

To: Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors

From: Historic Resources Commission, Chairman Kevin Newhouse

Re: Priorities of the HRC related to preservation of the County's historic buildings

Date: April 28, 2026

The Historic Resources Commission (HRC) was established in 1984. Its objective as stated in the General Plan is to *protect and where possible restore buildings, sites and districts of historic significance to preserve the rich cultural heritage of the community*. In the past two years the County has been fortunate to have had an historic resources planner who worked diligently to win a \$40K grant from the Office of Historic Preservation that was used to update the County's 1984 Historic Context Statement (completed in October 2025)¹, who managed the delisting of the Redman – Hirahara House (approved by the Board of Supervisors in October 2025), who managed the Mills Act program (approved by the Board of Supervisors in May 2025), and who developed a *Demolition By Neglect Ordinance* that stands ready to be presented to the Board of Supervisors.

There are currently approximately 345 National Register (NR) historic buildings in the County. The County initiated the inventory in the early 1980's with the bulk of the field work to identify historic building conducted in 1984 and 1986 with some updates occurring in 2004. Unfortunately, there are property owners who allow their buildings to deteriorate to such an extent that it can be considered demolition by neglect; the Redman – Hirahara House is an example; a slow demolition for all to see. In some cases, the lack of funds is cause for a building to deteriorate. In the case of the Redman – Hirahara House we can only surmise that the deterioration was a lack of interest on the part of the property owner (the last inhabitant of the Redman – Hirahara House departed in 1986) and a lack of interest on the part of the County to enforce codes intended to assure that structures are safe to inhabit. Unfortunately, we have a monumental disgrace for all to see from Highway 1 in the form of a slowly collapsing historic National Register (NR-1) historic house...here in Santa Cruz County! Demolition by neglect should never have occurred and is preventable through enforcement of the County's building codes. To hinder the loss of historic structures, a Demolition by Neglect Ordinance was prepared in 2025 by the County's Historic Resource Planner. However, this ordinance has not been prioritized by the Planning Department and so is not making its way to the Board. On behalf of the Historic Resources Commission and for the sake of preserving our heritage and historic buildings, I implore you to instruct the Planning Department to move forward the Demolition by Neglect Ordinance.

¹ General Plan Implementation ARC-8.2h states, "Consider applying for grant funds and updating the County Historic Context Statement to provide a more complete context with which to evaluate the significance of historic properties and assist in identifying properties that may qualify for listing on the Historic Resources Inventory."

The following are the relevant General Plan Policies and Implementation Strategies:

ARC-8.2.1 Historic Preservation Program. Maintain, update, and strengthen, where appropriate, the County Historic Resource Preservation ordinance with the assistance of the Historic Resources Commission in accordance with the State Office of Historic Preservation.

ARC-8.2.5 Encourage Protection of Historic Structures. Encourage and support public and private efforts to protect and restore historic structures and to continue their use as an integral part of the community.

ARC-8.2.7 Historic Resource Property Maintenance. Encourage the maintenance and upkeep of historic resources to avoid the need for major rehabilitation and to reduce the risks of demolition, loss through fire or neglect, or impacts from natural disasters.

ARC-8.2f Investigate sources of funding for private and public historic restoration and make such information available to the public.

ARC-8.2g Apply the State Historic Building Code to County designated historic buildings.