



DATE: October 14, 2020

AGENDA ITEM # 1

TO: Parks and Recreation Commission

FROM: Donna Legge, Recreation & Community Services Director

SUBJECT: Special Presentation - Informational

RECOMMENDATION

Receive special presentation from Jon Baer, regarding Insights to Halsey House: Background, Landmark Status, other Considerations, and Recommendations

BACKGROUND

Jon Baer is a founding member of Friends of Historic Redwood Grove; has served 9 years on the Los Altos Planning Commission; and has been a 23 year-owner of the restored city landmark #1. In addition, Jon has been a former member of Friends of Griffin House. The Griffin House is a building on the National Register with significant architectural and historic importance.

In its effort to learn about the status of the Halsey House, the Halsey House Subcommittee has met with a few stakeholders, including Jon Baer. Following the September 21, 2020 joint special meeting between the Historical Commission and Parks and Recreation Commission, Jon offered to present his perspective and additional information to the PARC. The Subcommittee recommended to Chair Lindermeier that this item be placed on the agenda.

Subject to the minutes being approved, the following recommendations were discussed at the joint meeting:

1. Historical Commission Chair Lang will investigate landmark and Department of Interior requirements.
2. Staff (Recreation & Community Services Director Donna Legge) will prepare a brief proposal of the programming use for Halsey House and/or the expanded use of Redwood Grove;
3. Staff (Municipal Services Director Manny Hernandez) will continue basic maintenance of Halsey House;
4. Aidlin Darling Design (Jeff LaBoskey) will move forward with stakeholder interviews, information gathering, and preparing a preliminary design;
5. Group consideration of how to use some of the Halsey House structure in the future; and
6. Both the Parks & Recreation Commission and the Historical Commission should proceed promptly with recommendations to City Council.

City staff is researching additional information including cost estimates and procedures based on the number of options discussed.

DISCUSSION

Attached is a power point presentation prepared by Jon Baer. While Jon Baer has a significant amount of experience, he is not a City employee, contractor, or affiliate. While he is entitled to his opinion and perspective, the City Council will ultimately determine the priorities for City projects and spending. Residents are encouraged to share their opinions and interests to the Council, and those who advise the Council such as the Parks and Recreation Commission and Historical Commission.

To further clarify, please note the following:

1. The City's reserves are allocated to specific purposes for specific reasons (such as the community center construction; future PERS increases; emergency operating reserves), or are restricted due to the source of the revenue (such as the reserve associated with the Sewer Fund or Solid Waste Fund).
2. The City has not advocated for, or pursued the concept of, converting its land to cash.

Attachment:

- A. Insights to the Halsey House Presentation by Jon Baer

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

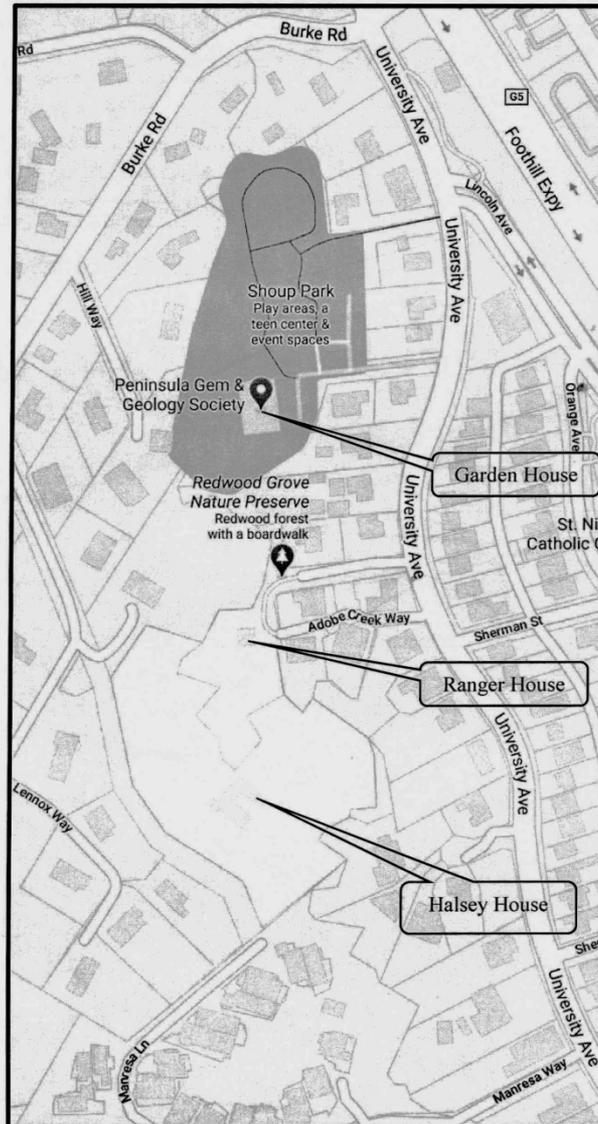
Current City status

- City unwilling/unable to spend money from operating budget or existing reserves
 - Reserves currently at \$50M
 - Park in lieu fund \$2.5M plus and growing to \$ by 2022
 - City has excess land it could easily 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 think 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