



DATE: February 10, 2021

AGENDA ITEM # 2B

TO: Parks and Recreation Commission
FROM: Donna Legge, Recreation & Community Services Director
SUBJECT: Halsey House Subcommittee Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION

Review options and forward a recommendation to the City Council on the future of the Halsey House structure in Redwood Grove

BACKGROUND

At regular Parks and Recreation Commission (PARC) meeting of January 13, 2021, staff provided an update on action taken by the City Council meeting on January 12, 2021, related to the Halsey House:

City Council directed staff to share the historical study conducted by Architectural Resources Group (ARG) and any other past studies relative to the Halsey House that has not yet been shared with Parks and Recreation Commission, Historical Commission and Financial Commission and work with the Commissions to formulate recommendations for Council on the direction they would like the Council to proceed relative to Halsey House including the options of renovation, partial renovation, demolition, partial demolition/restoration and bring back all recommendations, if there is not a consensus of the recommendations by the Commissions, to the Council for consideration by March 2021.

On behalf of the Halsey House Subcommittee including Vice Chair Spielman, Commissioner Dailey recommended that the Subcommittee gather and sift through all the Halsey House information from all relevant Commissions and present recommendations at the February PARC meeting to be considered by the PARC. Commissioner Dailey further requested that the commissioners forward to Director Legge, any specific questions or requests for information that may be needed to assist in the review and determination of a recommendation.

DISCUSSION

Special Projects Manager Dave Brees has prepared a Halsey House Commission Memo that will be distributed to the three commissions and reviewed at the following meetings, as directed by City Council:

Parks and Recreation Commission
Financial Commission
Historical Commission

Wednesday, February 10, 2021 at 7pm
Tuesday, February 16, 2021 at 6pm
Monday, February 22, 2021 at 7 pm

Commissioner Dailey and Vice Chair Spielman have provided supplemental information to be considered by the PARC.

In addition, Historical Commissioner Lang has provided the following information as requested at the special joint commission meeting held on September 21, 2020, between the PARC and Historical Commissions:

Responding to your request on behalf of Park & Recreation Director Donna Legge, I provide this research summary of the context surrounding decision-making regarding the future of the Halsey House, a Los Altos Historic Landmark.

Some of this information was previously shared, but to summarize:

As you know, the city of Los Altos is a Certified Local Government, as defined by Federal law and further defined by the state of California. This gives the city autonomy and funding opportunities regarding historical resources. It also gives the city the responsibility to establish policies and adopt practices that align with the intent of the National Historic Preservation Act. Cities that fail to do so face decertification.

While these responsibilities extend to all historical resources in the city, most of which are privately-held properties, the city has a particular responsibility to preserve the properties it owns and controls. For example, it's difficult for the city to insist that Mills Act homeowners live up to their preservation responsibilities more diligently than the city itself. Currently, the city-owned historic landmarks include the Apricot Orchard, the J. Gilbert Smith House, the San Antonio Club, and the Halsey House.

How an owner of a historic property should fulfill preservation obligations is not left to much interpretation. Rather, the best practices for historic preservation have been collected in the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties. These standards leave some room for interpretation, but they cover most requirements in substantial detail. It's reasonable to expect that any restoration of a historic landmark must conform with these standards to remain legally compliant.

The Halsey House was declared a city historic landmark by the Los Altos City Council on May 26, 1981. From that time forward, the city took on the legal obligation to maintain the property in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards. It's important to recognize that, even though four decades have since passed, the city took on this obligation voluntarily.

Any plans for Halsey House which deviate from the Standards would require review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). I'm not personally familiar with that process, since the city has not faced such a situation during my service on the Historical Commission. But I understand that it is fairly involved, requiring detailed reviews of alternatives and mitigation strategies, with multiple opportunities

for public comment. Such a CEQA process would be required for any renovations or rebuilding out of compliance with the Standards, and of course for any proposal involving its demolition.

The decision about the Halsey House—whether to invest substantial funds to restore it in compliance with the Standards or to undergo the CEQA process for some other course of action—poses a challenging conundrum for City Council. However, the decision has stalled for too long, and moving forward requires a good understanding of the legal constraints and options.

I hope this background research with references is helpful. Please forward to whomever would benefit or find it interesting.

Sincerely,
Larry Lang
Member (former Chair) of the Historic Commission

Staff is recommending that the Commission review the presentations and options in an effort to forward a recommendation to the City Council on the future of the Halsey House structure in Redwood Grove.

Attachments:

- A. Halsey House Subcommittee - Commissioner Dailey Recommendation
- B. Halsey House Subcommittee - Vice Chair Spielman Recommendation

Report and Recommendations for Halsey House

Executive Summary

- Halsey House has deteriorated beyond repair
- The structure is contaminated (Mold, Lead, Asbestos, Rodent Feces)
- The location is prone to flooding
- The structure is a liability (Fire Hazard, Physical Safety of area kids)
- There is insufficient Historical value to the structure relative to the direct, indirect and opportunity costs of restoration and preservation
- Cost Estimates for various options
 - \$6,000,000-8,000,000
Cost for full restoration meeting Department of Interior guidelines, using historically accurate custom construction materials:
 - \$5,000,000
Cost for reconstruction and adaptive reuse for building with equivalent square footage, using currently available off-the-shelf materials
 - \$500,000
Cost of demolition
- Recommendation: Demolition as soon as possible

Background

The City purchased the Halsey property, including Redwood Grove, in 1974 for use as a nature preserve. City of Los Altos' Historic Resources Inventory as a Historic Landmark in 1981. Until 2008 it was used for Parks and Recreation programming. In 2008 the building was red-tagged and has been vacant, neglected, and deteriorating ever since. According to the staff report, dated April 20, 2009, "...Structural, operational and environmental hazards render the Halsey House uninhabitable. Occupancy is prohibited."¹ Through ongoing neglect, the condition has only gotten worse, and risks to the safety of Los Altos residents, and liability to the city, have grown exponentially.

