Crystal Cove cottages approved for final phase of renovation

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Crysta[55x252]l Cove Alliance President/CEO Alix Hobbs, left, and founder Laura Davick, right, stand inside one of the historic Crystal Cove cottages. The California Coastal Commission on Wednesday approved the final phase of renovations. (Photo by Ana Venegas, Orange County Register/SCNG).

By LAYLAN CONNELLY / STAFF WRITER

More lodging will be available for overnight stays on the sand at the coveted Crystal Cove cottages, after the California Coastal Commission gave the green light Wednesday to begin final restorations along the nostalgic slice of coast. The plan is to spruce up the 17 remaining, crumbling cottages on the north end of the historic area, adding to the 29 cottages that have been renovated and open for public use in the past decade.

“This has been a long, hard journey,” Laura Davick, founder and vice president of nonprofit Crystal Cove Alliance, said at the meeting.

The cottages, which sit on the sand in a state park area between Newport Beach and Laguna Beach, were built in the ’30s to ’50s. They were occupied by families until a state lease expired in 2001. Crystal Cove Alliance, a state partner that heads the restoration project, was formed to maintain the history and create unique, low-cost public accommodations along the coast. The group previously helped fight plans for a luxury resort.
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All 17 cottages will be built into 22 affordable overnight units, and once restored they will add about 48,000 rental opportunities annually – about doubling the current available occupancy. A new “open bed” dorm lodge, with 11 beds, will be added at $35 a night per bed. The most expensive cottage, sleeping up to 10 people, will be $245 a night. “This is a huge public access success story that we should all be proud of,” Davick said. The Coastal Commission permitting process has been in the works for four years. None of the 10 commissioners objected to moving the project forward Wednesday.

“This is really an exciting project. I think it’s going to be one of the crown jewels in the California State Parks system, if it isn’t already the crown jewel,” said commissioner Gregory Cox. This is the first step in gaining approval for the final phase of renovation – it could take five years before the cottages are restored and ready for public use. Each cottage needs to be evaluated for historic significance to determine what stays and what goes, and one cottage is so dilapidated it needs an almost complete makeover.

The California Coastal Commission already had earmarked $5 million in mitigation funding to assist with the final phase of the Crystal Cove rehabilitation project. The plan is to use $4 million toward the infrastructure and restoration and $1 million toward an education endowment. Davick announced at the meeting a private donation of $3 million has also been secured. The next step is to start a bidding process to get an estimated cost of the project – which could be in the $30 million range – and to start fundraising for the remainder of the work.
Crystal Cove Alliance President/CEO, Alix Hobbs left, and Founder, Laura Davick, stand on the porch of one of the historic Crystal Cove cottages that is yet to be refurbished in Newport Beach. The California Coastal Commission on Wednesday, approved the final phase of renovations. (Photo by Ana Venegas, Orange County Register/SCNG).

Crystal Cove Alliance President/CEO, Alix Hobbs, walks through one of the historic Crystal Cove cottages. The California Coastal Commission on Wednesday, approved the final phase of renovations. (Photo by Ana Venegas, Orange County Register/SCNG).
Crystal Cove Alliance founder Laura Davick, left, and President/CEO, Alix Hobbs, right, walk along a row of historic cottages that are yet to be refurbished. The California Coastal Commission on Wednesday, approved the final phase of renovations. (Photo by Ana Venegas, Orange County Register/SCNG).

Major refurbishing will be involved in making a row of Crystal Cove cottages habitable. The California Coastal Commission on Wednesday, approved the final phase of renovations. (Photo by Ana Venegas, Orange County Register/SCNG).