



DATE: September 25, 2023

AGENDA ITEM #1

AGENDA REPORT

TO: Historical Commission

FROM: Sean Gallegos, Senior Planner

SUBJECT: H23-0001 – 604 Milverton Road

RECOMMENDATION:

Recommend approval of a new two-story house and the conversion of an existing historic house into a historic accessory building on a Historic Resource property subject to the listed findings and conditions

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This application seeks advisory review for a new two-story house with a 5,414 square-foot first story and a 2,831 square-foot second story, and the conversion of an existing historic house into a historic accessory building. This project is categorically exempt from environmental review under Section 15303 (“New Construction or Conversion of Small Structures”) and Section 15331 (“Historical Resource Restoration/Rehabilitation”) of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

BACKGROUND

The Costello House, a 1916 Craftsman Bungalow located at 604 Milverton Road, is listed in the Los Altos Historic Resource Inventory. Originally serving as a secondary residence for Francis J. Costello, Sr., and his family, it later became their primary family home and was inhabited by subsequent generations. Although the property once featured apricot orchards, these are no longer present.

The Costello House at 604 Milverton Road is vernacular bungalow type residence designed with elements of the Craftsman architectural style. The Arts and Crafts Movement, which influenced the design of the California Craftsman Bungalow, was based on the theory of honesty and natural beauty of construction and materials. 604 Milverton Road is somewhat of a hybrid between the Craftsman and Arts & Crafts styles, with elements unique to California bungalows and the aesthetic preferences of the Costello family.

The Costello house conforms to the traditions of the Craftsman style roof in massing, pitch, and proportion of the roof and gables, but deviates in that there are no beams, brackets, or knee braces. The ornamentation along the roofline is plain, and the gables are rounded. The carved apricot and leaf motif at the central gable tops the most arched of these front facing gables and all display the influences of the Arts and Crafts style on the Craftsman proportioned bungalow.

The Costello House retains many elements of its original materials, including the wood clapboard siding, masonry chimney, window fenestrations, wood window frames, wood sills, and wood roof framing. Most of the wood elements were made of redwood. The intersecting gable roof forms are original. The central gable roof has two bowed gables on each side with curved bargeboards and open eaves. The original grouped windows of three on the front facade fenestrations, wood frames and wood sills have been left intact. The rear porch addition alters the original scale and proportion of the house, but this addition is on a secondary façade and occurred in 1985-86, outside of the period of significance.

In order to be eligible for historic designation, the Costello House needs to satisfy three criteria (Age, Integrity, and Historic Significance) for designation as a historic resource or landmark. The project historian found the house retains integrity of Design, Materials, Workmanship, and Feeling. It does not retain integrity of setting. However, the subject property at 604 Milverton Road, historically called the Costello House, does display a level of historical significance and integrity that would qualify it for listing as a historic resource on the National Register of Historic Places, on the California Register of Historical Places, as a local Historic Resource or Landmark for the City of Los Altos. The Costello House is significant for its architecture, as a fine example of a vernacular California Bungalow with a mixture of Craftsman and Arts & Crafts design elements. It is also significant for its association with the overall development pattern of Los Altos and the South Bay region for its transition from a large apricot farming property to single family residential suburban properties. A copy of the Historic Resource Evaluation is provided as Attachment A.

Morningside Planned Unit Development

The property at 604 Milverton Road is a parcel within the Morningside planned unit development. The Morningside planned unit development (PUD) has 11 single-family dwellings in approximately 5.2 acres. The development is split into two sections with 10 units on approximately 3.1 acres and one unit (the historic house on subject property) on approximately 2.1 acres (see Attachment C). The total gross site area of the Morningside development is 226,740 square feet with a net site area of 181,392 square feet.

In 1971 the City determined the overall density for Creekside Oaks and what became the Morningside development when approving the 76 dwellings for the Creekside Oaks development. The City limited the Morningside development density to 10 single-family dwellings in addition to the existing single-family dwelling on the subject property. In 1985 the City approved the Morningside development subject to requirements for a conservation easement and dwelling limit on the subject property (Attachment E) which are discussed below.

Lot 12

The subject property, Lot 12 in the subdivision, is the home site of the original property owner and remains in the family's ownership to date. The property has a single-family and historic residence and an accessory building. The structures are accessed via a private driveway between the units at 720 and 730 Morningside Road. As part of the development the City created a conservation easement and restricted Lot 12 to a single-family residence as provided in the applicable laws and regulations of the City.