Dilapidated Physical Condition

According to the City's most recently commissioned report, the *Halsey House Historical Structure Report*, by Architectural Resources Group (ARG), the Halsey House has deteriorated catastrophically. It is likely beyond reasonable repair. "The Halsey House is generally in fair to poor condition, with many deteriorated materials and systems beyond their useful life span."² ARG notes that the structure has been degraded by constant water intrusion from above and below. The ground is literally swallowing the structure, with the foundation sill below grade in many places, "The sloping site and grading are trapping moisture along the west side of

¹ City of Los Altos, Staff Report, Attachment #7, April 20, 2009

² Architectural Resource Group. *Halsey House Historical Structure Report*, Fall 2019. P4

the building. The existing roof has failed and water intrusion has caused extensive damage at interior finishes.”

In addition to damage from water intrusion, Halsey House has suffered from chronic vandalism, including severe damage to windows and doors. “Due to both vandalism and general deterioration, the building is no longer weather tight and both water intrusion and pest infestation have occurred.”

ARG further noted, “Mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems are at the end of their useful service life and generally not safe to use in their existing condition.”

The pictures below show water damage to the roof, ceiling, and walls, along with mold, rodent feces, and graffiti.



Craft room, view of partially collapsed ceiling and exposed roof framing.



Craft room, view of floor and walls.

The following pictures show the foundation sill below grade, leading to moisture and pest intrusion from the ground:



Detail views from west elevation.



Looking south along the west elevation.

The crawl space does not meet requirements. There is less than 12 inches of space between the underside of floor joists and grade. Code requires at least 18 inches.

The existing wood shear walls in the longitudinal and transverse directions at the first floor are not adequate to resist ASCE 41-13 design earthquake lateral forces. The longitudinal and transverse shear walls may not be bolted to the perimeter concrete foundation walls.³

³ Tuan and Robinson, Structural Engineers, “Halsey House Structural Assessment,” in ARG HSR Fall 2091 p.8



Not only does this picture indicate insufficient crawl space, but it is more evidence that the ground is swallowing the structure. The minimal crawl space is further troubling because as the next section will note, the site is prone to flooding.

Flooding

Redwood Grove is prone to flooding. Halsey House is in a flood plain. According to ARG, the current floor of Halsey House is well below Base Flood Elevation (BFE).



Source: FEMA⁴

The pictures below show Redwood Grove (RWG) in a normal rainy season with Adobe Creek overflowing its banks:



Halsey House flooded five times since the city acquired the property:

⁴ FEMA Flood Zone Map, cited in Schroder, “Halsey House Restoration,” February 2020. <https://floodpartners.com/fema-flood-map/>

- 1/4/1982
- 1/30/1983
- 2/28/1983
- 1/9/1995
- 2/3/1998

The worst of these floods was reportedly 1983 when there were several feet of standing water in the house.⁵

Human activity, including the replacement of willows with redwoods, building of bridges, installation of culverts, and down-stream channeling modified the riparian conditions making flooding in RWG more common, and increasing sedimentation in RWG, which explains how the ground is literally swallowing Halsey House, and will continue to do so with any future structure unless major site work, with highly disruptive environmental impacts is undertaken.⁶

Contamination

ARG stated, “Hazardous Materials Abatement Lead is typically an issue in buildings painted prior to 1978. Due to the building’s age, lead paint is likely to be found throughout the interior and exterior finishes of the Halsey House. Lead testing and abatement should be undertaken prior to any demolition work. Asbestos is also potentially present, typically in insulation or previous floor coverings. As the materials are friable and will be further disturbed during demolition work, insulation and any resilient tiles or mastics should be tested before any work is

⁵ Pilson, *Urban Creek Restoration, Adobe Creek, Santa Clara County, California*. 2009, p. 5

⁶ Pilson, *Urban Creek Restoration, Adobe Creek, Santa Clara County, California*. 2009, p. 60

conducted. Mold growth was also noted within several areas of the interior. Remediation is recommended.”⁷

Liability

It should be clear that the physical condition of the structure represents a hazard to anybody who enters. While the structure is currently fenced off, that has not prevented area youth from entering the building as evidenced by the ongoing graffiti problem.

The contamination noted in the above section presents an ongoing threat to visitors to RWG, neighbors, residents down-stream, and to the ecosystem.

In addition, ARG noted the fire danger. Should Council decide to fund reconstruction, the new structure would be required to have a fire suppression system. Since the current structure not only lacks that safety feature, but it is built from materials, and in a manner that do not meet current standards, the risk of fire for the status quo is unacceptably high. This jeopardizes both Los Altos neighbors, and because of the location, potentially many residences in Los Altos Hills.

Historical Value

Whether Halsey House should ever have been added to the City’s Historic Resources Inventory has been subject to debate over the years.⁸ To quote one of our

⁷ ARG HSR Fall 2019, p. 43

⁸ Federal Code 36 CFR Part 61A sets forth the Secretary of the Interior’s minimum qualification standards required to perform identification, evaluation, registration, and treatment activities. The author of this document meets those requirements, having an

former mayors, “The most significant thing that family did was plant Redwood Grove, and whether that house is there or not, the grove will remain.”⁹ The Halseys were not even full-time residents of Los Altos. They built Halsey House as a summer retreat in 1923. The property changed owners when it was sold to the Bessey family in 1945 and Emma Halsey moved to Palo Alto, so the family whose name has been attached to the structure were no more than seasonal occupants for just over two decades.

The home is an example of the Spanish Revival architectural style, reminiscent of the missions throughout California. The style of architecture was popular throughout the South Western United States as well as Florida. If the structure were 75 years older, and an example of actual Spanish architecture from the Mission period, there would be little debate about the historical value. The Halsey house is not in any way then particularly unique, nor does it exhibit any artistic flourishes that would make it a notable exemplar of the otherwise widespread style of architecture still in use today.

undergraduate degree in History from the University of California at Berkeley, and currently doing graduate work in California and Bay Area history at Stanford.

