

12 June 2024

Sean Gallegos, Liaison for the Historical Commission
1 North San Antonio Road
Los Altos CA 94022
Email: Sgallegos@losaltosca.gov

Re: 762 Edgewood Way, Los Altos

Dear Mr. Gallegos,

The History Commission of the City of Los Altos, and City Council have determined that the referenced property, known as the **Sarah Winchester House**, is a historic landmark with architectural value to the community. As such, any rehabilitation or alteration must be consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. Urban programmers was contacted by Walter Chapman, Chapman Design Associates, the designer for the rehabilitation of the house, to provide a third party professional review of the rehabilitation plans for consistency with the "Standards."

The original redwood frame cottage of c.1840 was extensively enlarged in 1888 by Sarah Winchester for her sister Miriam. Since that time there have been alterations to the house that maintained a variation but appears very much like the original building.

We started by identifying the character-defining features of the buildings and then reviewing the proposed plans to determine if important features were being altered. We found that the proposed plans showed very little change to the primary facade but added compatible dormers to the west roof line. Other minor window and door modifications are in character with the architecture and are considered insignificant.



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Sheet A5.1

This is the north elevation, called "RIGHT SIDE" on the plans. It shows no changes to the first floor. At the second floor the window to Bedroom 3 has been enlarged and in Bedroom 2 one window has been relocated and a matching one added.



Sheet A5.2

This is the south side, called “LEFT SIDE” on the plans. It shows minor window and door relocations on the ground floor under the existing second floor deck.



Existing south facade



PROPOSED LEFT SIDE ELEVATION

1/4" = 1'-0"

Sheet A5.3

Existing front (east) elevation showing no changes.



Existing east facade

In all the proposed changes are minor and do not significantly affect the architecture of the house.

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation of Historic Buildings.

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings were created by the National Park Service, Cultural Resources Division in 1978 to provide a framework to guide rehabilitation work for projects that were Certified Historic Structures and applied to use investment tax credits. Since that time the "Standards" have been expanded by introducing element specific guidance in the "Guidelines" and these have been adopted by many governmental agencies to promote the same level of guidance to projects that are determined to be local landmarks and/or historic resource properties.

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Property state the importance of identifying the character of a property that contributes to its significance.

To evaluate the proposed change, it is necessary to identify the character defining elements of the historic resource (house). Character defining features are those elements that set the historic building apart from other resources and communicate the design, materials, period, and construction of the building. These include elements that define the Victorian variation of the Queen Anne style in the design, size and mass, multi-planer roof, materials and workmanship. Elements include the bulk and mass of the building, the shingle and board siding, window shape and style, porches and canted walls. The design is unique and thus the building's character is the total of the components.

*"Rehabilitation" is defined as "the process of returning a property to a state of utility, through repair or alteration, which makes possible an efficient contemporary use while preserving those portions and features of the property which are significant to its historic, architectural, and cultural values."*¹

*The Standards are to be applied to specific rehabilitation projects in a reasonable manner, taking into consideration economic and technical feasibility.*¹

Standard 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.

The proposed changes encourage the continued historic use as a single-family residence.

Standard 2. The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.

The proposed plan preserves the historic character of the house. The repair and reuse of the exterior wood system windows retains the materials and craftsmanship of the house. The addition and the new dormers are in character with the building's design style.

Standard 3 Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or architectural elements from other buildings, shall not be undertaken.

The new bedroom dormers are appropriate for contemporary living and are sensitively designed to blend with the house's architectural style. They will not create a false sense of historical development.

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

It is not clear that the house has changed over the years. However the existing home, while eclectic, is symptomatic of the funky architecture that Sarah Winchester is noted for. The proposed changes are not character defining elements.

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

All distinctive features will be preserved.

Standard 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.

The existing house appears to have been properly maintained over the years. None of the proposed work is to repair deterioration. Existing windows and doors shall be reused when relocation is necessary.

Standard 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.

The construction plans and specifications for this work shall contain such instructions.

Standard 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 rehabilitation does not involve excavation into the earth. It unlikely that archeological resources, important to our understanding of pre or recorded history, will be encountered. However, an archeological survey was not part of this review.

Standard 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 its environment.

The very minor exterior alterations need not be differentiated as noted in the report above.

Standard 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.

There is no new construction that alters the historic building significantly.

Finding: The proposed modifications and addition plans, prepared by CHAPMAN DESIGN ASSOCIATES, are consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Property and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings.

- The new bedroom dormers and relocation of some windows is necessary to facilitate contemporary living in this historic house. While not individually significant they fit nicely into the significant Sarah Winchester design of the building.

We appreciate the opportunity to review and comment on the proposed alterations for the Sarah Winchester designed house at 762 Edgewood Way, Los Altos. We conclude that the modifications will not harm or destroy character-defining elements of the historic building and are not a substantial change to the building or the environment. We are available to discuss this review and the "Standards" with you.

Best regards,

Bonnie Bamburg



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