

Supervisors adopt code to protect historical buildings

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The Calaveras County Board of Supervisors last week passed an ordinance to county code that oversees the preservation of historical buildings.

The vote on Jan. 14 was 4-0 with District 3 Supervisor Martin Huberty recusing himself because he has an interest in residential property that could come under the ordinance. The ordinance will take effect on Feb. 13.

The movement for an historical preservation ordinance began in January of last year when there was a permit pulled to demolish the former Valley Springs train station located on the southwest corner of Sates Routes 12 and 26.

The old train station dates back to the late 1880s and was the genesis of commercial and residential development in what we now know as the present day Valley Springs. The California Office of Historical Preservation and California Department of Transportation consider the building historical. In addition, it is on the list of California Historical Resources and deemed eligible for the National Register of Historical Places.

When word got out that the permit had been issued a number of people voiced their concerns to the county and the Board of Supervisors passed an urgency ordinance in early February of last year temporarily blocking demolition of any historical building in the unincorporated parts of the county.

The urgency ordinance gave county staff a one-year period to develop a permanent historical preservation ordinance for consideration by the County Planning Commission and supervisors.

The ordinance is based on the urgency ordinance in format and procedure with some changes. The most significant change is that it applies to permits for alterations to or relocation of structures as well as demolition permits.

Any demolition permit or building permit for an alteration to or relocation of a structure would be reviewed by the planning department during the course of the usual permit review process to determine if the structure was 75 years old or older. A determination would then be made if the structure is historically significant, and if so, a review panel comprised of the planning director, building official and a designee of the Calaveras County Historical Society would identify mitigation measures to protect the historic character of the structure, utilizing Department of the Interior guidelines. The project would then be sent to the Planning Commission for a decision. That decision would be appealable to the Board of Supervisors.

District 4 Supervisor Amanda Folendorf questioned whether the county archivists should be included on the review panel.

The proposed ordinance was amended to say appropriate resources should be consulted in the process including the county archivist.

In addition, the ordinance establishes a county register of historic structures and buildings. The register will include all structures on or eligible for listing on the federal and state registers and any new structures added to the list through the review process established in the ordinance. The ordinance will also allow for the use of the Historic Building Code, which provides flexibility in construction and improvements to historic buildings.

On another 4-0 vote, the board adopted a companion resolution establishing procedures for implementing the Mills Act, state legislation that gives the county the authority to enter into contracts with owners of qualified historic properties who actively participate in the long-term restoration and maintenance of their historic properties to receive property tax relief.

Sal Manna, president of the Society for the Preservation of West Calaveras History, said the procedure should have two guide posts – transparency and simplicity. If your building is not on the list, move on, but if it is then you have to go through the process.

Dr. Julia G. Costello of Mokelumne Hill, a member of the (Society) Register of Professional Archaeologists and a recognized authority on cultural resource management of historic sites in the Western United States, said it has been “a long time in getting Calaveras County into the mainstream of historical preservation.”

She told the board, “This takes us a huge step forward protecting these important resources.”