⁹ Satterlee in Green, San Jose Mercury News, “Halsey House Faces Uncertain Future”, December 8, 2015



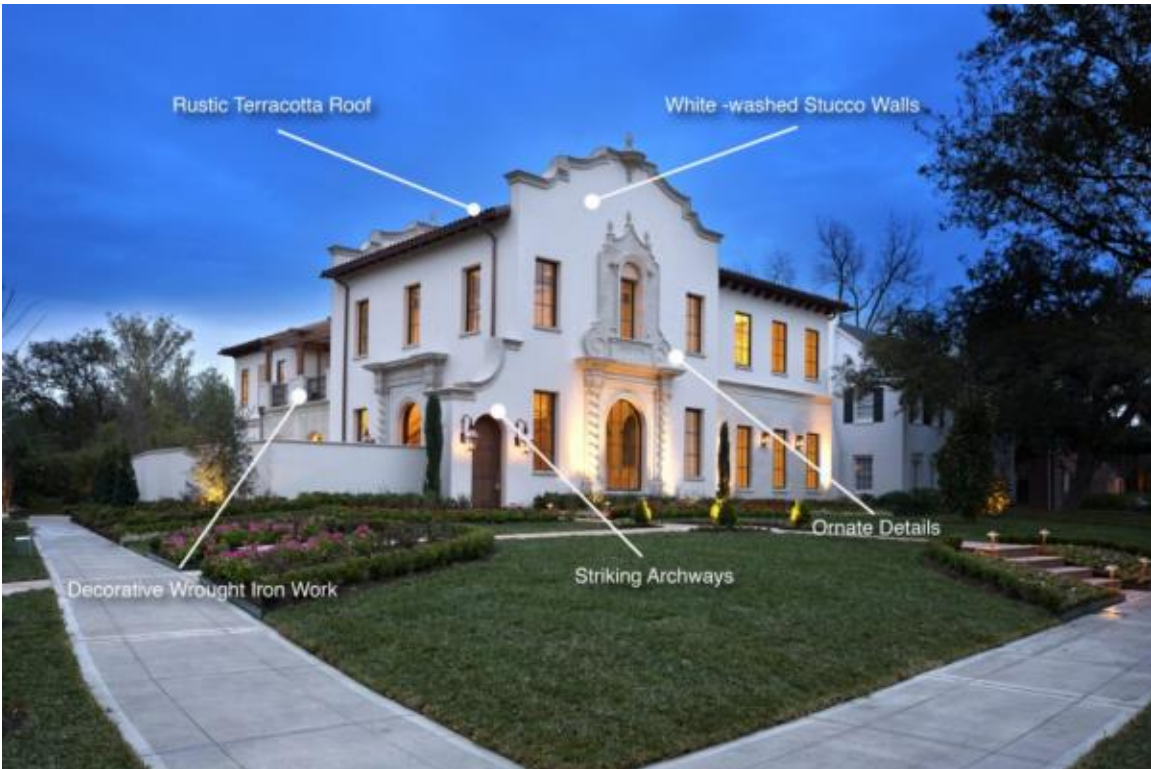
Figure 8. Tiled fireplace in former living room (photo: ARG, May 2019).

Pictured above is one of the fireplaces, an interior feature where one would expect some artistic flourishes, but instead what is shown is a plain fireplace, that looks like it may have even been updated with non-period materials at some time. Also notable is the drop-ceiling with noise suppressing tiles that are clearly also not period-correct.

For comparison, pictured below is a Spanish Revival house built in Los Altos in 2020, an indication that the Spanish Revival style of architecture remains common. Note the artistic flourishes like the wrought iron works, inlaid decorative tiles around the arched entrance, and other decorative elements.



These architectural flourishes are not modern adaptations, or new to the Spanish revival style. It is possible that had the affluent Halseys built a year-round residence rather than a seasonal retreat, perhaps the structure would have been a better exemplar of the style. Pictured below is a house from the same period:



The only thing Halsey House had in common with this home is the terracotta roof and the stucco walls. Entirely missing are the striking archways, ornate details, and decorative wrought iron work.

There are 5 contexts that the HRI cites as relevant to Los Altos listings.

Halsey House is not identified in the HRI as associated with any of these contexts:

1. Pre-history (Ohlone)
2. Agriculture 1850 – 1940
3. Residential Architecture 1907-1940
4. Institutional Development 1907-1940
5. Commercial Development 1907-1940

While the Historical Structure Report (HSR) for Halsey House indicates that it is an example of Spanish Revival Architecture, which was popular between 1907 and 1940, the city's Historical Resource Inventory document does not list it among those properties associated with the Residential Architecture context, perhaps because Halsey House was never a particularly compelling exemplar.

Emma Wright and Theodore Vail Halsey built the house. Neither were particularly historic figures. It is true that Emma's father, William Wright who gave them the land at 482 University Ave. was a successful orchard owner, based on property inherited from his father, James Wright. However this is a tenuous at best connection to the context of agriculture because there is no record of Emma Wright Halsey being involved in the family orchard business.

Theodore Halsey was not a particularly notable historic figure in his own right either. Theodore was an executive with Pacific Telephone and Telegraph in

San Francisco. While the company was reportedly founded by (among others) a relative of Theodore's mother's, Theodore himself fell short of expectations as he was indicted for bribery. Though he was acquitted, the scandal apparently limited his prospects within the firm.¹⁰

In 2009 the city reviewed Halsey House's Kalman score, the system originally used to evaluate Halsey House as a historic landmark. Scores of 85 or better were required for historical status. In 1981, Halsey House was given a score of 95. While the Kalman score is no longer the evaluation system used for historical landmarks, it is notable that when the city reviewed the evaluation in 2009, Halsey House's score had fallen to 73.¹¹ So by the time Halsey House was taken out of use, it no longer met the criteria by which it had been added to the City's Historical Resource Inventory originally.

