



City Council Agenda Report

Meeting Date: March 11, 2025

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Approved By: Gabe Engeland

Subject: Appeal No. 1 – Appeal of Historical Alteration Permit (H24-0003)

COUNCIL PRIORITY AREA

- Business Communities
- Circulation Safety and Efficiency
- Environmental Sustainability
- Housing
- Neighborhood Safety Infrastructure
- General Government

RECOMMENDATION

Deny the appeal and uphold the decision of the Los Altos Historical Commission for Historical Alteration Permit (H24-0003) for a new library courtyard, and affirming that the proposed project is categorically exempt from environmental review pursuant to Section 15301 (Existing Facilities) and Section 15303 (New Construction and Conversion of Small Structures), of the State Guidelines implementing the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) of 1970 and that none of the exceptions outlined in Section 15300.2 apply.

FISCAL IMPACT

Not Applicable.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

City Council's action upholding the decision of the Historical Commission is not a project under California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The Historical Alteration Permit (H24-0003) for a new library courtyard was analyzed for its associated impacts under CEQA, and it was determined to be exempt from environmental review pursuant to Section 15301 (Existing Facilities) and Section 15303 (New Construction and Conversion of Small Structures), of the State Guidelines implementing the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) of 1970 and that none of the exceptions outlined in Section 15300.2 apply.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL CONSIDERATION

- On June 27, 2023, the City Council discussed location and general design characteristics in consideration of a new outdoor patio for the Los Altos Library at the Civic Center.
- On November 28, 2023, the City Council authorized the use of Civic Center land for the construction of an outdoor library patio and directed the review to the Planning

Commission for final design approval.

PREVIOUS COMMISSION CONSIDERATION

- On February 6, 2025, the Historical Commission and Planning Commission held a Joint Meeting to consider the library courtyard patio project.

BACKGROUND

On February 6, 2025, the Los Altos Historical Commission and Planning Commission held a Joint Meeting to consider the approval of a courtyard patio at the Los Altos Library. Jointly the commissions conducted a Public Hearing where they received a presentation from City Staff, and Project Applicant, asked clarifying questions, received Public Testimony, deliberated, and rendered a decision.

The Los Altos Historical Commission rendered a unanimous approval (3-0-1) from all commissioners in attendance (one commissioner was absent) to Adopt a Resolution approving a Historical Alteration Permit (H24-0003) for a new library courtyard at 13 South San Antonio Road per the recommended findings and conditions of approval; and find the project is categorically exempt pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15301 (Existing Facilities) and Section 15303 (New Construction and Conversion of Small Structures).

The Los Altos Planning Commission rendered approval (4-1-1) by majority vote from all commissioners in attendance (one commissioner was absent) Adopt a Resolution approving a Design Review Permit (DR24-0002) for a new library courtyard at 13 South San Antonio Road per the recommended findings and conditions of approval; and find the project is categorically exempt pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15301 (Existing Facilities) and Section 15303 (New Construction and Conversion of Small Structures).

On February 14, 2025, an appeal was filed for the approved project. The following Appeal was received:

- One (1) appeal was filed by the Preservation Action League Los Altos (PALLA), Alice Mansell, for the decision of the Los Altos Historical Commission on Historical Alteration Permit (H24-0003).

The appeal was filed pursuant to Chapter 12.44 of the Los Altos Municipal Code.

APPELLANTS REASON FOR APPEAL

The appellants reason for appeal filed with the City of Los Altos is attached as Attachment #1 to this agenda report.

ANALYSIS

Historical Alteration Permit (H24-0003)

The Civic Center Orchard is one of the last remaining orchards in Los Altos and holds additional significance as it was planted by early resident J. Gilbert Smith. The approved project involves constructing a new courtyard north of the Los Altos Public Library, a portion of which overlaps the defined orchard boundaries however does not modify such boundaries. The City hired Treanor,

an independent historic consultant firm, to evaluate the proposed project and prepare a Secretary of the Interior Standards Compliance Review report with their findings.

The report found the project does not involve the removal of any character-defining features, which are essential for historic designation as they embody the visual and physical aspects that give a property its historic significance. The Civic Center Orchard's character defining features include its trees arranged in rectangular plots with orthogonal rows spaced approximately 12 by 12 feet apart. While the project will overlap a small portion of the orchard boundary, it will not impact the orchard's historic character. The loss of seven (7) potential planting sites will not affect the orchard's historic significance or integrity, as these sites do not individually convey the orchard's function or historical value. The remaining orchard trees continue to represent the orchard's historic character.

The Civic Center Orchard retains its integrity of location, as it has not been moved, as well as its integrity of association and feeling, remaining an orchard since its establishment in the early 20th century. It also retains integrity of design, materials, and workmanship, as the trees' size, spacing, and arrangement are preserved. Although the civic center has been improved over the last several decades with anticipated new and expanded buildings, the orchard maintains sufficient integrity to convey its historical significance and original function since its initial designation in 1981.

The approved project will not destroy any historic materials, features, or spatial relationships that define the property. The new construction will be clearly differentiated from historic elements while remaining compatible with the size, scale, proportion, and massing of the Civic Center Orchard and its surroundings.

The project was determined to comply with the Historic Preservation Ordinance, does not adversely impact the resource's physical integrity or historical significance, and meets the findings of Section 12.44.140.A of the Los Altos Municipal Code (LAMC) and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties by City Staff, the Zoning Administrator, and a third-party independent historian.

Environmental Review for Historical Alteration Permit

The project is categorically exempt from environmental review under Section 15301 (Existing Facilities) of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines because it includes a minor alteration of an existing public facility consisting of the replacement of an existing patio with a new courtyard. The proposed courtyard area would be approximately 8,265 square feet, which is below the 10,000 square foot criteria identified in the CEQA Guidelines and mentioned above. The project courtyard is also consistent with the General Plan land use designation for the site and is within an urban area of Los Altos that is currently served by existing public facilities and services.

The project is categorically exempt from environmental review under Section 15303 (New Construction or Conversion of Small Structures) of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines because it is the construction of an accessory courtyard patio for the existing Los Altos Library. As mentioned above, the approximately project courtyard would replace the existing Los Altos Library patio.

ATTACHMENTS

- 1. Appeal Filed**
- 2. February 6, 2025, Agenda Item – Joint Planning Commission/Historical Commission Meeting**