Windemere Saga Continues
City Council upholds appeal of Irving Gill cottage demolition

BY PAT SHERMAN

The San Diego City Council voted 5-3 on Sept. 23 to uphold the La Jolla Community Planning Association and La Jolla Historical Society’s (LJHS’s) appeal of a California Environmental Quality Act exemption, which led to the demolition of Irving Gill’s “Windemere cottage,” formerly located at 1328 Virginia Way in La Jolla.

The vote is the latest development in a contentious, two-year conversation pitting development against historic preservation.

The house, built in 1894 and believed to be the master architect’s first home in California, and the first Craftsman home in the state, was demolished on Dec. 23, 2011 after the City of San Diego deemed the property a “public nuisance,” thus requiring its demolition (sans a normally required coastal development permit).

Historic preservationists argue that property owner Frank Bottini knew the cottage was potentially historic when he purchased it, and was aware of the costs associated with restoration or relocation of Windemere if deemed historic (from $750,000 to $1 million, according to LJHS attorney, Julie Hamilton).

Hamilton said that to avoid incurring such costs, and to expedite demolition of the cottage so he could build a modern, single-family residence on the site for himself and his family, Bottini altered the structure by removing “architecturally and historically important aspects of the cottage.” These included redwood brackets in the eaves, and diamond-paned windows.

The changes, preservationists say, weakened the structure and led the city’s Historical Resources Board (HRB) to determine it had been altered too much from its original condition to be historic, and the city’s Development Service Department to declare it a public nuisance.

The motion to uphold the LJHS’s appeal was made by District 1 City Councilmember Sherri Lightner, who represents La Jolla, and seconded by District 9 representative Marti Emerald (opposing the motion were Kevin Faulconer, Lori Zapf and Mark Kersey, with Scott Sherman recusing himself from the vote).

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