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Supervisors Give Green Light to Rehabilitation of Most Significant Historic Structure at Almaden Quicksilver County Park

SAN JOSE-CALIF.— Today the County of Santa Clara Board of Supervisors moved forward with the rehabilitation of one of the most significant historic structures in Santa Clara County, the Casa Grande at Almaden Quicksilver County Park. This building is located within the New Almaden National Historic Landmark District. As the lowest responsive bidder, Bevilacqua and Sons was selected to carry out the rehabilitation.

Restoration of the building requires the removal of all appurtenant structures added after 1927, including the addition known as the "Opry House." Work will include seismic upgrades, restoration of windows and doors, plastering of the interior and exterior, repair of deteriorating brick material, new roof, new HVAC system, landscaping, relocation of restrooms, an audio-visual interpretive presentation room, retaining walls and other improvements.

"When we have historic treasures like Casa Grande, we have an obligation to preserve them for the community and future generations," said Supervisor Don Gage, Chair of the Housing, Land Use, Environment & Transportation Committee. "This is even more important as the valley changes and continues to develop."

This National Historic Landmark District was California's first mining operation--started in 1845, before the major Gold Rush of 1849. Mexican settler Antonio Sunol discovered ore deposits here in the 1820s, identified as quicksilver by Mexican Army officer Andreas Castillero in 1845. Named for the famous Almaden mercury-producing mines in Spain, New Almaden attracted a world-wide interest during the Gold Rush, since mercury was the primary reduction agent of gold and silver. New Almaden became the most prominent quicksilver mine under the operation of Quicksilver Mining Company in the Western Hemisphere.

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The Casa Grande functioned as the Mine Manager's residence until 1927. The New Almaden National Historic Landmark District was designated as a national, state and locally significant site in the mid-1960s for its association with quicksilver mining. The 3,500-acre district (2,500 acres of which fall within Almaden Quicksilver County Park) includes remnants of mining operations and three mine company owned communities, one of which is intact today, namely the Hacienda, known today as New Almaden.

The mining company owned the town and the buildings of New Almaden, including the Casa Grande, from 1845 to 1927. Between 1927 and the County's acquisition of the Casa Grande in 1997, the building had a number of functions such as a resort, saloon, restaurant, home, post office, dance hall, theater and office space.

"The plan for improvements to Casa Grande follows the recommendations of the State Office of Historic Preservation and the National Parks Service," said Lisa Killough, Director of the County of Santa Clara Parks and Recreation Department. "The structure's restoration will preserve the historic fabric of the building."

Preservation and restoration considerations were addressed by Parks and Recreation Department staff, consultants, National Parks Historic Landmarks staff and the State Office of Historic Preservation. Participants determined that the period of significance should be identified with the mining activities and Mine Manager's residency which occurred between 1854 and 1927. Based on extensive archival photographic records and a remodel plan dated 1888, stakeholders followed the Historic Structures Report recommendation to restore the building to the mining period activity, specifically around 1890 to 1900.

Background

The \$5 million Casa Grande rehabilitation will be funded from a variety of sources. Funding is available from the Parks Capital Improvement Program and Reserve Funds. Additional funding is available from the Santa Clara County Historical Heritage Grant Program, Proposition 12 California Heritage Grant, National Trust for Historic Preservation Grant, Proposition 40 Roberti Z'Berg Harris Grant, Proposition 40 Per Capita Grant, Save America's Treasures Grant and Slinger Foundation Donation.

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