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Board OKs first phase of Mission preservation

By MARY BROWNFIELD

INITIAL STEPS to preserve the Carmel Mission and make it earthquake-resistant received a unanimous thumbs-up from the city's historic resources board Monday afternoon.

Funded by the Carmel Mission Foundation — which is not affiliated with the Catholic Diocese — the work will mostly focus on the Basilica, which was built in 1771 and is one of the most important historic structures in the state.

Father Junipero Serra, who founded the string of missions that led to European settlement of California, is buried there.

According to the report presented by planning and building services manager Sean Conroy at the Oct. 18 HRB meeting, the first phase calls for removing the roof to insert reinforcing materials in the walls, repairing or replacing deteriorated siding and roofing materials, and upgrading mechanical, electrical and plumbing systems.

A saint's birthday

It also includes replacing the deteriorating gated entry arch with a lightweight material that's similar in appearance, building new ADA-compliant restrooms at the rear of the Basilica and upgrading the existing bathroom at the Downie Museum, installing a memorial plaque wall in the courtyard to honor project donors and Serra's 300th birthday, and proving access and paving on the grounds.

Because the general plan encourages protecting and enhancing historic resources, and minimizing the potential adverse impacts of natural disasters, Conroy recommended the board approve the proposal, which will also be considered by the planning commission.

The plans meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties, according to Conroy, who stipulated the new 621-square-foot detached restroom building at the rear of the Basilica should be "appropriately differentiated from the historic structures on the site," so no one mistakes it for a significant building.

He also said drawings and photographs should carefully document the arch — which is falling apart and is in danger of falling — to ensure its replacement is as close a match as possible.

Finally, before a building permit can be issued, documents outlining how materials will be salvaged and reused, including all exterior walls, will have to be filed with the city.



PHOTO/CHRIS COUNTS

This deteriorating arch at Carmel Mission will be replaced, according to plans approved by the historic resources board.

Architect Brett Brenkwitz told the board construction should begin in May 2011 and be completed five months later.

"Once the roof tiles come off, the building is vulnerable," he pointed out, and workers will probably cover the Basilica at night to keep fog and moisture from damaging anything in the church.

New HRB member Matt Little Jr., who was an altar boy at the Mission, was married there last year and can see the buildings from his house, encouraged the seismic upgrades but was concerned about the memorial plaque wall, the fire sprinklers and the lighting proposed for inside.

But Conroy told him all of those were outside the board's purview.

"We need to make sure the board stays within your sphere," which is confined to exterior changes and their compliance with the SOI standards, he said.

Board member Greg Carper, also new, said the work will help protect a local, state and national treasure, and chairman Erik Dyar and the rest of the board unanimously voted in favor of the project.

"I applaud the plan," Dyar said. "It does a great job in terms of ensuring access to the church, and I'm strongly in favor of it."