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Landmarks panel takes up Natural History Museum plan: El Encanto Hotel, bulbouts on Carrillo Street also among items on its agenda

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Landmarks panel takes up Natural History Museum plan : El Encanto Hotel, bulbouts on Carrillo Street also among items on its agenda The joint Santa Barbara Planning Commission and Historic Landmarks Commission met to review the preliminary concept for the overhaul of the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History facility at 2559 Puesta del Sol.

The commission also took a look at bulbouts on Carrillo Street, a mixed use project on lower State and a revised master plan for the El Encanto Hotel.

The Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History was initially built in 1916, two blocks north of its present location, starting out as the Museum of Comparative Oology.

It moved to its present location in 1922.

As the museum grew, so did the need for buildings, but they were added piecemeal over the last century. The result today is a campus paved right to Mission Creek with various buildings of sometimes seemingly haphazard organization.

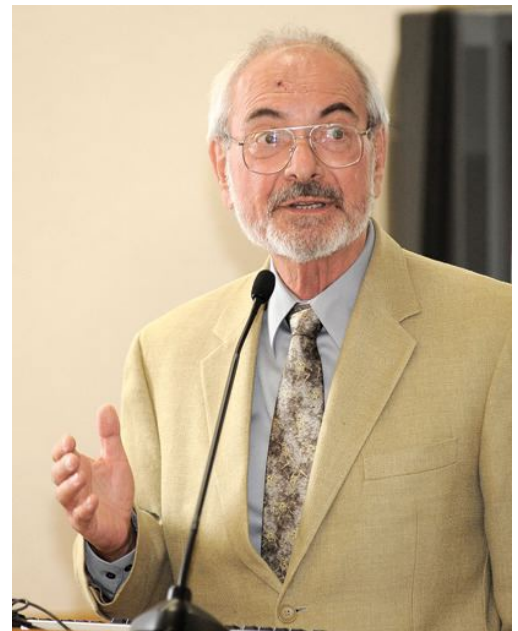
Added to that, according to Museum Executive Director Dr. Karl Hutterer, is the wear on the buildings, exhibit space that is below today's museum quality standards, the need for more interface with the natural environment, and the need for an emergency access route.

To solve those issues the Santa Barbara Natural History Museum Plan aims to rehabilitate some of the buildings it has, remove others and add more for better teaching,



The El Encanto Hotel property as seen from outside the fence on Wednesday. Below, a shot from a presentation at the meeting.

STEVE MALONE/NEWS-PRESS



Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History Executive Director Dr. Karl Hutterer.

THOMAS KELSEY/NEWS-PRESS

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research space and house collections and to give workers more room. About 42,000 more square feet of space would be added to the museum's public, non-public and support spaces, but the ground footprint will only increase by 11 percent because much of the proposed space will be in the form of basements for collections and research work. The new development will take place west of the historic buildings in the current development area, and the MacVeagh house will be relocated from its current site to the campus' northwest corner.

Also included are plans to draw development away from the creek banks and restore them, and to provide an emergency access loop road. The new buildings are also planned to be LEED certified and will take advantage of sustainable technology and be up to the latest seismic standards.

Out front, the parking lot would be largely the same except for efforts made to control runoff, but Puesta del Sol might change to allow for left turn access from Mission Canyon Road, and perhaps even a two-way direction.

To put this Master Plan into effect, the museum would have to annex the county-owned part of its campus to the city.

Among the issues the museum wished for assistance with would be resolving the concerns that arise from being historic and needing to comply with code. The Luria building, for instance, is qualified as historic but does not mesh with the plans to restore the creek. Depending on the setback from the creek, an historic garden may not be restored in its entirety. The museum wanted the panel's help in trying to convince the fire marshal to consider only partially paving the access road to keep it natural looking.

The 11-member joint panel returned with feedback and suggestions from lessons learned with other projects, generally approving of the design of the museum at this conceptual stage. At the request of the city, the museum has been working on this Master Plan for over a year, with consultations and presentations. Because the museum is a nonprofit, and construction will depend on its ability to get funding, this project is seen as a multigenerational one that will be completed in several phases. The museum director asked for help with obtaining a development agreement that would allow it to phase and extend their development for as many years as possible to avoid repeatedly applying to the city every five years.

"The scope of the challenge is truly enormous," said Dr. Hutterer.

There were some concerns from the panel.

Some were uneasy with the new buildings' sizes and designs relative to the historic ones. Character was an issue for others, with plans for photovoltaic panels seeming a little too urban for the semi-rural Mission Canyon neighborhood, and the design of the new buildings not quite comports with the design for the historic ones.

Overall, the members of the review panel seemed satisfied with the buildings' layout. At this early stage, according to the staff report, specifics of the development have not yet been determined, only building location has. They were also appreciative of the attempts to relate to the outdoors and restore the creek bank, advising the museum to check with the Creeks Department on the appropriate setback.

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Several supported moving the buildings that interfere with the creek plans, and also advocated the smaller 25 foot setback to preserve the historic garden, and members supported the museum's bid for a more open, permeable and natural paving of the loop road.

Other ideas were brought up by the panel, such as a few small residential units for staff or visiting researchers, and a plan that would pace funding with projects to prevent failure of the project at any phase due to economic downturns.

Members of the public were also generally supportive of the plans.

So good were the plans it seems, that they received applause at the end of the consultation. The museum plans will appear with more detail again before the city.

"Please move it along so we can see it in our lifetimes," said Planning Commission Chair John Jostes.

The commissioners also reviewed Entrada de Santa Barbara at 35 State Street. The mixed-use hotel, timeshare and commercial project changed, particularly in its landscaping, with the designers opting for a sunken open lawn space similar to the ones at the Santa Barbara Courthouse. Generally, the commissioners urged simplification of building details while requesting plantings to soften the transition between pavement and grass. They also urged the planners to review the choice of jacaranda plantings along State Street and do more research into the native grass planned for the lawn.

The panel also reconsidered its approval of improvements planned for the installation of bulbouts at the 100 block of E. Carrillo Street, at its intersection with Anacapa Street. Two weeks ago, city planners got approval for several improvements to the intersection, which is said to be the site of many collisions. The upgrades include signal poles with mast arms over Carrillo and curb extensions, which are intended to slow drivers down as they approach the intersection and reduce crossing time for pedestrians. However, Commissioner Louise Boucher, taking into account the historical aspect of the area, called the approval back for reconsideration by the commission. The split vote approval was reversed with a proposal instead to leave the intersection as is, without the bulbouts, except for the mast arms with signals.

To proceed with that version of the project, city planners will have to redesign it.

The commissioner wrapped up the day by granting preliminary approval of the designs for Cottages 27 and 28 of the El Encanto hotel. The two cottages are replacements for two that had been eliminated in a previous plan. With suggestions for the design of the two cottages, including recessed windows, and changes to some other architectural elements in 27 and similar changes to 28, plus adjustments in roof ridge alignments for the two-story cottage, as well as discussion over the control of sunlight on the west, the commissioners were satisfied with the design of the structure, with changes to come back in two weeks.