



COUNTY OF SANTA CRUZ

HISTORIC RESOURCES COMMISSION

PLANNING DEPARTMENT

701 OCEAN STREET, 4TH FLOOR, SANTA CRUZ, CA 95060

(831) 454-2580 FAX: (831) 454-2131 TDD: CALL 711

KATHLEEN MOLLOY, PLANNING DIRECTOR

December 31, 2020

AGENDA: January 11, 2021

Subject: Consider approving the design for a historical installation honoring Robert Merriman for his heroic role fighting fascism in the Spanish Civil War, required as a condition of approval for approved Application #181579.

Staff recommendation: Approve the design for the historic interpretive installation as submitted.

Applicant: MidPen Housing

Owner: County of Santa Cruz

Application #: 181579 (Commercial and Residential Mixed-Use Project)

APNs: 026-741-12, 026-741-13, 026-741-14, and 026-741-15

Situs: 1412, 1438, 1500 and 1514 Capitola Road, Santa Cruz

Rating: Properties do not meet the criteria for designation as historic resources

Existing Site Conditions

Project site: Approximately 3.65 acres

Use: Currently vacant

Planning Policies

Planning Area: Live Oak

Zone District: C-1 (Neighborhood Commercial)

Coastal Zone: No

Dear Commissioners:

Today, your Commission will consider the design submitted by project applicant Mid-Pen Housing for the interpretive historical installation honoring Robert Merriman, his connection to the site at 1438 Capitola Road, and his heroic role fighting fascism in the Spanish Civil War (Exhibit A). At the October 2020 meeting, your Commission provided feedback on a preliminary draft, and directed that Commissioners Pearlman and Merriam form a subcommittee and work with the applicant to revise the design in accordance with your Commission's guidance. The applicant has worked closely with the subcommittee and is here today to present their finalized design for your consideration and approval.

Background

Robert Merriman, broadly recognized as a hero for fighting fascism in the Spanish Civil War from 1936-1938, lived at the residence at 1438 Capitola Road during his teen years. Although this property does not meet the criteria for historic designation according to the 2004 report and DPR form prepared by Sheila McElroy, and the 2019 report and updated DPR form prepared by Architectural Resources Group (ARG) (Exhibit B) and is therefore not a designated historic resource, the Board of Supervisors recognizes the significance of Robert Merriman and the importance of local history to the community. Therefore, as a required condition for the mixed-use project for this site approved by the Board of Supervisors in November 2019 (Application #181579), the applicant is required to provide an historic installation at the site honoring Robert Merriman. In the site plan approved by the Board of Supervisors, the interpretive display is located at the public plaza facing Capitola Road and is accessible to the public. Three interpretive panels are provided, as shown on pages one and 15 of the applicant's PowerPoint presentation (Exhibit C).

Recognizing the expertise that your Commission brings to the review of interpretive historic installations and your knowledge regarding the historic significance of Robert Merriman, the Board of Supervisors directed that your Commission review the design and content of the historic interpretive installation for conformance with the condition of approval and approve the design. It should be noted that as this is not a designated historic property, your Commission's authority for this project is limited to reviewing the installation design and content for conformance with the condition of approval.

Analysis

As directed by the Board of Supervisors, your Commission is required to review and approve the design of the historic installation in accordance with the following condition of approval:

Condition G: Provide details of an interpretive historical installation (which could be instead of or in addition to a mural) honoring the history of the site and honoring Robert Merriman. This installation shall include references to his role as Commander of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, the historical importance of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade fighting fascism in Spain, and reference to Merriman as inspiration for the character Robert Jordan in Hemmingway's "For Whom the Bell Tolls". The design of the installation shall be approved by the Historic Resources Commission.

In the proposed design (Exhibit A), three panels are provided with paintings, photos, and detailed text in both English and Spanish. Panel one, "The Early Years," focuses on Robert's teen years while he lived at 1438 Capitola Road, and how his activities and experience living in Santa Cruz influenced his adult life. Panel two, "The Education of an American Hero," reviews Robert's university education, marriage, and his development as an anti-fascist. The final panel reviews Robert's heroic actions in the Spanish Civil War, including his role leading the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, and his meeting Robert Hemmingway and inspiring the character Robert Jordan in "For Whom the Bell Tolls." As recommended by your Commission in October, the panels focus on Robert Merriman's life and his heroism, and include new, more realistic artwork and historic photos. The panels follow guidance provided by the California State Parks for accessibility, with a minimum font size of 26 points (approximately 1¼") to ensure legibility.

Conclusion

The proposed interpretive panels honoring the life of Robert Merriman, developed under the guidance of Commissioners Pearlman and Merriam, provide a detailed and accurate history, historic photos and realistic artwork. The design and content of the panels comply with the required condition of approval and incorporate the earlier guidance from your Commission. Furthermore, the interpretive display will contribute to the knowledge of our past, with an engaging bilingual display that can be enjoyed by the entire community. Therefore, it is **RECOMMENDED** that your Commission approve the proposed design for the interpretive historic installation, as provided in Exhibit A.

Sincerely,

Annie Murphy, Planner IV
Secretary to the Historic Resources Commission

Exhibits

- A. Applicant Submittal: Merriman Historic Interpretive Panels
- B. Historic Resource Evaluation and DPR form for 1438 Capitola Road prepared by ARC in 2019, and DPR form for 1438 Capitola Road prepared by Sheila McElroy in 2007
- C. Applicant Submittal: PowerPoint Presentation