Ongoing dilapidation of Halsey House has degraded the historical value even further since the city's evaluation in 2009. ARG did the facility condition assessment on May 23, 2019. Almost 2 years have transpired, characterized by rot, decay, and vandalism. In short, the facility is in far worse shape than it was in May of 2019.

"The next step is to determine whether the property retains enough original materials and features to convey its value as a historic resource."¹²

¹⁰ Chapmin, "Santa Clara Valley Lives: Revisit the story of Halsey House and its pioneering owners," Los Altos Town Crier, March 14, 2018.

¹¹ City of Los Altos, Staff Report, Attachment #8, April 20, 2009

¹² *The City of Los Altos Historic Resources Inventory*, p. I-1

As outlined in the Los Altos General Plan, it is a goal of the City to preserve and enhance historic and cultural structures and resources within the community. To support that goal, the General Plan identified specific historic preservation policies:

The City shall regard demolition of landmark and historic resources listed in the Historic Resources Inventory as a last resort. Demolition would be permitted only after the City determines that the resource has lost its physical integrity, retains no reasonable economic use, that demolition is necessary to protect health, safety and welfare, or that demolition is necessary to proceed with a new project where the benefits of the new project outweigh the loss of the historic resource.¹³ “Properties that do not retain physical integrity are not considered to warrant further evaluation as a historic resource.”¹⁴

There is ample precedent for the removal of structures from the city’s Historical Resource Inventory. Following is a list of examples that have been removed and or demolished:

- 233 West Edith Avenue
- 175 Sylvia Court
- 1050 Portland Avenue
- 1475 Oakhurst Avenue
- 1473 Miramonte Avenue (Holly Village)
- 1330 Concord Avenue
- 210 Alta Vista Avenue
- 170 Almond Avenue (Formway Machine Shop)

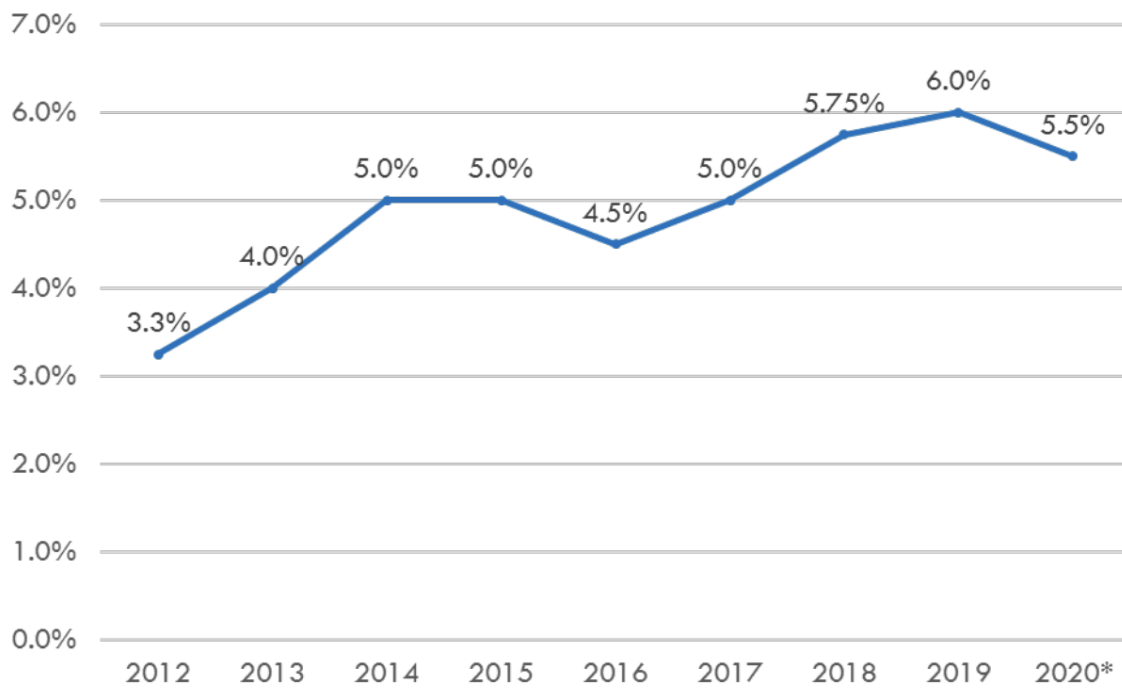
¹³ *The City of Los Altos Historic Resources Inventory*, p. I-2

¹⁴ *The City of Los Altos Historic Resources Inventory*, p. I-12

Cost Estimates

The cost estimates presented here are very rough. These estimates are not presented for the purpose of budgetary appropriation but rather as ballpark guidance to help frame the decision-making process. The methodology used, per the request of City Council, has been to look at prior cost figures in the volume of reports already paid for by Los Altos residents, and extrapolate in the most informed manner possible. The author of this document has endeavored to use multiple methods to validate pricing assumptions.

The first method utilized is to apply an inflator for public construction. The following figure shows the inflation rate per year in the cost of local public construction since Sandoval Report was conducted.



Public Construction Cost Inflation¹⁵

The Sandoval report estimated \$3.5 Million to reconstruct. With the increases in construction costs since the time of the Sandoval report, that equates to a minimum of \$5 Million today. This estimate of the cost for reconstruction is further validated through a second method.

The total loaded cost per square foot for the new Los Altos Community Center, based on a 24,500 square foot facility and an approximate budget of \$35 Million works out to just over \$1,400 per square foot. Halsey house is approximately 3,400 square feet. If fully loaded costs are similar to the costs for the community center, that also equates to an estimated cost for reconstruction at \$5 Million.

The Sandoval had demolition at \$250,000. With inflation and factoring the cost of hazardous waste management (asbestos, mold, lead paint), an appropriate expectation would be a cost of \$500,000 for demolition.

Cost projections for restoration would exceed costs for reconstruction and or adaptive reuse. While some code variances might be exploited due to the Historical status classification, it is clear most would either not apply or be in appropriate and unsafe.

