



CITY OF
**PALO
ALTO**

ITEM #1

Historic Resources Board

Staff Report

Agenda Date: June 25, 2015

To: Chair Kohler and the Historic Resources Board

From: Matthew Weintraub, Planner

Subject: **1305 Middlefield Road [15PLN-00145]:** Request by the City of Palo Alto Public Works Department for Historic Review for a proposal to install new HVAC mechanical equipment and a new fence enclosure at the exterior southeast corner of the Lucie Stern Community Center, which is a Category 1 Historic Structure/Site.

Executive Summary

Staff recommends that the Historic Resources Board (HRB) recommend that the Director of Planning and Community Environment approve the application.

Review Procedure

The subject application for Historic Preservation Ordinance Review is subject to review by the HRB pursuant to Municipal Code Chapter 16.49. The applicant proposes exterior alterations to a property that is listed in the Palo Alto Historic Inventory as a Category 1 historic structure/site, which is considered a "significant building".

According to Municipal Code Section 16.49.050 (a), any application for a building permit for exterior alteration to any historic structure/site in the downtown area or a significant building elsewhere in the city, new construction on a parcel where there is currently a historic structure in the downtown area or a significant building elsewhere in the city, or such application for construction within a historic district, is subject to review by the HRB.

Property Description

The subject property is the Lucie Stern Community Center, a public facility located on a City-owned irregularly shaped 18.27-acre parcel. The parcel is bounded by Middlefield Road, Embarcadero Road, and a public school located on a separate lot to the south; Newell Road to the east; Melville Avenue to the west; and Hopkins Avenue, Harriet Street, and residential properties to the north. The community center consists of the primary building, a theater building, and a children's theater, located at the west end of the property, facing Middlefield Road and Melville Avenue. In addition to the community center, the parcel is occupied by a museum, a zoo and a pool. The property is zoned Public Facility (PF).

The Lucie Stern Community Center is a stucco-clad building complex with clay tile roofs that was constructed in phases between 1932 and 1940. It was designed by local master architect Birge Clark and built by locally renowned builder Wells Goodenough. According to the property's historic inventory form: "The complex combines several one and two-story Spanish Colonial Revival structures in a planning scheme that utilizes an entry patio, decorative circular fountain and wooden bench seating. The buildings are sited in a landscaped park". The community center is also described as "carefully

composed” and “a visual and focal point for the surrounding area, utilizing a design mode important to the character of Palo Alto”.

Description of Proposed Project

The applicant proposes to install new exterior HVAC equipment, a new concrete pad, and a new wood enclosure at the southeast corner of the main community center building, which is the part of the property located closest to and facing Middlefield Road. The project site is located within an exterior building ell, formed by an administrative wing to the north and the ballroom wall to the east. The site is currently landscaped with grass and hedges. The purpose of the new mechanical equipment is to provide temperature control within the main community center building. The theater and the children’s theater are currently temperature controlled.

The proposed location at the southeast corner of the community center building was selected as the most suitable location for the new mechanical equipment because:

- The site provides an area sufficient for the operation of the mechanical equipment.
- The site is not located near any major building entrances, paved walkways, or trees.
- The site is located within a building ell, which is a less visually prominent location than at a projected building façade or a rooftop.
- The only existing window views that would be affected are located at interior office spaces, and window views from important community spaces such as the ballroom would not be affected.

The proposed new HVAC equipment consists of two separate metal-housed units approximately 5’-5” tall, 3’-6” wide, and 9’-1” and 12’-7” long. The mechanical units would be installed on a new concrete pad, approximately 17’-2” by 18’-3”. The equipment pad would be surrounded by a new six (6)-foot tall redwood picket enclosure, three-sided with clipped corners, extending from the exterior building wall located to the north. At its closest point, the southwest corner of the enclosure would be located approximately 25’-4” from the sidewalk at Middlefield Road. The proposed design and materials of the new redwood picket enclosure would match those of similar existing wood enclosures that screen other maintenance and utility areas at the south and east elevations of the building.

The three-sided fence enclosure would extend from the exterior building wall to the north, which contains a row of three windows (corresponding to interior office spaces), two of which would be visually obstructed by the new installation. The fence enclosure, which would be freestanding with reinforced posts and footings, would not contact the building wall and would maintain a one (1) inch gap between the fence and the wall. The new mechanical units would be located a minimum of four (4) feet from the north wall. The wood enclosure would be located approximately 7’-8” from the exterior ballroom wall to the east, which contains a non-primary entrance to the building. Access to the equipment would be gained by a double-leaf redwood picket gate with cross bracing and a carved profile, located in the east side of the enclosure facing the ballroom.

