

STANDARDIZING THE DEFINITION OF AN NR-6 RATING

By
Ross Eric Gibson

Historic preservation guidelines are intended to protect and improve historic properties, neighborhoods, and their natural/historic context. But when the County Historic Resources Commission applies an **NR-6** rating (meaning *National Register-6*), the County Planning Department has imposed their own interpretation, that derails the historic review process.

1. PRE-CONDEMNED: County Planning believes an NR-6 rating means a building was evaluated and rejected for historic protection. So the County treats an NR-6 building as *pre-condemned*, meaning it may be demolished without historic review or notification. (The Live Oak History Project found listed NR-6 landmarks that both the Historic Resources Commission and Planning Department were unaware had subsequently been demolished.)

2. NO QUALIFIED REVIEW: One goal of a County Historic Resources listing is to provide a public forum on what a structure proposed for demolition means to the community. The Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors are not qualified to pass judgement on a structure's historic status until they've received a recommendation from the Historic Resources Commission. By not going through the HRC, it presupposes the building already wasn't important, and that individual HRC comments run counter to historic regulations. When Planning or the Supervisors have the developer's paid consultant as the only formal presentation of historic requirements and the landmark's history, it disenfranchises the community and commission that had it listed in the first place.

3. ENDANGERING HISTORY: Defining an NR-6 rating as "unprotected" undermines the enrollment of new buildings on the County Historic Inventory. Usually only the most qualified and endangered unlisted buildings are examined, and **those** without historic potential are not granted **any** rating. Even an NR-6 rating is *hard-to-get*, meaning *it qualifies as historic but has non-complying features that need correction*. Yet assuming this category is "unprotected" means attempts to list an historic or endangered structure may only accelerate its extinction.

4. ANTI-IMPROVEMENT: Most communities established Historic Preservation guidelines to facilitate community improvements, and many once-blighted areas have been turned from crime-ridden slums into desirable areas. Yet even County Planning has noted that its approach to the NR-6 rating has deterred people from improving their homes, for fear of being upgraded to protected status; and has made demolition of NR-6 properties more desirable to developers than restoration.

CONCLUSION

The Historic Resources Commission was established in response to a serious community need: because voluntary guidelines don't save history; the planning commission didn't regard *historic significance* as a legitimate factor in any planning decision; and the public had no forum for protecting the character-defining features of their neighborhoods.

So using an Historic Preservation listing as a tool for *discouraging restoration, condemning historic properties, and preventing an Historic Demolition Permit review*, runs counter to the goals of historic preservation guidelines.

DEFINING AN NR-6

An NR-6 (like an NR-5) **is** a *protected* structure of local historic significance only, that **is** not qualified for National Register status.

NR-6 **is** an entry-level listing for altered structures that might otherwise **be** lost or unprotected due to compromised historic integrity.

An NR-6 listing recommends **but doesn't compel** improvements to bring the structure into compliance with historic standards, that would raise its ranking to an **NR-5**.

A STRUCTURE IS AN NR-6 WHEN ITS HISTORIC INTEGRITY IS COMPROMISED BY:

- 1. An inappropriate substitution of materials** (aluminum-or-vinal siding, aluminum-slider windows or vinal windows)
- 2. An aesthetic modernization** (often removing most architectural details)
- 3. A bad pseudo-restoration** (such as mixing inappropriate elements from the wrong historic style, or an incompetent replication of missing features)
- 4. A mis-matched new wing**
- 5. An inappropriate addition** destroying the integrity of the main facade.

AN NR-6 BECOMES AN NR-5 WHEN ITS HISTORIC INTEGRITY IS RESTORED BY:

1. Replacing inappropriate plastic or metal materials with correct materials
- 2 & 3. Replacing missing elements,** or poorly replicated features
- 4. Making a miss-rnatched new wing** compatible with the architectural **style** of the landmark
5. Restoring an altered primary facade by correcting-or-removing the offending element