For example, NFIP floodplain management requirements from FEMA allow for some exemptions for historic structures but the critical language warns to consider tradeoffs and the potential risk and damage associated with flooding. In

¹⁵ City of San Francisco, *2020 Annual Infrastructure Construction Cost Inflation Estimate*

short, a variance might be obtained, but it would not be prudent to invest millions of dollars into a new structure that will almost undoubtedly flood at some time in the future.

What would restoration involve? Given the condition of the structure, the roof tiles are not likely to be salvageable. The foundation needs to be replaced and raised above flood level. The windows are broken, so the sashes and framing might be salvageable, but most have water damage. The electrical, fresh water, sewage, and heating systems are shot. The original hardwood flooring is badly degraded from water damage. The framing may still be in decent shape, but since the foundation would have to be redone, that makes it difficult to salvage the framing. Moreover, the hallways are too narrow so some degree of internal reframing would be necessary too.

On balance it is safe to assume for these reasons that restoration would involve careful deconstruction of the existing structure, board by board, in an effort to salvage as many of the raw materials as possible. The restoration would not be able to make use of contemporary, generally available construction materials. For example, custom milled lumber would be required. When Halsey House was built, the dimensions of standard lumber were different. So called "Two by Fours" were actually 2 inches by 4 inches. They are now 1 1/2 x 3 1/2 inches (38 x 89 mm).¹⁶

Because of the unknown cost adders that custom construction materials and other historical preservation requirements present, the best this author can do is

¹⁶ U. S. Department of Agriculture History of Yard Lumber Size Standards,
September 1964

surmise that the cost of restoration would be materially greater than the cost of reconstruction with generally available construction materials. Therefore the estimate of \$6,000,000 to \$8,000,000 for restoration should be viewed with an increased degree of uncertainty. The logic of the estimate is based on the assumption that it will not be practicable or appropriate to simply strip the existing structure down to the studs, rewire, replumb, reroof and reside the existing framing on the existing foundation. Previous estimates of restoration cost likely took the opposite assumption. But given the inadequate crawl space referenced earlier, the condition of the foundation sill being below grade, the inherent risk of flooding at the site, and the requirement to widen the halls etc, this author believes full and careful deconstruction would be required even for a restoration project.

In addition to considering the direct costs of the available options, the city should also be mindful of indirect costs. Such indirect costs would include the prolonged closure of RWG, further site expenses not otherwise included here, and future maintenance costs. Note that maintenance costs on a building designated as a Historic Resource would exceed those for a structure with modern construction, both because of the resiliency of modern materials and methods, and because of the general availability of materials for modern construction.

Finally, the city should consider the opportunity cost for Halsey House options. Should the city spend multiple millions of dollars in this uncertain time having just undertaken the \$35 Million-plus investment in the community center? Meanwhile the senior center at Grant Park needs a new kitchen and would cost substantially less, likely providing a much greater ROI.

What about programming? It was said by a Council member at a recent meeting that the city could, “Build and igloo on Main Street, and our professional Parks and Recreation staff would program for it.” To that end this author has no doubt that whatever option is pursued by Council, city staff will program appropriately. For the last 12 years, the Parks and Recreation Department has done a fine job offering outdoor programming in RWG, including the popular summer camp, without using a building. Indoor programming needs can likely be fulfilled by other city assets, obviously including the new Community Center, but also facilities at Grant Park, Neutra House and the Garden House.

The following table prepared by staff shows that the majority of programming for RWG involves minimal need for indoor space. This need could be accommodated by a very modest investment detailed below under “Conclusions and Recommendations.”

Redwood Grove Programming

Physical Site Improvements	Est Sq Ft	\$ per Sq Ft	Cost	Programming								
				Park Maintenance	Passive Outdoor Activities - Strolling and Sitting	Active Youth Outdoor Education and Recreation (e.g. Summer Nature Camps)	Active Youth Outdoor Activities (e.g. archery, classes, environmental program)	Outdoor Multi-use Covered Area for 20 (meetings, camp gatherings)	Outdoor and Indoor Education for 20	Outdoor/Indoor Community Gatherings (e.g. birthday parties, wedding, performances, club meetings, scout merit badge program, classes)	Outdoor Year-Round Nature Camps (some overnight)	Indoor History display/room (e.g. Ohlone exhibit, previous occupants: exhibits, craft room, animal room, food prep)
Storage & Maintenance				X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Restrooms				X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Pathways, Benches and Picnic Tables					X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Storage for backpacks and educational material						X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Outdoor open space						X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Outdoor discussion circles						X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Outdoor covered area for 20						X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Multi-Purpose Room (20 or less)								X	X	X	X	X
Multi-Purpose Room (40 or less)								X	X	X	X	X
Full Restoration 10+ room (40 to 80)								X	X	X	X	X

Conclusions and Recommendations

1. Remove Halsey House from the Historic Resources Inventory
2. Demolish the structure
3. Salvage the lumber from the framing that is worth salvaging. Salvage the window sashes or other architectural elements that have value.
4. Then if the city decides separately to undertake restoration, some materials will be available. If the city decides not to undertake restoration, the materials may be useful for maintenance and repair of other assets in the Historical Resource Inventory, or the materials can be sold to an architectural salvage company. This effort will contribute to the noble goals of preservation and historical conservation, even if Halsey House, the structure, is no more.
5. The caretakers house suffers from many of the same ills as does Halsey House, and will likewise need to be demolished. Public restrooms and a storage room can be constructed on the current site of the care-takers house. There are site advantages that include availability of utilities, proximity to parking, and location on the accessible side of the creek. The budget for this might be approximately \$500,000 - \$600,000 (factoring 400 square feet at the estimated fully loaded community center cost per square foot). This would provide facilities appropriate to support high quality programming at RWG and to enhance the experience of Los Altos residents when they visit RWG.

http://losaltospolitico.com/wpcontent/uploads/2019/10/item_2_2015attachment_a_halsey_house_feasibility_study.pdf

Pilson, Chris D. *Urban Creek Restoration, Adobe Creek, Santa Clara County, California*. San Jose State, 2009

https://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4993&context=etd_theses

Presentation to PARC Regarding Halsey House

by Scott Spielman, Commissioner
February 10, 2021

In appreciation of:
Elisabeth Ward
Marie Backs
Los Altos History Museum

Are there potential programs that support the renovation of Halsey House?



