

# Council Rejects Easement Proposal for Ravenswood

A conservation easement over the historic Ravenswood site isn't in the cards, as far as the Livermore City Council is concerned.

The council voted 5 to 0 not to proceed with establishing an easement. They did not like the idea of giving up land use jurisdiction over the property.

The council did agree to establish a subcommittee comprised of representatives from the city council and the Livermore Area Recreation and Park District board. The subcommittee would discuss Ravenswood to determine if there were problems at the site, if so how to deal with them. The city owns the property. LARPD manages it.

The Tri-Valley Conservancy had proposed the easement as a way to provide additional protection for the city against future development. The easement would prohibit any future subdivision or sale of the property.

Paul Spence, principal planner for the city, added that the easement could prevent some of LARPD's plans, which include expanding the parking lot and constructing a pavilion in which to host events such as weddings. LARPD is concerned that holding major events in the historic buildings could damage the buildings.

Councilmember Marj Leider suggested that a building envelope of one acre could be included as part of the easement. That would allow the park district to construct a pavilion. The city would retain approval rights of the building envelope. The Conservancy would have jurisdiction over the remainder of the property.

Laura Mercier, associate director of the Conservancy, said the nonprofit was very interested in holding an easement over the property as a method of protecting agriculture uses and the historic values of the site. She said the Conservancy was interested in holding further discussions with all parties to look at issues.

Mayor Marshall Kamena was the most adamant member of the council in opposing the easement. He asked, "Why do we want to give this asset away? Over 35 years, I've never seen even the most pro-growth council suggest there could be a modification or sale of the property."

"LARPD, the city and Conservancy don't look to be in concert. I'd much rather see the status quo retained. I can't see any council touching the property. To have another level of bureaucracy is surreal," Kamena declared.

He suggested that the city could take back the property and operate it. Another option would be for representatives from the council and LARPD to meet and come up with something that works for everyone.

Councilmember Doug Horner saw no reason to hand over land use rights to another agency. "I think the council has been a very good steward of the property."

Looking at other options, such as deed restriction, could provide protection in the future, stated Councilmember John Marchand. He, too, was concerned about giving up control of the property.

Jeff Williams wondered what concerns had prompted the Conservancy to request the easement. Mercier said if the facility were to burn down what would happen to the property. What would prevent it from being developed.

Williams said that if folks have a problem with LARPD plans it would be nice to discuss how to iron out the issues. People seem to have different visions for the property.

LARPD, at its facilities committee meeting, recommended placing an easement only over the 10-acre vineyard area. The committee indicated an easement over the entire site could be acceptable provided it gave the greatest flexibility in the management of the site.

At its July 11, 2007 meeting, the LARPD Board recommended approval in concept of an easement over Ravenswood. The terms of the easement were to be worked out in negotiations.

Ravenswood was built between 1885 and 1891 as the country estate of Christopher Buckley, Jr., a San Francisco political boss. In 1931, the property was sold to the Redemptionist Fathers, a Catholic religious order. During the 1960s up until 1972 the site was occupied by a succession of single-family tenants.

In 1972, the property was sold to developer Massud Mehran. In the mid-1970s, 33 acres of the original 100 acre site was given to the City of Livermore as the park dedication requirement for a development project.

Ravenswood is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is a California Historic Point of Interest.