Potential Alternative Locations

Several potential alternative locations for the new mechanical equipment were considered at the south side of the building, but were found to be less suitable for various reasons, and rejected. The potential alternative locations considered and the reasons they were rejected are as follows:

- An existing exterior light well located along the south wall of the ballroom was considered. The location was rejected because the size of the light well does not provide suitable space for access or air flow to the equipment.

- The lawn area to the south of the ballroom was considered. The location was rejected because it would be visually prominent (located along the long ballroom elevation and close to a paved walkway) and it could potentially impact the health of existing trees.
- The area near the south entrance was considered. The location was rejected because it would be visually prominent (at a major entrance) and it could potentially impact the health of an existing olive tree.
- The building's sloped roof was considered. The location was rejected because it would result in adverse visual impacts to the roofline and adverse material impacts to the existing clay roof tiles.

Only locations at the south side of the community center building were considered potentially suitable for the proposed new mechanical equipment. Locations at the north, east and west sides of the building were not considered potentially suitable because of the visually prominent architectural elevations, courtyard landscapes, and high volumes of pedestrian traffic that occur in these areas.

Review Standards

According to Municipal Code Section 16.49.050 (b), the review bodies shall consider the architectural style, design, arrangement, texture, materials and color, and any other pertinent factors in evaluating applications. The prime concern should be the exterior appearance of the building site.

The Standard of Review in Section 16.49.050 (b) (1) is applicable. It states that on buildings not in a historical district, the proposed alterations should not adversely affect the exterior architectural characteristics nor the historical or aesthetic value of the building and its site.

In 1987, the City Council adopted the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation for use by the HRB. The Standards for Rehabilitation promote historic preservation best practices that help to protect our nation's irreplaceable cultural resources. In order to make findings based on the Standards of Review found in Section 16.49.050 (b), the HRB may refer to the Standards for Rehabilitation.

Analysis

Staff analysis finds that the project is consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. The proposed installation of new mechanical equipment, concrete pad, and wood enclosure is compatible in form, materials and style, and subordinate in location and scale, to the historic structure. It would not result in the removal or alteration of any existing building features or any significant landscape or site features. It would not disrupt the existing spatial relationships of the building and its site. It could be removed entirely in the future without affecting the integrity of the resource.

The following table provides analysis of consistency of the proposed project with each of the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation.

Standards for Rehabilitation	Staff Analysis
<p>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.</p>	<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Consistent <input type="checkbox"/> Not consistent <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable</p> <p><i>Explanation:</i> The property would continue to be used as a community center, which is its historic purpose. Continued use requires minimal change to the historic structure and its site, such as installation of new mechanical equipment for environmental and energy systems.</p>
<p>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.</p>	<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Consistent <input type="checkbox"/> Not consistent <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable</p> <p><i>Explanation:</i> The project proposes no changes to the existing building. It would require the removal of a small area of existing landscape, including grass and hedges, which are not historic or character-defining. While it would be constructed within the ell space that characterizes the southeast corner of the building, it would retain and be subordinate to the space.</p>
<p>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.</p>	<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Consistent <input type="checkbox"/> Not consistent <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable</p> <p><i>Explanation:</i> The materials, features and details of the proposed new redwood picket enclosures would match those of other existing enclosures located around the exterior of the building, which are compatible with the character of the building. Therefore, the design of the new enclosure would not be conjectural and it would be in keeping with previous changes that have occurred.</p>

Standards for Rehabilitation	Staff Analysis
<p>4. Most properties change over time; those changes that have acquired historic significance in their own right shall be retained and preserved.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Consistent <input type="checkbox"/> Not consistent <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not applicable</p> <p><i>Explanation:</i> The project does not propose to remove, alter or affect any building feature, or any changed landscape feature that may have acquired significance in its own right, such as a tree, fountain or bench.</p>
<p>5. Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a historic property shall be preserved.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Consistent <input type="checkbox"/> Not consistent <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not applicable</p> <p><i>Explanation.</i> No building features are proposed to be affected, including distinctive stucco finishes, wood trim, or clay tiles that display craftsmanship.</p>
<p>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.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Consistent <input type="checkbox"/> Not consistent <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not applicable</p> <p><i>Explanation:</i> No deteriorated features are proposed to be repaired or replaced.</p>
<p>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.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Consistent <input type="checkbox"/> Not consistent <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not applicable</p> <p><i>Explanation:</i> No chemical or abrasive physical treatments are proposed to be used.</p>