Questions to consider:

- What are the needs for programs at Redwood Grove?
- Is there a need for a building for programs at Redwood Grove?
- Is there uniqueness to Halsey House that supports its renovation in part or in total?

Previous Programs at Redwood Grove and Halsey House

Redwood Grove Programming

(9/21/20 Joint Meeting - Historical and Parks and Recreation Commissions Presentation)

Past Programs *Indoor Partly or Completely

- Nature Center *
- Redwood Grove Nature Camp
- Nature Programs *
- Yoga Classes *
- Ohlone History Lectures & Artifact display *
- Building of Ohlone Shelters
- Boy and Girl Scout Merit Badge Programs *
- Guitar classes *
- Children's Birthday Parties
- Archery classes
- Rose pruning demonstrations & lectures *
- Ceramics Studio by Pinetree Pottery *
- Blacksmithing

Source: Marie Backs

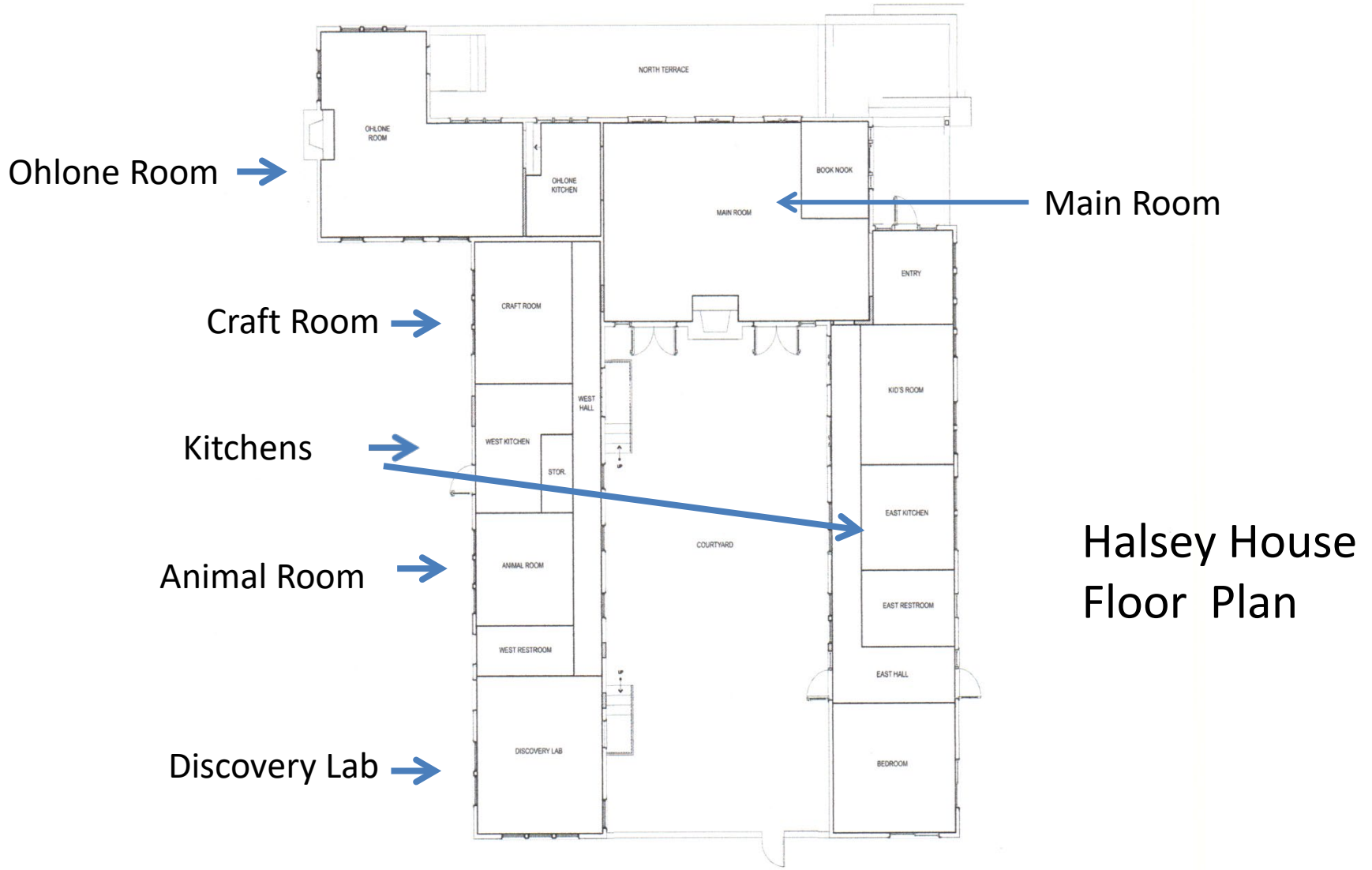


Figure 0. Existing floor plan of Halsey House (Drawing by ARG, 2019). Note that north, as referenced in the report, is up.

The Success of these Programs!

