



HISTORICAL COMMISSION AGENDA REPORT

Meeting Date: November 19, 2024

Subject: Historic Advisory Review for Exterior Alterations to a Single-Family Home at 236 Eleanor Avenue

Prepared by: Sean Gallegos, Senior Planner

Initiated by: Todd Parmacek, Applicant

Attachments:

1. Primary Historic Record
2. Secretary of the Interior Report
3. Project Plans
4. Material Board

RECOMMENDATION

Recommend approval of the Historic Advisory Review (H24-0008) applications based on the findings; and find the project is categorically exempt from environmental review pursuant to Section 15331 (Historical Resource Restoration/Rehabilitation) of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines– Attachment 1 to the report.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

Property History

The 1914 C.W. Morris House, located at 236 Eleanor Avenue, was designated a Historic Resource in the Los Altos Historic Resource Inventory by the Historical Commission on September 28, 1997. As detailed in the City’s Primary Historic Record (Department of Parks and Recreation Forms 523A and 523B) (Attachment 1), prepared by Circa: Historic Property Development, it is one of the few remaining farmhouses in the city.

This two-story, wood-frame Craftsman-style residence features a square plan and a side-gabled roof with decorative wood knee brackets and exposed rafter tails. The ground-floor entry porch includes a prominent front-facing gable with a balcony supported by paired, square wood porch posts. While the balcony has been remodeled since 1997, it retains its original design elements. Other paired porch posts, connected by simple wood railings, frame the ends of the full-width porch. The entrance is offset to the right, with two large plate-glass windows to the left, and the

house retains its original wood sash windows with smaller upper panes. A circular driveway surrounds a mature palm tree in the front yard.

Originally part of the 1911 Adams Subdivision and associated with agriculture, particularly orchards, the bungalow was owned by the Morris family, who held 14 acres of orchards. C.W. Morris, listed as an orchardist in city directories starting in 1922, was likely the property's owner, though it is unclear if the family was the original occupant of the house. Today, the house is one of the few remaining farmhouses in the City.

Although the house has undergone several alterations, it still retains key elements of its Craftsman design, materials, and workmanship, making it a significant example of the style. While the loss of surrounding acreage and its location on a back flag lot—set away from the street—diminishes its historical association as a farmhouse, the property's design integrity remains intact. Thus, it continues to be considered a historic resource.

Historical Commission Meeting

On April 24, 2023, the Historical Commission recommended approval of an advisory review permit for a project involving the addition of a 1,647-square-foot first story, a 327-square-foot second story, and an 832-square-foot basement to the existing two-story historic residence. The project also includes the construction of a new 588-square-foot detached garage.

Planning Commission Meeting

The Planning Commission subsequently approved the Design Review, Variance, and Historic Advisory Review on July 6, 2023, to allow these additions. The Variance is requested to allow a basement 2.5 feet above grade that exceeds the maximum height limit of two feet, a 326 square-foot second-story addition on a flag lot which allows only one-story structures, a height of 26.2 feet that surpasses the maximum limit of 20 feet for flag lots, and the placement of an accessory structure in the required front yard, where such structures are not permitted.

PROJECT SUMMARY

This application seeks advisory review for several modifications to a designated historic resource, including the removal of a 48-square-foot second-floor porch above the first-floor porch on the east side elevation, the redesign and material change of a 297-square-foot covered terrace. Additionally, the proposal includes the modification of one window on the north (front) elevation and the addition of a new window on the west (right) side

ANALYSIS

Discussion

The proposed alterations are highlighted in the architectural drawings with a red cloud, clearly indicating the specific modifications to the historic house and site. All other changes are part of

the previously approved project by the Historical Commission on April 24, 2023. The Commission will not be reviewing or reconsidering those earlier-approved additions or exterior modifications.

The project involves the removal of a 48-square-foot second-story porch on the east side elevation. The existing balcony, added in the 1990s, features stucco and wood columns that replaced the original wood brackets. The 1914 Craftsman design of the house included a stucco-finished balcony with a central wood baluster, supported by two pairs of wood columns that mirrored the porch design. In the 1990s, these columns were introduced to replace the original double wood brackets, altering the historic appearance of the balcony.