Standards for Rehabilitation	Staff Analysis
<p>8. Significant archeological resources affected by a project shall be protected and preserved. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures shall be undertaken.</p>	<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Consistent <input type="checkbox"/> Not consistent <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable</p> <p><i>Explanation:</i> The property is located in an area of moderate archeological sensitivity, according to the Palo Alto Comprehensive Plan. The project proposes pad excavation to approximately 12 inches below grade, and footing excavation to 2'3" below grade, which is not likely to disturb previously undisturbed ground. If archeological resources were to be discovered during excavation, measures would be taken to protect and appropriately treat the resources according to federal and State regulations.</p>
<p>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.</p>	<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Consistent <input type="checkbox"/> Not consistent <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable</p> <p><i>Explanation:</i> The new equipment, pad and enclosure would not harm or affect the existing historic building or any significant landscape features. The new enclosure would be differentiated from the stucco building by wood construction, and it would be compatible with other existing wood enclosures located around the building.</p>
<p>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.</p>	<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Consistent <input type="checkbox"/> Not consistent <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable</p> <p><i>Explanation:</i> All of the proposed new elements – the mechanical equipment, the concrete pad, and the fence enclosure – would be freestanding and could be removed without affecting the integrity of the building. Lawn and hedges could be restored to match existing conditions.</p>

Recommendation

Based on analysis according to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, staff recommends that the project would not potentially affect the exterior architectural characteristics nor the historical or aesthetic value of the building and its site. Staff recommends that the finding of consistency with the Standard of Review in Section 16.49.050 (b) (1) can be made for the application as

proposed.

Attachments

- A. Project Plans
- B. Property Inventory Form

City of Palo Alto

Historic Resources Inventory Detail



Date: 25-Jan-95

Historic Building Inventory ID: 324

location

Historic name: Lucie Stern Community Center
 Common or current name: Lucie Stern Community Center
 Number & street: 1305 Middlefield Road
 City: Palo Alto ZIP: 94303 County: Santa Clara
 Alternate Address:
 Past Address:

status

Category: 1 National Registry
 Historical District: State Registry

ownership

Owner: City of Palo Alto public private
 Address: 250 Hamilton Ave.
 City: Palo Alto, CA ZIP: 94301

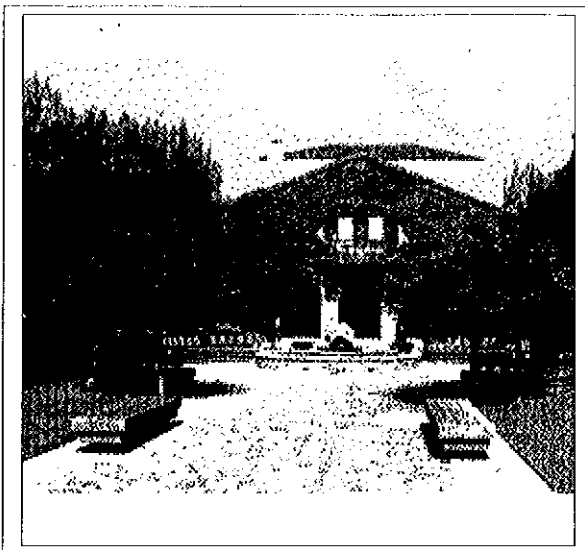
use

Present: Community Center
 Original: Community Center
 Past:

description

The Lucie Stern Community Center is a complex of buildings designed by Birge Clark, an important local architect. The complex combines several one and two-story Spanish Colonial Revival structures in a planning scheme that utilizes an entry patio, decorative circular fountain and wooden bench seating. The buildings are sited in a landscaped park.

Photo Date: 1978



Property Size frontage:
 depth:
 acreage: 18.45 (part)

Condition: excellent

Alteration: Altered

Surroundings:

- Open Residential
- Scattered Buildings Commercial
- Densely Built Industrial

Other:

Threats:

- None Known Public Works
- Vandalism Zoning
- Private Developmen

Other:

description
(cont.)

Architect: Birge Clark

Exterior Material: stucco

Builder: Wells Goodenough

Other Material: tile

Date: 1932

Original Site: original

factual estimated

Theme: architecture

Notes:

Features:

- | | | | |
|---|--|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Barn | <input type="checkbox"/> Formal Garden | <input type="checkbox"/> Outhouse | <input type="checkbox"/> Watertower |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Carriage House | <input type="checkbox"/> Windmill | <input type="checkbox"/> Shed | <input type="checkbox"/> None |

OtherFeatures: Complex of related buildings

significance

The series of buildings were designed by Birge Clark, prominent local architect, in 1932, to be used as a Community Center. The buildings were made possible by the donations of Mrs. Lucie Stern, for whom Clark also designed two other houses. The Community Center is carefully composed and serves as a visual and social focal point for the surrounding area, utilizing a design mode important to the character of Palo Alto. The adult theater was built in 1932; the balance was added from time to time up until 1940, all in accordance with the master plan as originally conceived.

sources

P.A. Hist. Assn. Community Center files; P.A. Times 10/27/33, 3/14/34.

preparation

Organization:

By: City of Palo Alto; Revised 1981- Birge Clark, His

Date: 1978

DB Record Date: 7/22/94

Address: 250 Hamilton Avenue

City: Palo Alto

State: CA

ZIP: 94301

Phone: