STATE COMMISSION APPROVES CITY’S NOMINATION OF NORCONIAN PROPERTY FOR LISTING IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

Norco, CA – On February 2, 2018, the California State Historical Resources Commission unanimously voted to expand the current Lake Norconian Club Historic District to encompass the property’s World War II Naval hospital and Cold War guided missile laboratory-related buildings and grounds. Many Norco residents have supported Norco’s David and Goliath efforts and praised the Commission’s decision – a decision that completely reversed a previous denial by the State Office of Historic Preservation. The nomination cited four areas of historic significance: health/medicine, military history, social history, and architecture.

Norco’s nomination was produced by Norco’s Cultural Resources Consultant Bill Wilkman, who was hired by the City Council more than three years ago to prepare the documents to support the City’s nomination efforts. The nomination took three years to compile and was based on 10 years of comprehensive and painstaking research. Nearly 20 letters were sent from leading local and national historians and historical organizations supporting the City of Norco’s nomination. Significantly, these included letters from the California Preservation Foundation, the Society for the History of Naval Medicine, and former California State Historic Preservation Officers Wayne Donaldson and Dr. Knox Mellon.

The State Commission praised the nomination and strongly declared the historic site was important to both local and national history and needed to be preserved. Council Member Kevin Bash stated, “It was very gratifying to hear the Commissioners give proper due and respect to the Navy physicians, nurses, Corpsmen and other medical staff who pioneered so many medical advances and saved lives.”

Chair of the City’s Historic Preservation Commission Matt Potter noted, “Some Norconians may not realize how significant it is to have the State Historic Preservation Commission approve our nomination to the National Register with a unanimous vote despite objecting statements and testimony from two large influential entities. The Herculean efforts made by Bill Wilkman and Council Member Kevin Bash to document and preserve the Lake Norconian property should be commended.”

This nomination places Norco in a similar situation to 1996 when Navy historians found the Norconian Resort did not qualify for National Register listing. Disagreeing with this finding, the City of Norco hired respected historian Dr. Knox Mellon, who supplied substantial documentation to support the historical significance of the resort-related buildings and grounds. The result was the listing of the Lake Norconian Club Historic District on the National Register of Historic Places in 2000. Because of this listing, the Navy subsequently received a sizable grant to repair the beautiful lakeside pavilion.

As in the year 2000, the Navy’s Federal Historic Preservation Officer must endorse the expanded historic district before it can be sent to the Keeper of the Register for final approval to be listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The Keeper of the Register is the final arbiter of nominations to the National Register. Continued public support will be needed to assure the nomination successfully negotiates these final steps. Individuals interested in voicing support of the nomination are encouraged to visit the City’s website and social media accounts where news regarding the nomination’s status will be posted.

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