

HISTORIC RESOURCE COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

Regular Meeting

April 15, 2009

The regular meeting of the Coronado Historic Resource Commission was called to order at 3:02 p.m., Wednesday, April 15, 2009, at the Coronado City Hall Council Chambers, 1825 Strand Way, Coronado, California, by Chairperson O'Brien.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Commissioners Crenshaw, Jones, O'Brien, Ryan, and St. Denis

MEMBERS ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: Ann McCaull, Associate Planner
John Swanson, Assistant Planner
Martha L Alvarez, Recording Secretary

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of April 1, 2009, were approved as submitted.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Director McCaull reported that at the City Council meeting of May 5, there will be a Proclamation announcing May as the National Preservation Month. In the past, the Historic Resource Commission Chairperson has attended to present the Proclamation, along with the Executive Directors of MainStreet and the Coronado Historic Association. During the meeting, historic preservation plaques will be given to property owners whose properties have been designated during the last year.

Commission's Summer Schedule. Ms. McCaull reported that the City Council has opted to cancel the second meetings of July and August. The Commission agreed not to cancel any of their upcoming meetings. The Commission also discussed possible meeting dates for the impending joint City Council/Historic Resource Commission meeting.

ORAL COMMUNICATIONS AND OTHER MATTERS

Chairperson O'Brien reported that he and Commissioner St. Denis met with a property owner to review an upcoming design for the property located at 1124 F Avenue. They toured the site with the project architect and are glad to report that there will be no changes to the front elevation of the main structure. The property owners are attempting to add additional living space at the rear of the property and have been advised to get their neighbors "on board."

Commissioner St. Denis said Architect Kevin Rugee has offered to review plans and answer any questions the Commission members may have.

Marc Tarasuck, Board of Trustees Member, San Diego Historical Society, encouraged anyone looking for historic designation to use the San Diego Historical Society Research Library in Balboa Park to conduct research on their property.

MISCELLANEOUS

HRPA 8-08 City of Coronado: Discussion regarding changes to the Mills Act Program and future Mills Act Workshops.

Ms. McCaull introduced the staff report as outlined in the agenda. At the February 18, 2009, Historic Resource Commission meeting, the Commission began preliminary discussions regarding the upcoming Mills Act workshops. Subcommittees of the Commission were formed to develop preliminary recommendations regarding the items to be discussed at the workshops. The areas the Commission would like to focus on include 1) eligibility requirements, e.g. what properties are eligible to apply; 2) process e.g., how are properties treated/evaluated on the waiting list; 3) funding levels, e.g. how should the fiscal cap be handled annually; and 4) alterations, e.g. extent of alterations allowed for Mills Act properties.

Ms. McCaull stated that the purpose of today's meeting is to review subcommittee recommendations for possible changes to the Mills Act Program.

The Commission briefly discussed Mills Act Process Considerations, under Process.

Commissioner Ryan asked if the new method for Process gives enough weight to the date of application submittal.

Chairperson O'Brien replied that it does in as much as City Council had requested the Commission to evaluate homes, not just on the date of application submittal, but on a set of specific criteria.

Commissioner St. Denis said she would like to leave open other methods of prioritization, other than date of application submittal, because the new City Council may feel that this is not the best method of prioritization.

Vice Chair Crenshaw commented that some of the homes that have already been approved will be listed lower on the roster because of the proposed criteria that is being set up for future negotiations.

Commissioner St. Denis said that it would not be fair to the property owners currently on the waiting list if the method of prioritization were to be changed again.

Commissioner Ryan said he would support the date of application submittal as being a stronger criterion. He understands that the politics over the last few years was forced by the fiscal cap.

Ms. McCaull stated the change in policy arose because the City would receive several applications during the course of one year. The applications would then be forwarded to City Council for their review and approval. The City Council would be forced to deal with various homeowners who all wanted their Mills Act application approved that year when only a limited amount could be accommodated. The City Council determined the Commission should develop a prioritization method to determine historic significance and submit a recommendation to the City Council on which applications should be considered on an annual basis based on historical significance.

Commissioner Ryan disagreed with this method. He said he understands that City Council will be faced with an almost unfunded program. He feels that the Commission should encourage City Council to “step up” and fund this program.

Commissioner St. Denis said that she and at least two other Commissioners feel that prioritization should be based on application submittal date. Ms. St. Denis asked how this method of prioritization would affect the list.

Commissioner Ryan said it would change the list significantly.

Vice Chair Crenshaw disagreed. In addition, she does not feel that there will be as many applications received by the City as there have in the past.

Commissioner Ryan provided a brief update on Funding Levels.

Vice Chair Crenshaw commented that there are a certain number of homes in Coronado which will not be designated historic because their home falls under Prop 13. She feels that additional incentives are necessary for those property owners who only desire to restore their historic homes.

Chairperson O'Brien agreed.

Commissioner St. Denis asked about placing a cap on the value of a home, e.g. a home that is valued at more than 8 million is not eligible for Mills Act.

Vice Chair Crenshaw asked if Council exceptions would be included.