- 1000's of children participated in the classes/camps up to 2008
- Many were oversold and often there was a waiting list
- Redwood Grove programs have made/make Los Altos unique and special

Programming has been limited since Halsey House Closed

Pre-Pandemic Programs

- Redwood Grove Nature Camp
- Archery Birthday Parties
- Archery Lessons

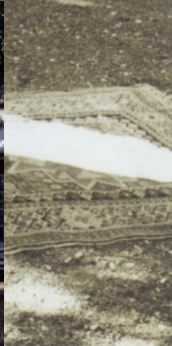
Program Possibilities *Indoor Partly or Completely

- Nature programs for School-age Children *
- Nature/Ecological Classes(Water Conservation, Creek Habitat, Native American Programing, Santa Clara Valley / Los Altos History *)
- Partnerships (Los Altos History Museum and Grassroots Ecology, etc.)
- Scout Merit Badge Programs
- Photography classes *
- Yoga, Pilates/Tai Chi/Meditation *
- Nature inspired art classes *
- Music Classes, cooking classes, gardening classes, Ikebana
- Rentals (birthday parties, retreats, memorials, seminars/lectures and small events *)

Source: City Staff

Other Potential Programs that would require a building

1 - Halsey Family History – with exhibits



2 - Cultural History of the 1920's



Credit: Elisabeth Ward

3 - The Planting of the Redwood Trees

- Exhibit
- Plan and inspiration



4 - Architecture of the Building

- Spanish colonial revival style
- Link to California history





5 - Los Altos History Exhibit

- University triangle
- Neighborhood history



6 - Los Altos History Through Art

- Annie Knapp Fitz,
local folk artist

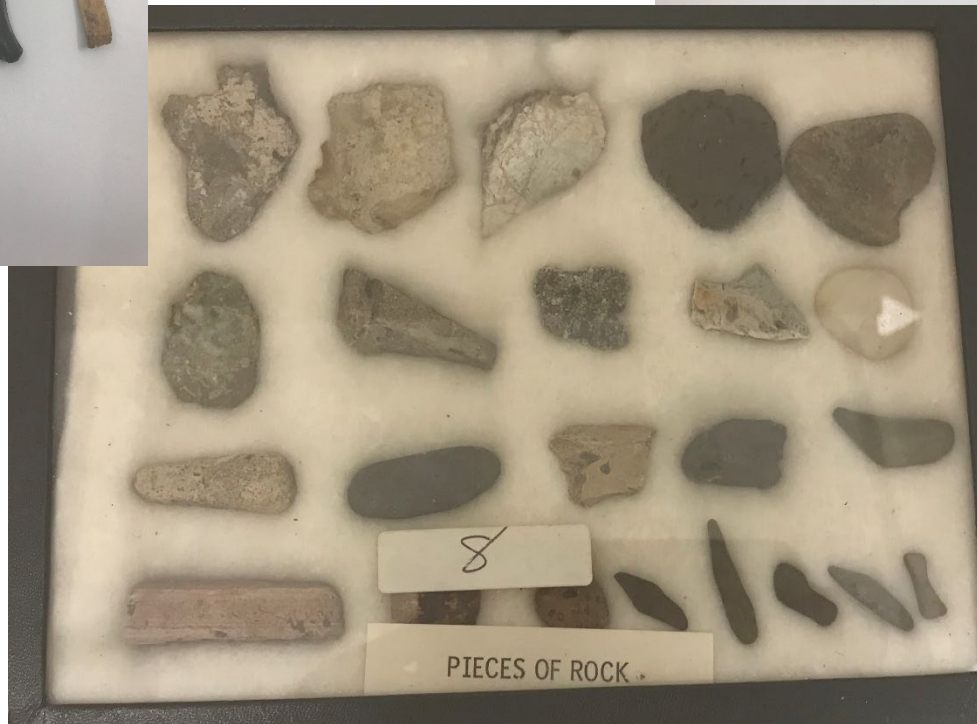


Art of Redwood Grove (Exhibit of local artists)



Tanvi's watercolor of the boardwalk meandering through the redwoods

7 - Ohlone Exhibit and Artifacts



8 - Animal Room and Exhibits



Which of these programs requires a renovated Halsey House?

2- 1920s era

4 - Architecture

Which of these programs are enhanced by a renovated Halsey building?

- 1 – Halsey Family History
- 2 – Cultural History
- 3 – Planting of the redwoods
- 7 – Ohlone exhibit
- 8 – Animal Room

Summary Thoughts

- Redwood Grove and Halsey House together have provided a unique experience to our children
- Redwood Grove would not exist without the Halsey's
- Something was visionary about the Halsey's planting of the redwood trees
- The history of the family and the era is unique and worthy of consideration to preserve through programs
- The architecture of the Halsey House is a transition in California architectural history and is worthy of preserving through a program

Summary Thoughts (Continued)

- A room dedicated to the Ohlone culture near where they had a settlement is worthy of consideration
- There are numerous programs that would benefit from a building and many of those also benefit from Halsey House
- Historically, programs at RG (prior to 2009) were beloved by parents and children.
- Redwood Grove/Halsey House is a unique asset of our community

Recommended Actions

- A community engagement program is needed
- Ongoing coordination with the Los Altos History Museum and the Historical Commission (HC) to ensure complementary programs
- Coordinate with HC and the Finance Commission and staff to determine cost/feasibility of partial and full adaptive reuse of Halsey House
- Develop a plan to reinstate programming at Redwood Grove as feasible

Other Important Information beyond the scope of PARC (this presentation)

- 1 - Landmark status and legal issues
- 2 - Engineering requirements for key alternatives
- 3 - Insights from the historical commission and history museum
- 4 - Cost assessment – engineering and finance commission

Testimonial

“My varied experiences at Redwood Grove and Halsey House in many ways shaped both my childhood and my passion for the outdoors ... The world is changing - historical buildings are being tastelessly renovated in preference of cement and minimalism, and it harms the sense of wonder and community that makes Los Altos so special. Ecological preservation is just another flavor of this culture - Redwood Grove is a place where kids squeal holding their first spiders and snakes, watch in amazement as the tannins in Redwood cones turn water red, and connect with their friends and community in ways that are rare and beautiful. To tear down a center of learning, exploration, and nature would be unconscionable.” from a 26 year old former camper

Questions and Answers

Appendix

Testimonials

“My varied experiences at Redwood Grove and Halsey House in many ways shaped both my childhood and my passion for the outdoors. Growing up in Los Altos, I had birthday parties (my own and others), camp sessions, playdates with friends, and exhilarating afternoons holding tarantulas larger than my hands, improving my archery skills, and marveling at the beauty in our own suburban backyard. Redwood Grove is an integral part of the adolescent experience in Los Altos that I hope to provide to my children someday.

