

Planning & Building Services

Dear Board Members,

I would like to share some general thoughts on issues raised at December's MHRB meeting. Namely, how we go about preserving the special character of Mendocino.

At the last Review Meeting, in regard to the historic barn on Lansing Street, the applicant said, and here I quote from the recorded session:

Historical preservation does not mean trying to keep things the same, or even how they once were. The idea of historic preservation is that remodels, new development, [and] changes that come to our town will be done in a style that is in harmony with and matches, to the best of our ability, a time period of the past. If things were just made to stay the same, our town would be full of brothels and bars... we'd have to hitch donkeys in the yard, there'd be no automobiles. This is not where we live.

The MHRB Design Guidelines don't disagree:

"It is not the intent of these guidelines to return the Town to a bygone era."

However, the guidelines also make clear that it is our responsibility to, "preserve and protect the special character and identity of Mendocino." And further, that the distinguishing historic qualities or character of a building ... "should not be destroyed."

Simply renovating a structure to conform to other buildings around it, as was argued, is not enough. The guidelines clearly require every applicant to find ways to preserve the defining historic qualities or character of a structure.

Following these guidelines will not force us back to bygone days. Retaining or reimagining barn doors on a town landmark that's always had barn doors does not equate to the return of brothels and donkeys. And merely matching to the style of surrounding buildings does not justify the destruction of core historic features that could be saved.

Again, our goal is clear: "To preserve and protect the special character and identity of Mendocino."

Following through on fundamental guidelines that help us meet this goal does not obstruct progress; rather, it makes room for the advent of new, modern uses even as it preserves and protects the special character of our village.

Thank you for listening.

John Cavanaugh

Examples of preserving “special character and identity”
in the modern era

