



DATE: September 25, 2022

AGENDA ITEM #2

AGENDA REPORT

TO: Historical Commission

FROM: Sean Gallegos, Senior Planner

SUBJECT: HPA23-0001 – 41 Hawthorne Avenue

RECOMMENDATION:

Recommend approval to the City Council to authorize the City Manager to execute a Mills Act agreement with the property owners for 41 Hawthorne Avenue

BACKGROUND

This property is designated as a Historic Resource in the City's Historic Resources Inventory (HRI) and is located on Hawthorne Avenue between South San Antonio Road and Eleanor Avenue. The main house was designed in the Tudor Revival architectural style and was originally built in 1922.

Houses constructed in the Tudor Revival architectural style were prevalent between 1890 and 1940. This design style is characterized by its eclectic fusion of early and Medieval English building traditions, resulting in a picturesque and traditional aesthetic. Key identifying features of Tudor buildings include steeply pitched roofs, frequently adorned with front-facing gables or multiple gables, and the distinctive use of half-timbered wall surfaces. These details may encompass elements such as overhanging gables or second stories, decorative chimneys on the front or side, diamond-shaped casement windows, or round-arched board and baton front entry doors. Typically, Tudor houses are constructed using stucco, masonry, or masonry-veneer materials, often incorporating ornamental stonework or brickwork into their design.

On December 1, 1978, the City Council approved a variance for an arbor in the rear yard with a setback of zero-foot, where the minimum setback is five feet.

DISCUSSION

Historic Assessment

As outlined in the Historic Resource Evaluation and Secretary of the Interior Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties Review prepared by Stacey De Shazo with Evans & De Shazo, Inc. (Attachment B, respectively), the Historic Evaluation Report assessed the existing historic resource and the proposed rehabilitation project and made the following determinations:

- It is confirmed that the existing historic resource with its Tudor Revival architectural style retains all seven aspects of integrity; and therefore, the existing house is a qualified historic property and eligible for the Mills Act.
- It is found that the future proposed rehabilitation project meets the Secretary of Interior Standards for Rehabilitation that is analyzed below. Therefore, the proposed rehabilitation will not impact the integrity of the historic resource and still make the house eligible for the Mills Act.

Overall, the exterior modifications to rehabilitate the house and the construction of a new garage and ADU would not impair the original design or form of the existing historic resource and will meet the Secretary of Interior Standards for Rehabilitation, which continues to make the house eligible for Mills Act after rehabilitation.

The structure's defining characteristics are closely aligned with the Tudor Revival design, encompassing steeply pitched roofs with wooden or slate shingles, intersecting gables, the presence of stacked chimneys or chimney pots, half-timbering, casement windows featuring leaded glass, and six-over-one double-hung windows, as well as oriels and one- or two-story bay windows. The structure's charm is further defined by its use of multiple materials, including stucco, rubblework masonry, patterned stonework or brickwork, clapboards, vertical plank doors, and an asymmetrical floor plan.

The evaluation of the 1926 house's restoration, as presented by the owner, adheres to the Secretary of Interior Standards for Rehabilitation. This plan involves rehabilitating the overall structure, including restoring the original front door to its central location on the primary façade, facing Hawthorne Avenue, based on photographic and physical evidence, aligning it with its historical placement when constructed in 1926.

While the 1926 house retains its original exterior stucco, contingencies for its replacement have been outlined. If rehabilitation, exploratory, or construction work determines that the stucco is beyond repair, this decision will be substantiated by photographic evidence and reviewed by a qualified expert, with an acceptable alternative in line with the Standards for Rehabilitation.

The preliminary project encompasses the construction of two new ancillary structures, a detached garage and an accessory dwelling unit (ADU), both situated at the rear of the 1926 house. The new detached garage, located east of the house within the current driveway but set back from the house, and the ADU, situated where the current ca. 1950 detached garage is located, adhere to the historic precedent set by earlier structures on the property, as documented in historic photographs. This rehabilitation plan aligns with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties.

In summary, the proposed exterior modifications for the house, garage, and ADU will uphold the integrity of the original design and form of this historic resource. These changes are consistent with the Secretary of Interior Standards for Rehabilitation, ensuring continued eligibility for the Mills Act after rehabilitation.

Analysis

The City of Los Altos currently has 15 Mills Act agreements for properties located in Los Altos. The Mills Act serves as a mechanism for reducing property taxes on eligible historic properties. Under this Act, a current use assessment, often referred to as a contract assessment, is established. Property owners interested in this program must engage in a preservation agreement, granting them the benefit of a reduced property tax rate as determined by the County Assessor. This reduction is provided in exchange for the commitment to preserve, and in some instances, restore and rehabilitate, the historic structure on the property. The property tax rate is determined by the County Assessor, who appraises the market value of both the land and the improvements associated with the historic structure. Properties under a Mills Act agreement receive a property tax reduction based on the appraisal of the rental value of the land and improvements linked to the historic structure. These agreements are authorized under Municipal Code Chapter 12.44.170, allowing the City Council to approve Mills Act agreements as an incentive for safeguarding and preserving historic properties.

Mills Act agreements have a standard duration of ten years, accompanied by an automatic renewal clause on an annual basis. Importantly, both parties involved, namely the property owner and the City, retain the option to revoke the agreement should they wish to do so at a later date. A key stipulation within the historic preservation agreement is that any funds saved on property taxes must be reinvested into the preservation, restoration, or enhancement of the historic structure. To facilitate this commitment, a schedule outlining proposed improvements to the structure and the property is included as Exhibit B in the draft agreement, detailed in Attachment D.

Based on the recommendations provided by the historian, as outlined in Attachment D, the historical resource located at 41 Hawthorne Avenue is affirmed to maintain its architectural significance, as per both state and local criteria. Consequently, it continues to hold its status as a significant historic resource and is deemed appropriate for consideration for a Mills Act contract, reaffirming the commitment to its preservation and enhancement.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

this designation is classified as an historic resource restoration/rehabilitation/ preservation project and is categorically exempt from environmental review under Section 15331 of the California Environmental Quality Act

PUBLIC NOTIFICATION AND CORRESPONDENCE

A public meeting notice was posted on the property, mailed to property owners within 300 feet of the subject site, and published in the Town Crier. The applicant also posted the public notice sign (24" x 36") in conformance with the Planning Division posting requirements.

Staff received no comments from neighbors as of the writing of this report.

Cc: Sreenivas Naganedra Tallam and Isabel Tallam, Applicant/Owners

Attachments

- A. Site Map
- B. Resolution No. 2023-__

- C. Historic Evaluation and Secretary of the Interior Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties Review, Stacey De Shazo
- D. Proposed Ten Year Rehabilitation/Restoration/Maintenance Work Plan
- E. Mills Act Application Recommendation Letter, Stacey De Shazo
- F. Historian Support Letter for Ten-Year Work Plan, Stacey De Shazo
- E. Historic Preservation Agreement