It would be a shame to see another of the region's last vestiges of natural beauty removed in the unfortunate effort to scrub the heritage we have inherited. Our region of the world and of the country is incredibly special, and we owe it to our residents and our children in the name of great American conservation to keep these places alive. Were Ansel Adams not exposed to the beauty of the world, would we have his timeless art for generations to come? In the heart of Silicon Valley, we must encourage this love of our world so future entrepreneurs can help save it.

At a time when kids are handed iPads the day they turn five, it's more important than ever to preserve local environmental programs that expose kids to the world around them and the beauty that the Peninsula has to offer. The world is changing - historical buildings are being tastelessly renovated in preference of cement and minimalism, and it harms the sense of wonder and community that makes Los Altos so special. Ecological preservation is just another flavor of this culture - Redwood Grove is a place where kids squeal holding their first spiders and snakes, watch in amazement as the tannins in Redwood cones turn water red, and connect with their friends and community in ways that are rare and beautiful. To tear down a center of learning, exploration, and nature would be unconscionable. “

26 Year old former camper

“All three of my children have wonderful memories of Redwood Grove camp. Keith was a great leader, but the program went beyond just one individual. The opportunity for our kids to explore and be ‘safely adventurous’ in the blackberry bushes and creek were so very valuable. I teach second grade in Los Altos and know that kids spent more and more time on screens even before distance learning, and what they really need are unscripted outdoor experiences. It also gave high school students a chance to experience leadership and responsibility. If there is a way to restore this wonderful program, I am sure parents throughout the city and county would be thrilled. If Los Altos is blessed with the space, we owe it to our kids to give them a chance to experience ‘camp.’”

Kathy FitzGerald

Teacher, Montclair School

“I am writing to support the restoration of Halsey House. Although now grown, my two children spent many summers at Redwood Grove camps and programs. Some of their favorite memories are holding snakes and romping in the Creek. There are so few places in our area where kids get to experience the beauty and playfulness of nature. I hope that you will make an effort to keep Redwood Grove a thriving and magical part of Los Altos.”

Laurie Biros

“Please make the restoration of Halsey House to be a top priority. As a former Girl Scout leader, the use of the Halsey House within the nature preserve of Redwood Grove, proved to be one of the greatest assets of our community. In this area, nature and open land are scarce. Having the Halsey House for a meeting location combined with Redwood Grove, brought a level of experiential learning and growth to Troop # 61427. Regardless of the needs of future scouting troops, preservation of this historical structure would only enhance the uniqueness of Los Altos and bring a higher quality of appreciation for our history.”

Dianne Edmonds

“As a longtime Los Altos resident I would like to see the LA Park and Rec Commission preserve and restore Halsey House in Redwood Grove. Redwood Grove is a truly unique and beautiful place where most residents can drive just minutes and feel like they are far away in redwood forest. Halsey House would allow for Los Altos to continue to provide incredible nature experiences for generations of children to come. As today's children are faced with fewer and fewer opportunities to experience the joys of nature it would be criminal to destroy a building that has hosted children's programs for years. My now grown children attended numerous birthday celebrations and summer camp experiences at Halsey House. Preserve this amazing community asset.”

Ann Wolff

“Redwood Grove is a very special hidden gem in Los Altos. It provides children with a unique opportunity to enjoy and learn about nature. My children have very fond memories of their birthday party and their elementary school trips to Redwood Grove. They remember doing archery, learning about the forest and Native American people, holding a tarantula (under the supervision of the Ranger), doing archery, and watching the ranger start a fire using sticks. Los Altos is fortunate to have such a peaceful, beautiful and educational grove for all ages to enjoy.”

Nanette Malgesini

“Bring back summer camp! Those camps are a true highlight from my childhood. We were given freedom to roam around and be independent (safely!), explore nature, and learn new skills. I vividly remember making face paint from rocks, cooking Indian fry bread, scurrying after popcorn from the popcorn volcano, and sleeping under the stars. Not to mention how much I loved spending time with the animals (I would never touch a rat now but I loved it then!) and running up and down the driveway.”

Dee Gibson

“Both of my children attended countless events at Redwood Grove. They each had several birthday party celebrations there. Our family photo albums have soooo many pictures of fond memories they experienced and we shared as a family in Redwood Grove. I remember each year scouring the Los Altos Park and Rec schedule of summer camps to find the camps at Redwood Grove and sign up for them as early as possible before they were full. We attended family week-ends there. Our Girl and Boy Scout troops held events there. We hiked there, we picnicked there. We took photos for holiday cards there.

My children learned to love and appreciate all nature can offer – lessons that have impacted their activities into adulthood. The Redwood Grove programs, the Grove itself and the house in which we cut so many birthday cakes and served so many snacks helped bring our family together and shape our children into the environmentally concerned and sensitive young adults they now are.

Redwood Grove always has been, and hopefully, always will be a treasure of Los Altos.”

Lois Baer

“My son had a birthday party at Redwood Grove. He was obsessed with snakes at the time, and when he got to hold the ball python, he was so excited. Best birthday ever!

Our neighbor was a counselor at the camp when she was a teenager. It was her first opportunity to work with younger kids, and she enjoyed it so much that she is now a teacher.”

Parent and neighbor

2010 PARC Facility Analysis

Recommendations

- two meeting spaces each to accommodate a group of 25-30 people
- public restrooms that met ADA requirements
- one ADA parking space in Redwood Grove or surface material on a pathway from Shoup Park that is ADA compliant
- signage for fire safety and dog rules
- outdoor gathering circle, open air meeting spot
- administrative office with supplies and storage
- teaching garden
- pathway connection to LAH
- animal safe trash receptacles
- kitchen to enhance program potential

Other Facility Considerations

- Efforts should be taken to minimize impacts to neighbors of Redwood Grove - example – eliminate portable toilets