



City Council Agenda Report

Meeting Date: March 11, 2025

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Approved By: Gabe Engeland

Subject: Appeal No. 3 – Appeal of Administrative Application Categorical Exemption (NOE ENV 25458)

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) and the Los Altos Planning Commission for Design Review Permit (DR24-0002) 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 and the Planning Commission is not a project under California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The Historical Alteration Permit (H24-0003) and Design Review Permit (DR24-0002) 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 21, 2025, an appeal was filed for the approved projects use of categorical exemption. The following Appeal was received:

- One (1) appeal was filed by the Preservation Action League Los Altos (PALLA), Catherine Nunes, for an Administrative Appeal to the City Council of the Application of the Categorical Exemption and Filing of NOE ENV 25458 for the Library Courtyard Project for Design Review and Historical Alteration Permit.

The appeal was filed pursuant to Title14 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

Environmental Review for Historical Alteration Permit and Design Review 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.

The project is consistent with the General Plan and Zoning Ordinance, as outlined in this staff report. It does not result in significant impacts on sensitive environments, geological resources, biological resources, air quality, and is fully supported by necessary utilities and public services. The project site is not listed on the National Register of Historic Places or the California Register of Historical Resources. While a small portion of the northern boundary overlaps with the Civic Center Apricot Orchard, a City-designated historic landmark, the Secretary of the Interior's Standards Compliance Review concluded that the project would not significantly impact this historic resource as it complies with the Secretary of the Interior Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties. Additionally, none of the exceptions outlined in CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2 apply. A detailed analysis and supporting documentation for the CEQA exemptions are provided in Attachment #2.

ATTACHMENTS

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