

# THE FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT CIVIC CENTER CONSERVANCY

May 10, 2016

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Marin County Board of Supervisors  
3501 Civic Center Drive, Room 329  
San Rafael, CA 94903

**SUBJECT:** Staff Report on the Donation from Jim Berger of the Doghouse  
designed by Frank Lloyd Wright

Dear Board Members:

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. Accept report from the Frank Lloyd Wright Civic Center Conservancy staff
2. Accept the donation to the County from Jim Berger of the doghouse designed by Frank Lloyd Wright

## **OVERVIEW:**

In 1950 and 1951, Frank Lloyd Wright designed a unique house for Robert (Bob) and Gloria Berger of San Anselmo. Later in 1956 during the construction of the Berger's house, Mr. Wright also designed a dog house upon the personal request of one of their sons, Jim Berger, and the history about the dog house is one of the many interesting Wright chronicles and is known worldwide by people who are interested in Frank Lloyd Wright and his architecture. Jim personally constructed this doghouse for a movie documentary that was being filmed about Frank Lloyd Wright in 2011. The dog house since then has been on a tour at various facilities designed by Wright around the United States. Jim Berger, who now lives outside Sacramento, wanted to bring the dog house back to California and find a permanent home for it, and so has offered it to Marin County through the Frank Lloyd Wright Civic Center Conservancy commission.

The interesting background story is that Bob Berger, who was teaching mathematics at College of Marin while also serving as a reserve in the Army, contacted Mr. Wright first in early 1950, is that he asked for a house to be designed in a series of units so that he could personally construct it during the summers off from teaching. Due to various Army deployments, Bob Berger did not start construction until July 1953. It took four years to complete the construction of the first unit consisting of a kitchen, master bedroom, bath, terrace, and living and dining areas. During construction in June 1956, then twelve-year old Jim Berger, their eldest of three sons, wrote to Mr. Wright asking him to design a doghouse for their four-year old Labrador retriever named Eddie. In the letter, Jim told Mr. Wright that he would pay for the plans and materials with money he earned from a paper route. Wright replied back that he was extremely busy, and that Jim should

contact him again in several months, which Jim did in November 1956. On the back of the envelope from that letter, Mr. Wright sketched a triangular structure of the dog house from which his staff made working drawings. Bob Berger constructed the first doghouse for another of the family's dogs as Eddie had passed. In an oral interview in 1993, Jim Berger mentioned there was no fee charged for the drawings. The first doghouse was disposed of around 1968 by Gloria Berger, according to Jim. Jim, a retired cabinet maker by trade, received permission from the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation to rebuild the doghouse and the Foundation accepted it as the original since Jim was Mr. Wright's client, and he also has the original plans in his possession, according to Jim.

Members of Conservancy and County staff are excited about this offer. Staff from Cultural Services, the Library and the CAO office anticipates that this could be shown in special exhibitions in the future at the County Fair, in the Library, and as part of the docent tour program in the Civic Center. There already is a photo and description of the Berger house as part of the Frank Lloyd Wright exhibits on the walls in the mall. Staff would work with the Civic Center Conservancy to find an appropriate location for it in the Civic Center. Staff from the Department of Public Works, Shipping and Receiving Department and Building Maintenance, were instrumental in assisting with bringing the dog house to the Civic Center and the Conservancy wishes to thank them.

Members of Civic Center Conservancy and staff from the above departments recommend acceptance of this donation.

**FISCAL IMPACT:**


Staff will work with the Conservancy to protect and preserve the doghouse in order for it to be shown publically, similar to the Civic Center Campus model in the first floor mall. Funds are available in this year's budget.

Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns.

<b>REVIEWED BY:</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Finance	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> County Counsel	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A
	<input type="checkbox"/> Human Resources	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A

Respectfully submitted,

**Submitted by:**



David Speer  
Staff to the Civic Center  
Conservancy

**Reviewed by:**



Matthew H. Hymel  
County Administrator