

County has 1 year to come up with historic building code

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The clock is ticking for Calaveras County to come up with an ordinance to preserve its historic buildings.

The Calaveras County Board of Supervisors voted 5-0 last week to extend an urgency ordinance prohibiting demolition of historical buildings, such as the Valley Springs train station, for one year while staff prepares an historical preservation ordinance.

Calaveras County is one of just a few counties in the state without a preservation ordinance and such a code is called for in the county's recently adopted general plan.

The old train station on the southwest corner of State Routes 12 and 26 was on the verge of being demolished and that sparked the interim urgency ordinance, which was approved in February by the board.

The board could have extended the urgency ordinance for a nearly two-year time period, but County Counsel Sarah Edwards at the March 26 board meeting said the one-year extension would be sufficient time to prepare the final ordinance for board consideration.

While owners of historic properties "could feel a bit broadsided" by such an ordinance, Kristopher Mandell, executive director of the Calaveras Historical Society, said grants are available to help in the preservation process, and "our organization is willing to help the public facilitate them."

Sal Manna, president and founder of the Society for the Preservation of West Calaveras History, said his organization "wholeheartedly" supported extension of the urgency ordinance.

He had a couple of suggestions for the process as it moves forward.

Manna said the scope of the final ordinance should not be limited to demolition, but also consider rehabilitation of historic buildings.

In addition, he said the ordinance should address "demolition by neglect."

Owners of historic properties should not be able to let those buildings fall apart because they neglect to fix, as an example, a hole in the roof and “just say too bad,” Manna added.

Board chairman and District 2 Supervisor Jack Garamendi was the lone board member to comment on the extension.

He cautioned against “unilaterally enrolling people’s property into historic preservation without the consent of the owners. I think that would be a really bad idea and I certainly would not support something like that.”

The ordinance is applicable to buildings 75 years or older and either listed or have been deemed by the State Historical Resources Commission to be eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places or the California Register of Historic Places.

Once the permanent ordinance is developed by staff, it will go through public notice requirements and public hearings before the county Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors.