



Historic Resources Board

Staff Report (ID # 13532)

Report Type: Approval of Minutes **Meeting Date:** 9/9/2021

Summary Title: HRB Draft Minutes June 24, 2021

Title: Approval of Historic Resources Board Draft Minutes of June 24, 2021

From: Jonathan Lait

Recommendation

Staff recommends the Historic Resources Board (HRB) adopt the attached meeting minutes.

Background

Attached are minutes for the following meeting(s):

- June 24, 2021

Attachments:

- Attachment A: HRB Draft Minutes June 24, 2021 (DOCX)



HISTORIC RESOURCES BOARD MEETING
DRAFT MINUTES: June 24, 2021
 Virtual Teleconference Meeting
 8:31 A.M.

Call to Order/Roll Call

Present: Chair David Bower, Vice Chair Shepherd; Board Members, Michael Makinen, Margaret Wimmer, Christian Pease, Gogo Heinrich, Caroline Willis

Absent:

Oral Communications

[None]

Agenda Changes, Additions and Deletions

[None]

Officer Election

1. Election of Chair and Vice Chair

Chair Bower said he will stay on the Board until the end of his term. He said he thinks he has done enough as Chair to step aside and let someone else run with the baton. In addition, he said Ms. Shepherd is moving, and this will be her last meeting. He thanked her for her service and all the information she has shared from the Santa Clara County Historic Committee. Chair Bower invited nominations for Chair.

Board Member Makinen and Board Member Wimmer declined to be nominated.

Board Member Wimmer nominated Board Member Willis for Chair, saying she has been on the Board before, is very informed, has great experience and is very enthusiastic.

Chair Bower nominated Board Member Pease for Chair, stating he is another new member with energy and interest. He said Board Member Willis has also expressed interest in initiatives important to the HRB, so he would be pleased to have either of them as Chair.

Board Member Pease declined the nomination as Chair, but appreciated the confidence demonstrated in him. Board Member Willis accepted the nomination for Chair.

Chair Bower nominated Board Member Pease as Vice Chair. Board Member Pease accepted this nomination.

Motion by Chair Bower to nominate Board Member Willis as Chairman and Board Member Pease as Vice Chair. Seconded by Board Member Shepherd.

Board Member Willis stated that if she does chair the HRB, she expects the Committee to meet more often and develop some goals to evidence progress in accomplishing a few things during the next year.

Board Member Pease said when there are no properties in the docket to review, he would like to have meetings from time to time to look at the Work Plan and evaluate where they are, to keep motivated and moving.

The motion carried unanimously.

Chair Bower congratulated Board Member Willis and turned the meeting over to her.

City Official Reports

2. Historic Resources Board Schedule of Meetings and Assignments.

Ms. French explained that there is no major project on the docket for July, but the Committee could certainly meet in July. Meetings will remain on Zoom until further notice. She thought there was talk of coming back to a hybrid model, potentially by August, but this has not been confirmed. She said there are two calendar dates each month for meetings. During the past reporting period five meetings were held.

Ms. French shared the dates for upcoming meetings and asked that if anyone has an issue with any of the dates to let Vinh or her know, so they can secure the next meeting date. It was agreed to cancel the July 8th meeting date.

Chair Willis asked if they were restricted to Zoom for a retreat. Ms. French said she would explore this, but thought it wise to look towards August for this, when City staff starts coming back into the building. Chair Willis indicated she would like to meet on July 22nd to review subcommittee assignments and talk about how to organize the committee for the next year. She would also like to do an in-person retreat, because she feels there is a different type of connection when there is some down-time, especially outside of "Zooming." A July 22nd Zoom meeting was agreed upon. Ms. French said she understands that the City Clerk will be advertising for the position to be vacated by Board Member Shepherd, but they may not have a seventh member for a few months.

Board Member Bower said he assumed that they would not meet on Veterans Day and Thanksgiving, and also wondered about December 23rd, which they have typically not done. Chair Willis agreed that these three dates could be cancelled. She encouraged all to be available on December 9th, because she does think they lose momentum when they wait too long.

Action Items

3. Discuss the Historic Resources Board's (ARB) Draft Work Plan Shared With the City Council

Ms. French made a brief presentation on this item. She thanked Board Member Shepherd for her service on the Committee and service as the Vice Chair. She shared the HRB Work Plan and explained the items that are intended to be part of the plan. Council accepted the Work Plan on June 21st and did not add any items. The HRB may add items during the year, and will also have the opportunity to work on the next fiscal year plan. Council Member Cormack clarified that all of the Work Plans were on the Consent Agenda for the Council, and nothing was pulled from Consent, so while it was reviewed, it was not an action or discussion item.

Ms. French shared a slide defining the purview of the HRB, as listed in the Code. She presented a slide as detailed in the staff report, with information drawn from the CLG (Certified Local Government) report, indicating the five items on the Work Plan for the next fiscal year. These include review of alterations to historic resources; supporting implementation of Comprehensive Plan policies; inventory upgrades and nominations; improving outreach, reviewing incentives, and developing the work program for FY 22-23; and Tailored Mills Act Program discussion. She shared the Comprehensive Plan, Goal L-7, which includes robust goals pertaining to historic resources. She shared a number of additional policies which would be good topics for the Committee to examine and discuss, perhaps at the retreat.