On September 24, 2013, the City Council approved modifications to the Morningside PUD with the following amendments:

1. Any new dwelling shall be subject to a Historical Commission recommendation, if necessary, and Zoning Administrator review and approval. Prior to submittal to the City, the property owner shall provide evidence of architectural review by the Morningside of Los Altos Community Association, if required, by the property's Covenants, Conditions and Restrictions;
2. If a new dwelling is developed, then the nonconforming dwelling must be removed or converted to an accessory building. Removal of the nonconforming dwelling shall be subject to the recommendation of the Historical Commission. "If retained, conversion must be complete prior to final occupancy and accessory units shall not be rented;
3. Any new structures shall be subject to the following building setbacks:
 - a. Front yard - 35 feet;
 - b. Side yard - 25 feet; and
 - c. Rear yard - conservation easement line;
4. Any new structures shall be located outside of the dripline of the oak tree unless recommended by a certified arborist;
5. Any new development shall appear to be single-story and have no more than 6,000 square feet of lot coverage;
6. The driveway for any new development shall use the existing driveway apron on Morningside Drive;
7. Any development that converts the existing structure shall remove the septic system and convert the unit to sanitary sewer as required by the City Engineer. Any other modifications shall be in a manner consistent with the Santa Clara Valley Water District;
8. Any new dwelling shall be compatible with the architecture of the Morningside planned unit development, immediately surrounding area and adjacent properties, and subject to the City's Single-Family Residential Design Review Guidelines;
9. The amended Condition No. 7 to state that the property owner shall maintain the conservation easement area including removal of any abandoned septic systems, water wells, drains and other structures as required by the Santa Clara Valley Water District;
10. At the time of a new home proposal, the property owner shall provide an evaluation of any eucalyptus and non-native trees creating a fire hazard within the conservation easement only near the historic structure; and
11. The property owner shall remove any eucalyptus and non-native trees creating a fire hazard within the conservation easement only near the historic structures as recommended by the City Arborist.

ANALYSIS

The proposed project proposes a new two-story house with a 5,414 square-foot first story and a 2,831 square-foot second story, and the conversion of an existing historic house into a historic accessory building. The site plan depicts Lot 12 with the existing house in a light salmon color and the proposed new two-story house in blue. Access to the existing historic house is provided through a private driveway situated between units 720 and 730 Morningside Road.

The existing historic house and the carport are located near the center of the property, but the house is close to the property lines on the west side and the garage is situated close to the property boundary on the east side. The house is not visible from Morningside Road or from Milverton Road, because it sits below street level, on a grade closer to Adobe Creek. The front façade of the house faces east. The property is in a mostly wooded area and includes a segment Adobe Creek, to the east of the house.

Within the context of a development agreement for the Morningside PUD, the City has established a conservation easement that imposes a restriction on Lot 12, permitting it for use as a single-family residence only. Under this restriction, the existing historic house can continue to exist within the conservation easement. However, to facilitate the development of the proposed new single-family house, a necessary step would involve transforming the existing historic house into an accessory structure. This transformation would entail the removal of the kitchen from the historic house.

It's important to note that this conversion of the historic house into an accessory structure aligns with the deed restriction's objective, which is to permit only a single-family house on the property in the event of the creation of a new house. As per the definition, accessory structures are permissible as long as they are associated with the principal structure. The proposed new house complies with the development plan, including the amendments of the Morningside Planned Unit Development.

The proposed new house is located at the northeast corner of Lot No. 12, with its front façade directly along the frontage of Milverton Road and the entrance of the Morningside PUD.

The new two-story house is a contemporary style house with rectangular forms and simple massing and details that relate well to the low-scale, Ranch style houses in the neighborhood context. The project uses low-sloped hipped roof forms, which are consistent with the hipped roofs found in the neighborhood. The proposed project uses more eclectic forms than those found in the surrounding neighborhood, such as a formal front entry with the flat roof form, which is integral to the proposed architectural style. The detailing and materials of the structure reflect a high level of quality and appropriate relationship to the rustic qualities of the area. The proposed building materials, which include clay tile roof, stucco and stone siding, wood clad windows and front door, wood garage door and wood trim and details, are integral to the design. Overall, the design incorporates a contemporary style with simple elements and quality materials that produce a thoughtful and integrated appearance that is compatible with the character of the area.

Staff reviewed the project to ensure consistency with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Structures (SOIS) and staff's comments are provided below:

1. *A property shall be used for its historic purpose or be placed in a new use that requires minimal change to the defining characteristics of the building and its site and environment.*

Response: The application proposes to alter its current use as a single-family residence to an accessory due to the removal of the kitchen. These changes have been carefully planned to ensure that the defining characteristics of the building, as well as its site and environment, remain unchanged.

2. *"The historic character of a property will be retained and preserved. The removal of distinctive materials or alteration of features, spaces, and spatial relationships that characterize a property will be avoided."*

Response: The application does not propose any exterior alterations to the historic resource, nor the removal or alteration of any distinctive materials features, spaces, and spatial relationships of the building.

3. *"Each property shall be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or architectural elements from other buildings, shall not be undertaken."*

Response: The proposed new house does not include any conjectural features. Instead, it utilizes compatible forms without any stylistic decoration. Additionally, any similar materials used in the addition are offset or textured to distinguish the different eras of construction and maintain the historic integrity of the original historic building.

4. *"Most properties change over time; those changes that have acquired historic significance in their own right shall be retained and preserved."*

Response: The historic building did not showcase any artistic or significant changes, in the alterations made to the house.

