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UCSD spokesman Jeff Gattas walks through the courtyard at the University House in the La Jolla Farms neighborhood. The former chancellor's residence, declared inhabitable in 2004, is back on track for a multimillion dollar renovation. — Earnie Grafton

Written by
Pat Flynn

noon, Nov. 19, 2011

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LA JOLLA — After 11 years of planning, protests and more planning, it appears that the multimillion dollar rehabilitation of the University of California San Diego's historic University House will begin next year.

The 11,400 square foot adobe house on a La Jolla bluff with a spectacular view of the Pacific has been home to every UCSD chancellor except the current one, Marye Anne Fox.

University House

- Acquired in 1967, as part of a larger 130-parcel for \$1.7 million.

- Built for La Jolla developer William Black and his family from 1950 to 1952 by architect William Lumpkins.

- Housed every UCSD chancellor except Mary Anne Fox, including founding Chancellor Herbert York in his second tenure from 1970-72.

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It was declared uninhabitable in 2004 after Fox's predecessor, Robert Dynes, moved out. Built in 1952, the house was found to have seismic, electrical, plumbing problems, among others. Committees were formed to come up with a plan.

"It was determined that the most cost effective way to build something suitable for the next 50 or 100 years was to raze it and build something new," said Brian Gregory, a UCSD assistant vice chancellor.

That's when the protests erupted.

"We've been on this pretty much since we read that Union-Tribune story in 2004 that said they were going to raze it," said Don Schmidt of the La Jolla Historical Society. "We were really upset and furious that they were going to tear down this house.

"This is a really, really important place. This is probably one of the most significant houses of its type in Southern California, and then there is the sacredness of the Native American remains," Schmidt continued. "This was a Native American village and burial ground. People lived, loved and died here. This is really a sacred site to the Kumeyaay people."

Preservationists and Native Americans rallied against plans to tear down the house and replace it. Among other things, they got the house listed on the National Register of Historic Places and persuaded the state Native American Heritage Commission to declare it a sacred Indian burial site. They also pleaded their case to the University of California's governing board.

"In 2008, the regents asked us to go back and try to come with some plan that our community partners wouldn't object to," Gregory said.

A University House Rehabilitation Advisory Group, with Native Americans and preservationists on board, was formed with Gregory as its chairman. A new architect, Ione Stiegler, who has overseen a number of historic preservation projects, was hired.

"My cocktail party spiel is that I have an un-reinforced masonry, 12,000 square foot building with a failing coastal bluff, with protected habitat — both flora and fauna — and nesting pairs of fauna, which are even more protected," Stiegler said. "And then I add: 'And it's sitting in the middle of a sanctified Native American cemetery.'"

Stiegler noted that the house was built in the Pueblo Revival style by renowned architect Williams Lumpkins between 1950 and 1952 for La Jolla developer William Black and his family. Its two-foot thick adobe walls are made of blocks that were hauled to the coast from Ramona.

A key portion of the work that needs to be done is to mechanically fasten the roof to the adobe walls. Generally in older adobes roofs were simply set atop the walls, a serious seismic hazard.

"It has the typical problem with adobe construction going way back to 1760 or whenever," Stiegler said.

The rehabilitation will include the removal of two "unfortunate" additions made in the 1970s.

"We're going to bring it back more to its historical origins..." Stiegler said. "But it's not a restoration. It's a rehabilitation — being respectful for the old, but also making it work for a modern family."

About 4,000 square feet of the renovated house will be the private residence of the chancellor who arrives after Fox steps down at the end of the academic year. It will include three bedrooms and three bathrooms and a private kitchen, plus an attached guest room that Lumpkins designed about 10 years after the original construction.

The rest will be semipublic space for university use. There will be a commercial kitchen and room for sit-down dinners for approximately 60

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and receptions for perhaps 100 guests.

All the new electrical, plumbing and other utility lines that will run onto the property will be situated in aboveground concrete vaults camouflaged with landscaping so no excavation is necessary.

"It's one of the biggest compromises for the campus," Gregory said.

With the use of ground-penetrating radar, archaeologists have identified 36 "anomalies," which could be ancient human remains, on the property. University officials and Kumeyaay representatives on the advisory committee agreed that the ground should be disturbed as little as possible, officials said.

The two Indian members of the advisory committee declined to be interviewed for this story. But Larry Myers, manager of the Native American Heritage Commission, said they are satisfied with the approach that has been agreed to while remaining troubled by earlier excavations at the site.

"Had it not been for their involvement, the developers would've gone ahead and disturbed the human remains," he said. "The cooperative relationship that has developed is really integral to the project going ahead."

UCSD won unanimous Coastal Commission approval for the project in August. Because it is state property, the university does not need city approval. The UC Board of Regents already has approved plans to use steel and concrete to reinforce the bluff at the edge of the property and is expected to give final approval to the rest of the project at its meeting in January. Construction could start by late spring and will take about a year.

The project will cost \$10 million. All of it will be paid through donations to the university specifically for the work. A \$2 million gift from Audrey Geisel about a year ago capped the project's fundraising effort.

"It looks like it's finally going ahead," said Schmidt, who added that the Historical Society will continue to closely monitor the project. "I'm relieved, and there's also a great sense of joy and accomplishment. It's really a gift to the community. Good things can happen."

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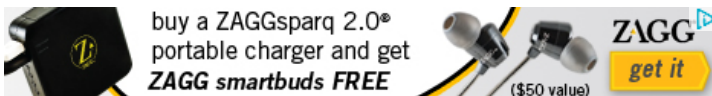
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