As the current balcony is not original to the 1914 design and detracts from the building's historic character, the proposed project will remove the non-historic balcony. The project also includes replacing the existing door leading to the balcony with a wood casement window, restoring the primary façade to its original 1914 form. Additionally, the roofline and other architectural details will be restored to reflect the house's original Craftsman style, reinstating the historic integrity of the elevation. These changes aim to enhance the building's historic value by removing later alterations and returning the design to its period-appropriate configuration.

The project also includes a modification to the newly approved covered terrace on the north elevation, which was previously authorized by the Historical Commission on April 24, 2023. The proposed revision features a raised concrete deck with a stucco railing, along with a thick, flat roof supported by two clusters of three small columns at each corner. The design of the new roof will incorporate the house's distinctive "bellyband" trim, helping to maintain design continuity between the original 1914 structure and the modern addition. This integration of the "bellyband" trim ensures that the new terrace complements the historical architecture, while subtly distinguishing the addition from the original building.

Additionally, the proposal includes modifications to the window configuration on the north (front) and west (right) elevations. Specifically, one existing window on the north elevation will be modified, and a new window will be added on the west elevation. Rather than adding new windows, the project will reuse existing windows from the 1914 house. This approach preserves the historic fabric of the building while maintaining the integrity of the original design. By reusing original wood windows, the project minimizes alterations to the architectural character of the north and west elevations, ensuring that the overall design remains consistent with the house's historic appearance. The project plans and materials board are provided as Attachment 3 and 4, respectively

Secretary of the Interior Standards

According to the National Park Service, integrity of a historic resource is defined by seven aspects: location, design, materials, workmanship, setting, feeling, and association. Historical professional, Stacey De Shazo of Evans & De Shazo Archaeology and Historic Preservation reviewed the project to ensure consistency with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Structures (SOIS) (Attachment 2), and the historian's 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: There are no proposed changes to the 1914 house that would create a false sense of history.

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 proposal to remove the 48-square-foot balcony will restore the primary façade to its original 1914 Craftsman design, reinstating the architectural integrity of the building. The existing balcony, added in the 1990s, is not considered historic due to its age (less than 50 years) and deviates from the home's original design. Removing this non-historic feature will return the first-floor porch roof to its original form, while the second-floor balcony door will be replaced with a window, further restoring the building's historical character.

The proposed covered terrace on the north elevation features a raised concrete deck with a stucco-finished railing and a substantial roof supported by two clusters of three small columns at each corner. In keeping with Standard 2, the design preserves the character of the original 1914 structure by ensuring that the new addition complements, rather than competes with, the historic fabric of the house. The terrace is thoughtfully scaled and designed to be compatible in size, massing, and materials with the original architecture, maintaining the integrity of the historic property while allowing for a sensitive addition.

The proposed project includes modifying an existing window on the north elevation and adding a new window on the west elevation. To preserve the historic integrity of the 1914 house, the project will repurpose and relocate existing wood windows rather than replacing or removing them. This approach minimizes alterations to the original design, maintaining the architectural character and craftsmanship of the north and west elevations in keeping with the home's historic materials.

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 exterior modifications to the building do not create a false sense of history.

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, and the alterations made are not of historical importance.

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 and the exterior modification and the removal of the second-story balcony, added in the 1990s, will restore the structure to its original primary façade

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: Because the work is limited, there will be no physical or chemical treatments that will affect the wood shingle or wood trim.

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. Because the ground was disturbed previously in 1911, and subsequently with landscape improvements, 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 removal of the 48-square-foot second-floor balcony, which was added in the 1990s and is not considered historic due to its age and deviation from the original design. The removal of this non-historic feature will restore the primary façade to its 1914 Craftsman form, reinstating the architectural integrity of the building. The first-floor porch roof will be returned to its original configuration, and the second-floor balcony door will be replaced with a window, further restoring the building's historical character. These modifications ensure that the building's design integrity is maintained while accommodating the needs of modern use, in line with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for rehabilitation.

The terrace has been thoughtfully scaled and placed to ensure it does not overpower the original design of the historic building. The size, massing, and material palette of the terrace are compatible with the character of the 1914 house, and the use of stucco and columns echoes the

Craftsman style while distinguishing the new addition from the original structure. The proposed covered terrace enhances the historic building by providing a functional outdoor space without compromising the integrity of the original design or feeling of the house. The terrace's placement and design ensure that the addition is subordinate to the original structure, maintaining the building's historical significance while accommodating modern needs.

