

Submission of Public Comment for consideration by the Mendocino Historic Review Board
CASE#: MHRB_2020_0001

March 2, 2020

We are next-door neighbors to the property under review in what we call the “Pink Vic”, directly to its east. Until this time, we have welcomed and maintained a friendly and chatty relationship with the applicants. We've been both supportive and cooperative of their project, even sharing our generator with their construction crew when the power was out, and have continued to be as patient as possible with the noise, dust, and disruption. We'd like you to know that these comments are not easy for us, but something we feel are necessary.

It was quite a surprise to learn just a little over a week ago of the proposals the Dominy's have planned for this historic property, in this historic district, behind Evergreen historic cemetery; changes, if approved, we argue, that bring this community to a critical crossroads in the preservation of its history. Please understand, we have never looked at the policies here as restrictions, but rather as protections.

When the Dominy's purchased their Mendocino property in 2018, we were delighted to learn about the intended renovation and looked forward to the day when it would be completed and the lights would be back on again. Carol and Christina quickly discovered that they shared a mutual interest in local history and were able to successfully research the history and connection of our adjacent properties. In fact, you may have read the article Christina authored about them in the Beacon last year. It is our understanding that as of just about two weeks ago, Carol now presides on the board of the Kelley House Museum.

Because of the obvious pride the Dominy's have shown in owning a piece of Mendocino history, we remain perplexed by the modifications proposed, and with our and the immediate neighbors' not having been given the courtesy of being informed of the specifics or asked our opinions about them prior to the public notice posting. Certainly, they aren't required to do so, but the gesture would've gone far in neighborhood relations. When they did inform Christina two weeks ago of their intentions for both ground and roof-mounted solar panels, Mr. Dominy solidly claimed that we would not be able to see them from our property. A quick consultation of the plans proved that this would most definitely not be the case, something he would have readily determined if they'd ever asked to view the site from our – or our neighbors' – perspectives. The fact is that we will be able to see all but one panel from our house and garden. The panels will be able to be seen in Evergreen Cemetery and a roof panel they have planned as far away as Mendo Realty -- the veritable entrance to Mendocino's historic district – especially if Mr. Dominy follows through on his offer to prune his bramble along the cemetery fenceline to 5 feet in height.

At our request, the applicants agreed to meet us at the site on Saturday, February 29, 2020; however, after learning more we were unconvinced, but recognizing that state law limits local government restrictions on solar installations, simply requested that they please reconsider and abandon their plans.

As it now appears, they are going forward with them regardless, and we offer some points for your thoughtful consideration:

- ~ First of all, please consider that their residence was originally constructed as a one-story home and that it is now surrounded on three sides by taller, two-story homes, all of which have windows that look down into the backyard and upon on the garage rooftops;
- ~ That the residence was originally constructed without insulation and that it remains largely uninsulated to date. The applicants have elected neither to insulate or to install double-glazed windows, choosing to retain the fatigued, single-glazed ones. Recreating the former windows could have been possible as was recently accomplished on the west end of Pine Street;
- ~ The home is being redesigned utilizing largely electric appliances. When asked about their choices on February 29th, Mr. Dominy snapped back that he didn't care about energy efficiency, that sustaining a constant source of electricity for his work was critical. We understand; 95% of Christina's work requires daily use of the computer and if not operational, she is also completely shut down. This is what generators are for, and we're glad to see they have one planned;
- ~ Although dimensions of garden planters are provided in the staff report, dimensions for the solar panels are not given. Mr. Dominy explained on February 29th that the sizes are still being determined, but estimated the ground panels to be 30" tall and 25' in length. We request that that the proposal be returned to the agent and resubmitted to PBS with the specific dimensions when they've been determined;
- ~ Glare and reflection of solar panels onto adjacent properties and public streets are of genuine concern. Their panels will be seen from both Pine Street and Evergreen cemetery avenues;
- ~ It is our understanding there are currently two solar applications in the District; one commercial, and the other, residential. Ms. Cherry was unable to provide us with the specific residential address, but reported that it can be seen from only two locations. We've been unable to find it: a good thing, we believe: "out of site, out of mind" as former MHRB and neighbor Garnish Daly notes. Please recognize that the installation in question is not discreet and will be prominently visible, even from areas of this Community Center;
- ~ We are also requesting that the new water tank proposed be under-grounded, partially-buried, or covered with a compatible structure and materials, as our is, when it was approved by the MHRB. Also, the new tank is not shown in the Attachment A rear elevation -- nor is the full length of the ground-mounted solar array. We request that the proposal be returned to the agent and resubmitted to PBS with a completed elevation for a more accurate depiction of what can be expected;
- ~ Lastly, the manager of the Mendocino-Little River Cemetery District confirmed earlier today that they are unaware of the Dominy's proposals and were not noticed. Although they are a public property, it is contiguous and will be adversely impacted. Therefore, we are requesting on their behalf that you continue public comment to April 6, 2020 so that they have opportunity to comment.

That's a few of our concerns. It's our hope that after studying the project, you'll agree that these proposals are neither sensitive to the setting in design nor in harmony with existing

structures within the District, that they detract and adversely impact from the appearance and value of neighboring public and private properties, and that their approval has every potential in opening Pandora's box for similar requests. We remain unable to comprehend why anyone would elect to relocate to the District knowing the concern for historic preservation and then attempt to override it. Make no mistake: the only ones standing to benefit from their proposals are the applicants themselves -- at the expense of their immediate neighbors and community.

What is evident is that with PSPS and other energy delivery issues, there are likely to be other similar requests coming which will inevitably lead to unnecessary conflicts. Without specific MHRB guidance on solar applications, the issue will continue to leave the board scrambling on how to evaluate proposals. The good news is that successful examples are out there; other historic districts throughout the country are grappling with the same issue. One town in Michigan, for example, approves solar panels only after the property owner has demonstrated that they have taken all necessary measures to increase energy efficiency first. There are various other solutions worth looking into. In the meantime, we believe the board should consider halting all decisions related to solar applications until the time when specific guidelines can be formed, and as quickly as possible.

These are our comments to date; please place them into the administrative record. We plan to submit additional comment and ask that the Chair keep public comment period open at the April 6th meeting.

... "I do not think it is an overstatement that it appears just as important for California to have Mendocino preserved and guarded against encroachments as it was for Virginia to have Williamsburg restored and protected". No, not our words, rather those of C. Malcolm Watkins, who was chairman of Civil History at the Smithsonian in 1969. His words help draw national attention to the drive here to preserve the town's historic integrity. We may be wrong, but think he'd agree that this isn't the place to experiment with what amounts in Mendocino proportions, to a solar farm.

Thank you,

Bob and Christina Aranguren
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Mendocino

