

SANTA FE NEW MEXICAN

Nonprofit seeks to turn east-side estate into museum

City expected to consider permit in June

[Tom Sharpe The New Mexican](#)

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Tom Sharpe A nonprofit based at the Paloheimo estate on Acequia Madre Street is seeking a special-use permit from the city of Santa Fe so it can operate the east-side property as a museum.

But Bunny Huffman, executive director of the Acequia Madre House, said no new construction is planned and neighbors should notice no change if the permit is approved.

"We will have an archive that will be accessible, and that is really the only public access that we foresee at this time, and that will be by appointment only," she said. "So it's not really a very invasive change."

The city Board of Adjustment is expected to consider the special-use permit June 17.

About 50 east-side residents turned out Monday evening for an Early Neighborhood Notification meeting on the plan.

Land-use consultant Jennifer Jenkins said the zoning on the 3-acre property allows up to eight dwellings per acre, but the nonprofit aims to preserve it as it is -- with a 5,400-square-foot main house and one guest house.

In response to questions from the audience, Jenkins said the single access off Acequia Madre Street would be maintained, no buses would bring people in, no additional parking would be needed and there would be no overnight accommodations. She said up to six scholars might meet there at times, but usually there would be fewer.

The house, built in 1926 at 614 Acequia Madre -- between Delgado Lane and San Antonio Street -- was the home of three generations of women:

u Eva Scott Fenyés (1849-1930), the child of New York publisher Leonard Scott, who first visited Santa Fe in 1889.

u Leonora Scott Muse Curtin (1879-1972), who helped found the Spanish Colonial Arts Society and El Rancho de las Golondrinas.

u Leonora Frances Curtin Paloheimo (1901-1999), who continued her mother and grandmother's cultural endeavors in Santa Fe.

In 2009, the Acequia Madre House nonprofit sought a special-use permit to operate a music school on the property, then withdrew the request due to objections from neighborhood residents. Nevertheless, a music program continues.

Huffman said she has tried to contact her neighbors about the plans this time so they would be better informed. She said the museum would be used to study the letters and other documents by Fenyes, Curtin and Paloheimo.

"There are thousands of letters that are describing everyday life and all their friends -- every name you can think of from that era," she said. "The house is the same as it was when they lived there. The same paintings are hanging on the wall. The same furniture is in place, at least in the public rooms. It's a time capsule."

Huffman said the museum would be supported by donations and grants, and operate similarly to the School for Advanced Research -- formerly the School of American Research.

"The only way we can save this is to find some kind of use for it, but it's rather fragile and, as a result, it can't be what you would normally think of as a museum in the sense of people trooping through on a regular basis," she said. "That is not something we want."

Huffman said the museum would benefit scholars of 20th-century artists, writers and musicians who stayed there.

"For someone who is writing a book or writing a thesis or whatever, to be able to be in that atmosphere is just marvelous," she said.

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