5. *"Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property shall be preserved."*

Response: The original design and construction, workmanship and materials are preserved in the historic house. The proposed new house separates from original historic building.

6. *"Deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature shall match the old in design, color, texture, and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features shall be substantiated by documentary, physical, or pictorial evidence."*

Response: There are no known deteriorated features.

7. *"Chemical or physical treatments, such as sandblasting, that cause damage to historic materials shall not be used. The surface cleaning of structures, if appropriate, shall be undertaken using the gentlest means possible."*

Response: There will be no physical or chemical treatments that will affect the historic materials of the existing building.

8. *Significant archeological resources affected by a project shall be protected and preserved. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures shall be undertaken.*

The project scope does not include invasive foundation work or landscaping that would affect the site. Therefore, it is unlikely that undisturbed archeological resources are present at the site.

9. *“New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and environment.*

Response: The proposed new house is a new construction and is designed to be compatible with the ca. 1916 house. The new garage is constructed of wood framing, with stucco and stone cladding and a low-pitch roof. The new house is 160 feet from the ca. 1916 historic structure. It does not intrude on the ca. 1916 structure or compete with the character-defining elements of the primary façade (south elevation), allowing the ca. 1916 house to remain a defining structure in its original setting on the Property (Figure 41).

10. *“New additions and adjacent or related new construction shall be undertaken in such a manner that if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.”*

Response: The new house will be constructed so that if in the future it is removed, it will not adversely affect the integrity of the ca. 1916 structure.

Therefore, the proposed new house does not adversely affect the physical integrity, or the historic significance of the property and it is consistent with the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Structures.

In order to make a positive advisory recommendation, the Commission will need to find that the project is consistent with the provisions of the Historic Preservation Ordinance and does not adversely affect the physical integrity or the historic significance of the property. Once the Commission provides a recommendation, the project will be reviewed by the Zoning Administrator for the design review application.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

This project is categorically exempt from environmental review under Section 15303 (“New Construction or Conversion of Small Structures”) of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) because it involves the construction of a single-family dwelling in a residential zone. categorically exempt from environmental review under Section 15303 (“New Construction or Conversion of Small Structures”) because it involves the construction of a single-family dwelling in a residential zone and Section 15331 (“Historical Resource Restoration/Rehabilitation”) of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) due to the project complying with the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Structures

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.

The applicant conducted community outreach by mailing letters with renderings of the new house to neighbors in the immediate neighborhood context. An overview of the neighborhood outreach by the property owner is provided as attachment B. Staff has received two letters supporting the project, including the homeowner's association for the Morningside PUD.

Staff received two comments from neighbors as of the writing of this report.

Cc: Dino Garcia, Applicant and Designer
Roberto Giovannotto, Owners

Attachments

- A. Historic Resource Evaluation, Garavaglia Architecture
- B. Community Outreach Letter
- C. Site Photos
- D. Materials Board
- E. Correspondence
- F. Project Plans

FINDINGS

H21-0002 – 604 Milverton Road

With regard to the Advisory Review, the Historical Commission finds the following in accordance with Section 12.44.140 of the Municipal Code:

1. The project complies with all provisions of the Historic Preservation Ordinance (Chapter 12.44) due to the project not adversely affecting the physical integrity or the historic significance of the subject property, and the project being in compliance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties; and
2. The project does not adversely affect the physical integrity or the historic significance of the subject property. Although the house has undergone alterations, it still retains enough historic fabric to be considered as having integrity. The house is significant as a variant of the Craftsman style. The house retains integrity of Design, Materials, Workmanship, and Feeling. It does not retain integrity of setting. The subject property at 604 Milverton Road, historically called the Costello House, does display a level of historical significance and integrity that would qualify it for listing as a historic resource on the National Register of Historic Places, on the California Register of Historical Places, as a local Historic Resource or Landmark for the City of Los Altos.

CONDITIONS

H23-0001 – 604 Milverton Road

GENERAL

1. Expiration

The Historical Commission Advisory Review approval will expire on September 25, 2025, unless prior to the date of expiration, a building permit is issued, or an extension is granted pursuant to Section 14.76.090 of the Zoning Code.

2. Approved Plans

The approval is based on the plans and materials received on July 6, 2023, except as may be modified by these conditions.

3. Indemnity and Hold Harmless

The applicant/owner agrees to indemnify, defend, protect, and hold the City harmless from all costs and expenses, including attorney's fees, incurred by the City or held to be the liability of the City in connection with the City's defense of its actions in any proceedings brought in any State or Federal Court, challenging any of the City's action with respect to the applicant's project. The City may withhold final maps and/or permits, including temporary or final occupancy permits, for failure to pay all costs and expenses, including attorney's fees, incurred by the City in connection with the City's defense of its actions.

INCLUDED WITH THE BUILDING PERMIT SUBMITTAL

4. Conditions of Approval

Incorporate the conditions of approval into the title page of the plans.