As part of these efforts, existing wood windows are being repurposed and relocated within the home rather than replaced or removed. Specifically, one window on the north elevation will be relocated to a new position, while a new window will be added to the west elevation. This approach ensures that the historic wood windows are preserved and reused, maintaining the architectural integrity of the original structure. The new window on the west elevation will be thoughtfully positioned to complement the building's historic design, while the relocated window on the north elevation will restore the original proportions and layout of the façade. These window modifications are in keeping with the project's overall goal of respecting the building's historic fabric while accommodating modern functional needs.

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: No new additions are proposed with the current application. a Historical Advisory Review Permit was previously approved on April 24, 2023, for a project that included a 1,647-square-foot first story, a 327-square-foot second story, and an 832-square-foot basement addition to the existing two-story historic residence. The current application seeks to modify the original permit by removing the second-floor balcony, restoring the original entry porch roof, and making changes to the terrace along the north elevation. Additionally, the proposal includes relocating one window to the north elevation and adding a new window on the west elevation.

As outlined in the report from the Historical professional, Stacey De Shazo of Evans & De Shazo Archaeology and Historic Preservation, the proposed exterior alterations do not adversely affect the physical integrity or the historic significance of the property and are 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 Development Services Director.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The project is categorically exempt from environmental review under Section 15301 (“Existing Facilities”) and Section 15331 (“Historical Resource Restoration/Rehabilitation”) of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines because it involves an alteration and addition to an existing single-family dwelling in a residential zone within the allowable size limitations and

rehabilitation and preservation of a historic resource consistent with the Secretary of the Interior Standards.

PUBLIC NOTIFICATION AND COMMUNITY OUTREACH

A public meeting notice was posted on the property, and published in the newspaper in conformance with the Planning Division posting requirements.

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

FINDINGS

With regard to the historic advisory review to allow for modifications to an existing historic resource, the Commission finds in accordance with Section 12.44.130 of the Los Altos Municipal Code that:

1. The project complies with all provisions of the Historic Preservation Ordinance (Chapter 12.44) because the project will not affect the physical integrity or the historic significance of the subject property and the project complies with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties, and the project has been processed in accordance with the procedural requirements of Chapter 12.44 of the Los Altos Municipal Code; and
2. The project does not adversely affect the physical integrity or the historic significance of the subject property because the site will retain its defining features characteristic of its Craftsman style, including its square plan and a side-gabled roof with decorative wood knee brackets, *wood windows, brackets within the gables, brick exterior chimney, stucco finish, and exposed rafter tails.*

CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL

Planning Division

1. **Approved Plans:** The project shall be developed in substantial compliance with the design plans and support materials and technical reports approved as part of Los Altos planning application H24-0008, submitted on November 4, 2024, except as modified by these conditions as specified below.

2. **Expiration:** This Permit is valid for a period of twenty-four months and will expire on November 19, 2026, unless prior to the date of expiration, a building permit is issued, or an extension is granted pursuant to the procedures and timeline for extensions in the Zoning Code.
3. **Revisions to the Approved Project:** Minor revisions to the approved plans which are found to be in substantial compliance with the overall approvals may be approved by the Development Services Director.
4. **Notice of Right to Protest:** The conditions of project approval set forth herein include certain fees, dedication requirements, reservation requirements, and other exactions. Pursuant to Government Code Section 66020(d)(1), these conditions constitute written notice of a statement of the amount of such fees, and a description of the dedications, reservations, and other exactions. You are hereby further notified that the 90-day period in which you may protest these fees, dedications, reservations, and other exactions pursuant to Government Code Section 66020(a) began on the date of approval of this project. If you fail to file a protest within this 90-day period complying with all of the requirements of Section 66020, you will be legally barred from later challenging such exactions.
5. **Secretary of the Interior Standards:** All construction activities, including maintenance, repair, stabilization, rehabilitation, restoration, preservation, conservation, or reconstruction of the historical resource, shall be conducted in a manner consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties
6. **Single-Phase Development:** Construction of the project shall be done in a single phase and shall not be considered a multi-phased development.
7. **Accessory Structure(s):** Any future accessory structure on-site will require approval by the Planning Division and may require separate City permits.
8. **Landscape Screening:** All utility meters, lines, transformers, backflow preventers, etc., on-site or off-site, must be shown on all site plan drawings and landscape plan drawings. All such facilities shall be located so as to not interfere with landscape material growth and shall be screened in a manner which respects the building design and setback requirements. Additional landscaping materials or modifications may be required by the Planning Division at final inspection to ensure adequate plant screening.
9. **Protected Trees:** Trees Nos. Nos. 1 to 7, 11 to 13, 16 to 21, and 23 to 27 shall be protected under this application and cannot be removed without a Tree Removal Permit from the Development Services Director.
10. **Tree Protection Fencing:** The grading and tree or landscape plan of the Building Permit submittal shall show the required tree protection fencing which shall be installed around the dripline(s), of all protected trees as deemed necessary by the project arborist. Tree protection fencing shall be chain link and a minimum of five feet in height with posts driven into the ground and shall not be removed until all building construction has been completed unless approved by the Planning Division.

