

happy one



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Flanders Mansion inches toward front burner — again

By MARY SCHLEY

AFTER BEING dormant for several years, the fate of the century-old, historic, Tudor-style Flanders Mansion in Mission Trail Nature Preserve is back on the council's to-do list — sort of.

At a daylong strategic planning session Tuesday, the council heard from two people interested in occupying and restoring the mansion — one who would conduct a 120-day “feasibility study” to determine costs and would have the eventual goal of using the mansion as a sort of low-key cultural center, and one who simply said he has the money to do the work now.

Mike Buffo, who submitted an unsuccessful proposal in December 2018 to become the resident curator, revised his plans and presented them to council members at their Jan. 31 session.

“Over these last four years, this proposal has gathered dozens of backers representing over 20 Carmel-based nonprofit organizations,” he said. “This home has also inspired a documentary on this city that my wife and I made, ‘Bohemian Soul.’”

Starting ‘immediately’

Resident Danny Halla, who said he grew up in the building that's now L'Auberge Carmel and now owns three businesses downtown, also wanted to throw his hat in the ring as a potential curator.

“I'm very passionate about Flanders Mansion as the centerpiece of our community,” he said, adding that he'd like to restore the mansion and its grounds “in a way that's respectful to the home's heritage.”



AT&T

Pebble Beach PRO-AM 2023

A Special Section inside today's Carmel Pine Cone — The pros and celebrities, schedules, ticket info, how to get there & more ...



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Playing to the crowd — and it's a big, happy one



While Jordan Spieth and Aaron Rodgers were getting play started in the AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am at Spyglass Thursday morning (left photos), Bill Murray was nearby, being his usual lovable self with the gallery (top). And at Wednesday's 3M Celebrity Challenge, Bobby Bones (bottom left) celebrated with the crowd after a great tee shot, while Scott Eastwood (below) was practically begged to pose with fans for selfies. For complete coverage, see our special section.



PHOTOS/MICHAEL TROUTMAN AND KERRY BELSER



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PHOTO/PINE CONE FILE

A city worker inspects the roof and repairs a gutter at Flanders Mansion in 2018.

Neighbors: Scenic Road repair is long overdue

Big Sur supply convoy set for February 10

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Further, he said, he could get started “immediately.”

“Unlike Mr. Buffo, I won’t need to fundraise,” he said. “I’m ready to immediately commit myself and my family to the restoration.”

Buffo said his proposal “stands out because it allows the city to consider a due-diligence period before committing to a curator” and “promises community benefits beyond simply restoring a city-owned asset.”

Other offers

Buffo, whose House of 8 Media video production company is located in Su Vecino Court near Cultura restaurant, described himself as “Carmel’s videographer,” especially when Covid-related lockdowns forced more people to participate in various activities remotely.

“I have become an essential contributor and have been meeting this community’s needs daily,” said Buffo, who lives in Marina with his wife and three sons.

Buffo recalled the council’s fielding several curatorship offers well before the pandemic, none of which met the diverse needs of maintaining and restoring Flanders Mansion as a single-family home and figuring out a way for it to benefit the community while not impacting the neighborhood surrounding it.

“Our proposal seeks to address all these needs,” he said. “Once restored, Flanders can be an outstanding example of the city’s commitment to Carmel preservation.”

Buffo said he’d like to see the old house, which taxpayers purchased in 1972 but have never been able to use, become “a historic venue in the park to educate users” about the area’s “unique cultural attributes.”

An online directory could make House of 8 productions available to any and all, and anything Buffo and his team produced

at Flanders would be inspired by the city, he said.

“We’d like to conduct a 120-day feasibility study to define the scope of work and estimate cost of repairs and improvements” to electrical, plumbing and other systems, Buffo said, during which he would seek “pledges toward a capital campaign to see if there is enough public support.”

If he raised enough money, Buffo and the city could collaborate on a lease agreement at that point, and if he failed, the city could use the results of the feasibility study in its conversations with other potential restorers.

Buffo urged the council to act quickly on his idea so he could get started.

Supporter Michael Hogan, who said he has advanced degrees in physics and environmental science from Princeton and Stanford and “founded the largest California environmental think tank,” said he’d use his considerable experience in environmental consulting to assist the Buffos with their project.

“I would support the Buffos’ curatorship as an unpaid environmental scientist” supervising planning and construction, he pledged.

“The interpretive center” their project calls for, with a 360-degree mural and other local art installations and information, “will be a vital public benefit,” he said.

More time

Architect Thomas Hood, a member of the board of the Carmel Heritage Society, supported Buffo and his family as well. He said he worked with them on their 2018 proposal and now has the benefit of more time and more thorough evaluations of needs and costs.

“We can put together a really good team for this,” he said. “Part of my job is to generate excitement with Michael for the potential of what can be done.”

Carmel Cares founder Dale Byrne and Flanders Foundation head Melanie Billig,

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who successfully led the opposition against the city's efforts to offload the house, also supported Buffo and his ideas.

"It meets the needs of the property," Billig said. "It meets the needs of the community and the neighbors. We haven't really had a proposal that's been so far reaching and so visionary."

The issue that never dies

Council members were a bit surprised to see a resurgence on the Flanders Mansion front, considering it has been a low priority with little progress made for the past several years.

"I really didn't know we were doing anything on this," said recently elected councilwoman Alissandra Dramov. She suggested that if the city is fielding proposals again, it should open the opportunity to everyone. "I had no

idea this was even going anywhere."

"You didn't prioritize it — we were taking a break," city administrator Chip Rerig confirmed. "Now is your opportunity to determine whether you want to elevate this."

And if so, he said, "you need to have a very open and transparent process for anyone who wants to propose curatorship."

Councilman Jeff Baron said he was unsure the previous process for soliciting and evaluating proposals was the right one. He suggested returning to the drawing board to "decide what the goals and objectives are."

Councilman Bobby Richards succinctly stated, "It sounds to me like the objective is to elevate it," and with that, the moldering old mansion that's been the subject of a 2009 public vote to sell it, a couple of lawsuits to overturn the election, multiple EIRs and a great deal of discussion, is back on the council's work list after several years of getting little attention beyond basic maintenance from the public works department.



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