Chairperson O'Brien asked for clarification on whether the 8 million dollar homes would be taken care of by Council in a special exemption.

Commissioner St. Denis replied that she was suggesting that 8 million dollar homes not be eligible at all.

Chairperson O'Brien stated that this suggestion would not work because Mills Act is meant to save historic homes, especially those valued at over 8 million dollars.

Ms. McCaull suggested the following wording be considered: "Any property interested in the Mills Act Program, and having a value of over 8 million dollars, must apply for a special exception."

Commissioner St. Denis said she liked the suggested wording.

Vice Chair Crenshaw asked how much of the Mills Act would be applied to a property if, for example, a three-story house was added at the rear of a property and the only historic structure was a small cottage at the front of the property.

Ms. McCaull replied that the Mills Act would only apply to the original historic structure.

Vice Chair Crenshaw said there has been much discussion about whether the entire site or only a small structure on a property is considered historic.

Ms. McCaull said that per the Historic Preservation Ordinance, designation is generally applied to the entire site because exceptions to the Code are provided which recognize the site constraints of an historic home. However, for the Mills Act tax benefit, it should only apply to the designated historic resource.

Vice Chair Crenshaw asked if the Commission would offer City Council the alternative of removing the fiscal cap. If the cap were removed, how would the 34 properties currently on the list be funded?

Ms. McCaull said it would be based on some type of prioritization method. However, she was certain this alternative of removing the cap would not be well received by City Council.

Commissioner Jones asked if there was a possibility the City Council would want to place a moratorium on future Mills Act applications until the backlog is decreased.

Chairperson O'Brien said it is definitely one of the options that City Council may consider. He recommended that the Commission unite their efforts in their presentation and be ready to respond to the possible suggestion by Council for a moratorium.

Public Comment

Chairperson O'Brien asked if there were any members of the public wishing to comment on Funding Levels and/or Process.

Jerry Mitchell, 43 The Point, commented that the Commission's success depends greatly on their ability to convince City Council that what is being discussed is the very jewels in Coronado, i.e. the ambience of the historic homes.

Commissioner St. Denis provided updated information on Eligibility. Ms. St. Denis said additional information was added, e.g. significant architects. In addition, the language was softened in some areas, and the format was changed to make it more reader-friendly.

Ms. McCaull asked about property owners who have made inappropriate additions or changes and whether, as part of the Mills Act Agreement application, they would now be further down on the list.

Commissioner St. Denis responded that if the property owner has actual documentation of what the structure looked like before the alterations, and if the property owner desires to use the Mills Act funds to return the structure to its original appearance, she would definitely support the request.

Ms. McCaull excused herself from the meeting at a 4:30 p.m. Assistant Planner Swanson stood in for Ms. McCaull.

Commissioner St. Denis said the following requirement was changed to read:

- Alterations allowable for historically designated structures may be more lenient and flexible (within the Secretary of Interior's Standards) than those allowable to Mills Act properties. The owner has two choices:
 - Preserve and protect an historic house and foster the strong community identity unique to Coronado's rich heritage in exchange for the pride of stewardship and Mills Act tax benefits, or
 - Save an historic house and add to or alter it as appropriate (subject to HRC approval), adapting a piece of Coronado's history to today's lifestyle. Owner may take advantage of considerable possible zoning exceptions and other benefits, with the understanding that he/she may forego the possibility of Mills Act tax benefits.

Vice Chair Crenshaw asked if property owners will be eligible for the Mills Act if they choose to alter the front façade or add a second addition.

Commissioner Jones said many property owners are only seeking historic designation and they must be made aware that if they do make alterations to the front façade, they may not be eligible for the Mills Act.

Commissioner St. Denis said it is not easy to discuss Mills Act without discussing historic designation because it is Step One in the application process for the Mills Act. She added that there has been much confusion about flexibility in what has been allowed so far. Ms. St. Denis said she believes the Commission should be more sophisticated and stricter about what will be allowed to a Mills Act home.

Chairperson O'Brien suggested that the aforementioned requirement could be included in the Mills Act Handbook.

There were no members of the public wishing to comment on Eligibility.

Commissioner St. Denis provided updated information on Alterations. She said the sections in *italic* indicate direct quotes taken directly from the Secretary of Interior's Standards for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings (www.nps.gov/history/hps/tps/tax/rhb/guide.htm).

Vice Chair Crenshaw asked about the recommendation which reads, "*Failing to undertake measures to assure the preservation of historic windows is not recommended.*" She asked how this requirement would be implemented.

Commissioner St. Denis said a list of consultants would be provided to the property owners. These consultants are experienced in repairing historic structures.

There were no members of the public wishing to comment on Alterations.

Chairperson O'Brien stated that by mid-May, the Commission should be ready to review and either approve/disapprove a number of subcommittee recommendations and discuss potential dates for future public workshops.

Discussion regarding the Mission of the Historic Preservation Program

Chairperson O'Brien stated that the Mission Statement should be ready for review and approval by mid-May.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:42 p.m.

Lauren Wasserman
Interim Director of Community Development