building code allows flexibility not afforded new construction
- Removal from Landmark status sets a precedent that City may not want
- Historical Commission would need to base upon info contrary to record
- A government jurisdiction can vote to change the status but State CEQA requires negative dec or more likely EIR
- Significant adverse impacts need to have alternatives/mitigation steps identified
- Courts have final say if opponents challenge EIR
- City would be liable for attorney fees of opponents if it does not prevail

Landmark Status

- Evaluated and given landmark status 1981
 - Good example Spanish-eclectic architecture and “notable early Los Altos family”
 - Designation requires owner to maintain structure
- Can the building be torn down?
 - Yes, if shown to be economically infeasible, a high bar, made higher by past actions and reports
 - CEQA/EIR can only be done once alternative is identified
 - Mitigation is required for actions that deemed significant
 - Subject to legal challenge, which should not be discounted
 - If City loses cost \$500k plus, if not challenged cost approx. \$200K

What is Redwood Grove?

- It is a City park with a historic, landmark structure
- It is a park-it is not natural, never was
- Not even the correct variety of redwood-coastal species!
- Yet it is being treated as such
- Habitat restoration is a false narrative
- It only exists because of the Halseys
- It was their backyard

“Halsey House is part of the historic landscape. You cannot (ethically) keep the redwoods and demolish the house”

Elisabeth Ward, Director Los Altos History Museum

PARC Requirements

- Large room for 30-50 attendees
- Two programming/meeting rooms for 15-20 each
- Kitchen-large enough for small classes plus pantry
- Courtyard with fountain
- Two plus storage rooms for equipment and supplies
- Halsey family museum room & Ohlone exhibits
- ADA accessible restrooms
- Office space for 1-2 staff

More space =more programs

“We can use as much space as you give us, we will fill it with programming”

D. Legge, Director RACS

- RACS programming is a REVENUE center for City
 - \$1.5M historically,
 - Reduced by \$750K due to Covid

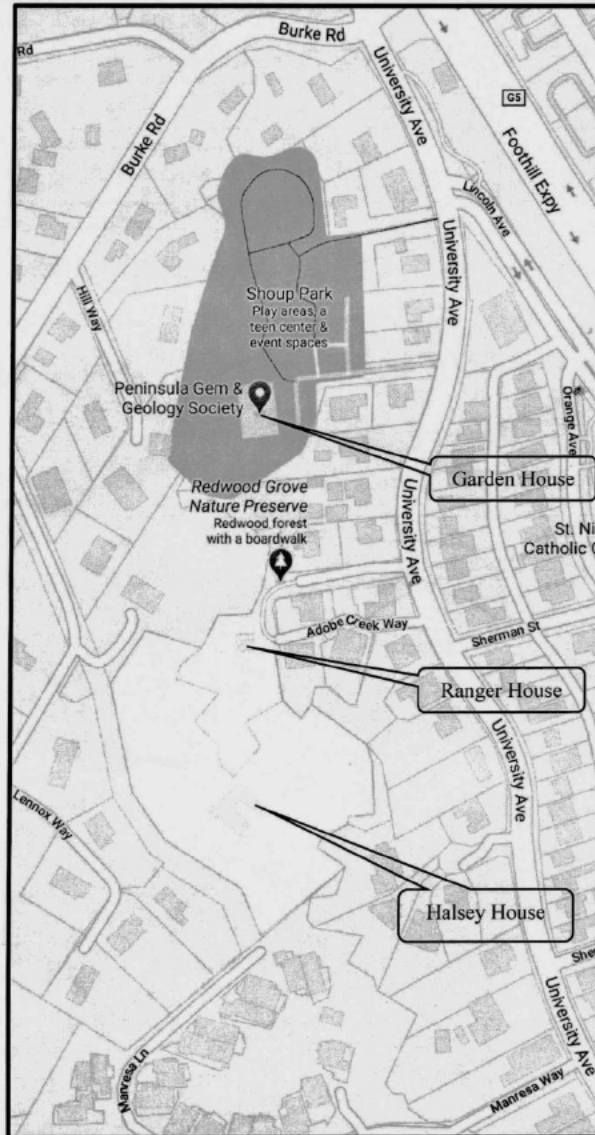
Current City status

- City unwilling/unable to spend money from operating budget or existing reserves
 - Reserves currently at \$50M; will go down as CC built
 - Park in lieu fund \$1M plus and growing to \$19.8M by 2022
 - City has land it could convert to cash
- If nothing is done the building will reach tipping point
- Historical commission is on record that don't want tear down and no rationale to alter landmark designation.
- Political football and PARC now has it-sort of.

New versus old

- Retention of HH allows use of HBC, not available for new construction
- New facility will cost more per square foot
- Requires new bridge-\$500K or more
- ADA, parking, noise do not change
- ADA and parking can be addressed by improvements to Shoup pathway and signage.
- Noise was not a problem before building abandoned
 - Actually further away from residences than Shoup Garden House
 - Caretaker cottage tenant added to site safety and security

Not Highlighted - Road to Redwood Grove & path connecting park & grove



Options

- Demolition/deconstruction with outside funding
 - Likely to be a long costly option that cannot be effected
 - New structures likely require \$500K replacement bridge
 - FOHRG supporters not likely to help fund effort
- Full/partial restoration with City funding
 - City staff and perhaps council lack “political will” if funding has to come from existing reserves
- Freehold or leasehold sale of caretakers cottage
 - Would enable HH repairs without City funds
 - May take significant work to implement
- Freehold or leasehold sale of Halsey House
 - Restoration/repair becomes someone else’s problem
 - ROFR could allow city to reacquire if so desired
- Adaptively reuse some or all of HH
 - Some PIL funds are available now, lots more in next 2 years
 - Supplement as necessary with other sources (grants, donations, etc.)
 - Lease of caretaker cottage to provide maintenance revenue stream

Money is not the issue

- City has park in lieu fund of \$1M projected to reach \$19.8M or more by 2022
- PIL funds cannot be used for ongoing repairs/maintenance
- PIL funds can be used forconstructing improvements in neighborhood and district park and rec facilities.
- Community advocate thinks a vision can sell City and community on \$2M project

Recommendations.

- Put up no trespassing signs
- Spend the remainder of the \$25K and make roof watertight, improve topography to prevent groundwater intrusion and solve rat problem immediately.
- STOP wasting money on studies to justify demolition
- Encourage Jeff LaBoskey to look at options that include some/most/all of Halsey House
- PARC should develop programming/facilities requirements for the various options
- Recommend City Council adaptively reuse Halsey House
- Encourage PARC request Finance Commission evaluate options for financing Halsey House scenarios since there are funds