

Plans to restore more Crystal Cove cottages will go before Coastal Commission



The sun sets over the Crystal Cove cottages in Newport Beach in 2016. On March 8, the state Coastal Commission is to consider a coastal development permit to restore the remaining 17 of the 46 cottages.

(Allen J. Schaben / Los Angeles Times)

Bryce Alderton – February 23, 2017

Decades ago, the cluster of vintage cottages between Corona del Mar and Laguna Beach were favorites of people who loved the bohemian feel of the beach colony.

But the property was sold, the tenants were told to leave and the brief consideration of a pricey resort as a replacement for the cottages only fed efforts to preserve the property, which continue.

On March 8, in Ventura, the [California Coastal Commission](#) will consider a coastal development permit to restore the remaining 17 of the 46 cottages, which date to the 1930s and '40s, at Crystal Cove State Park.

The California Department of Parks and Recreation, which bought the property in 1979, and the nonprofit [Crystal Cove Alliance](#), which is dedicated to the protection and preservation of the historic district, have made the permit request.

Plans call for the cottages to be dismantled and the materials used as much as possible in the reconstruction, while adhering to the Interior department's standards for treatment of historic properties, according to a commission staff report.

As part of the project, the state and alliance also want to build a 650-foot-long boardwalk upon caissons, construct a 20-foot-high, 120-foot-long wall to protect two of the cottages from potential erosion, and add eight spaces to a bluff-top parking lot, according to the report.

Waves washed out the original boardwalk, the staff report said.

Commission staff have recommended approval but with certain conditions, including requirements that overnight accommodations be offered to the general public at "affordable" rates and that the applicants submit periodic reports on bluff stability, the staff report said.

Proposed rates would range from \$245 per night for a cottage that can hold six or more people to \$175 per night for a cottage with one to three occupants, the staff report said.

One of the cottages would have at least 11 beds and be available for up to 36 nights per year for students from low-income families as part of an education program, the report said.

Crystal Cove's storied past has included challenges.

In 1979, the land was sold to the state for preservation as a state park, "and the cottage dwellers faced a 22-year countdown before they would have to go," according to the alliance's website.

By 2001, the historic cottages sat empty, and the state awarded a private developer rights and a 60-year lease to turn them into a luxury resort, but Laura Davick and other activists pushed back, proposing instead that the cottages remain intact and be used as overnight rentals and for educational purposes.

Davick founded the Crystal Cove Alliance and is its current vice president.

Restoration of the initial 29 cottages began in 2004.

Commission staff said in its report that proposed changes conflict with the state's Coastal Act — the cottages are located on the face and toe of a coastal bluff that is subject to marine erosion and is a hazardous location — but added there is no way to get around that without destroying the community's integrity.

"The commission would usually require consideration of alternative locations for the development that is outside of hazardous locations and avoid the need for shoreline protection," according to the report.

"However, given the status of this area as a historic district that provides unique public recreational opportunities ... it is not currently possible to relocate the structures to a less hazardous area that would also retain the historic value."