11. **Street Tree Protection:** All designated City street trees are to be protected throughout construction activity with protection measures shown on building permit plans.
12. **Basic Air Quality Construction Measures:** The applicant shall require all construction contractors to implement the basic construction mitigation measures recommended by the Bay Area Air Quality Management District (BAAQMD) to reduce fugitive dust emissions. Emission reduction measures will include, at a minimum, the following measures: (a) all exposed surfaces (e.g., parking areas, staging areas, soil piles, graded areas, and unpaved access roads) will be watered two times per day; (b) all haul trucks transporting soil, sand, or other loose material off-site will be covered; (c) all visible mud or dirt track-out onto adjacent public roads will be removed using wet power vacuum street sweepers at least once per day. The use of dry power sweeping is prohibited; (d) all vehicle speeds on unpaved roads will be limited to 15 mph; (e) all roadways, driveways, and sidewalks to be paved will be completed as soon as possible. Building pads will be laid as soon as possible after grading unless seeding or soil binders are used; (f) idling times shall be minimized either by shutting equipment off when not in use or reducing the maximum idling time to five minutes (as required by the California airborne toxics control measures Title 13, Section 2485, of the California Code of Regulations). Clear signage shall be provided for construction workers at all access points; and (g) all construction equipment shall be maintained and properly tuned in accordance with the manufacturer's specifications. All equipment shall be checked by a certified mechanic and determined to be running in proper condition prior to operation.

Building Division

13. **Building Permit:** A building permit is required for the structure relocation and building design plans shall comply with the latest applicable adopted standards. The applicant shall submit supplemental application materials as required by the Building Division to demonstrate compliance.
14. **Conditions of Approval:** The building permit plans shall incorporate the conditions of approval into the Building Permit submittal plans and provide a letter which explains how each condition of approval has been satisfied and/or which sheet of the plans the information can found.
15. **Work Hours/Construction Site Signage:** No work shall commence on the job site prior to 7:00 a.m. nor continue later than 5:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Saturday, and no work is permitted on Sunday or any City observed holiday. The general contractor, applicant, developer, or property owner shall erect a sign at all construction site entrances/exits to advise subcontractors and material suppliers of the working hours and contact information, including an after-hours contact.
16. **Disturbance Coordinator:** The applicant shall designate a "disturbance coordinator" who will be responsible for responding to any local complaints regarding construction noise. The coordinator (who may be an employee of the general contractor) will determine the cause of the complaint and will request that reasonable measures warranted to correct the problem be implemented. A telephone number of the noise disturbance coordinator shall be conspicuously posted at the construction site fence and on the notification sent to neighbors adjacent to the site. The sign must also list an emergency after-hours contact number for emergency personnel.

17. Public Utilities: The applicant shall contact electric, gas, communication, and water utility companies regarding the installation of new utility services to the relocated structure.

Engineering Division

18. Encroachment Permit: An encroachment permit and/or an excavation permit shall be obtained prior to any work done within the public right-of-way and it shall be in accordance with plans to be approved by the City Engineer.

19. Public Utilities: The applicant shall contact electric, gas, communication, and water utility companies regarding the installation of new utility services to the site.

20. Americans with Disabilities Act: All improvements shall comply with the latest version of Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).