In regard to "inventory upgrades and nominations," Board Member Bower asked Ms. French to share with the Board what happened with the application for the Mid-Century Modern Survey of Palo Alto, since they have had a grant application ready for three years. Ms. French said there is an opportunity every May to submit the grant applicant. She had received in the past year an estimate of cost from their lead consultant, but a decision was made not to move forward because of uncertainty with the budget as well as lack of a dedicated staff member for the program. The deadline has passed for this year, but she said it would be great to take this on in the next year and get permission and support to submit the application. Board Member Bower said he finds this very frustrating and unsupportive of the HRB. That the grant would be free money to the City, but can't be submitted because the City can't find staff funding, even in this difficult time, is unacceptable. He wondered why there is not money available for this after three years. Ms. French said it was a combination of budget cuts. There were positions cut from the budget in prior years, and they were in the budget cycle for this year, but it was uncertain what was going to happen. They are able to use salary savings to pay for consultant help, but it is harder to commit to hiring a full time position with uncertainty in budgets. Vice Chair Pease asked who makes this decision. Ms. French said Director Lait would make the decision in consultation with folks that are preparing the budget. She said there are a number of initiatives, such as the Housing Element, and it's the same staff that are doing so many things. Vice Chair Pease said if it was ready to go, he doesn't understand not submitting it. Ms. French said it's not that the application needs more work. The problem is if the grant is awarded, it will require staff work to focus on it.

Board Member Shepherd suggested, if staff availability is an issue, they could perhaps outsource, at least to a consultant, a public program to raise awareness about mid-century architecture in Palo Alto. She informed them that Stanford is going to be tearing down a mid-century building, the Lou Henry Hoover Memorial Building, a low, white structure with very distinctive colonnade of white arches. She said she was sorry to report that the County of Santa Clara has approved the demolition permit, and the Historical Heritage Commission did vote to support the staff recommendation, although they qualified it with advice as to adjustments that could be made to the design for the new building, which is taller, more massive and, some felt, not responsive to context. The Zoning Administrator/Officer disregarded that advice. She thinks they will be seeing other mid-century buildings coming down at Stanford in the relatively near future and she sees it as an opportunity for Palo Alto to take the lead and at least start educating people.

Chair Willis said this is something they will want to talk about next month when they are together again. She likes the idea of workshops or online tours or other ways to approach it. She asked the Board Members to think about how they would like to see this done, and resources, aside from staff, that might be available, adding that some of the members of the past community would help with legwork if needed. She asked Ms. French if members of the public could be present in breakout groups. Ms. French said yes, as part of a retreat. Chair Willis also asked if the Ad Hoc committees are restricted to Board Members, or if they can include outsiders. She feels Ad Hoc committees are a good way to move things forward. Since the Board is reduced to six, and many members are new, they could benefit from some outside help, and it might be a way to lead people to joining the HRB.

Vice Chair Pease said this touches on a point he wanted to raise, after attending two of the annual conferences for the Preservation Foundation. There are a number of presentations about cities larger than Palo Alto that have done a good job of crowdsourcing a lot of work for preservation, including data entry, recording of structures before they're demolished, and other things. He thought it was interesting, and if there is a chronic shortage of staff which bottlenecks progress, then it's something that should be discussed in this outreach. He said, while they should consider financial incentives, those seem less than adequate to be compelling in the current market, in many cases. Chair Willis asked Vice Chair Pease to summarize this proposal and send a brief report regarding how this might happen. Ms. French asked him to send the report to her or Vinh to distribute to the Board, warning that they must always be careful about the communication methods.

Chair Willis asked Ms. French to also send out the slides on the Comprehensive Plan, as they are particularly relevant to the Board. She would also like the notebook given to new HRB members that gives the relevant

parts of the Code without having to look through everything. Ms. French said the webpages have links, but she will compile something and send it out to the Board along with the Comprehensive Plan policies, to reinvigorate discussions in preparation for the retreat.

Ms. French said there is not a need for the HRB to adopt the Work Plan, because it has already been transmitted, but if there are comments, they could consider reviewing it again, and if there are changes to be made, it could be revised at that time. Chair Willis thought this should be a primary item for the next meeting, focusing on whether there is anything missing from the Work Plan.

Approval of Minutes

4. Approval of Historic Resources Board Draft Minutes of April 8, 2021

Chair Willis pointed out remarks on pages 8 and 9 that were made by her but attributed to Board Member Wimmer. She asked when the switch to summary minutes will occur. Vinh indicated this could happen immediately.

Council Member Cormack pointed out an error in transcription on page 2, in Ms. French's comments, where "I quit" guidelines should be "Eichler" guidelines.

Motion by Board Member Bower, seconded by Board Member Shepherd, to approve the minutes as corrected.

Council Member Cormack pointed out that votes must now be oral, and raising of hands does not constitute a vote. Ms. French concurred and said that with official actions, voice votes are needed. She added that, for those who were not in attendance at a meeting, they need to abstain from voting on approval of minutes.

The motion to approve the minutes of April 8, 2021, as corrected, carried unanimously, by roll call vote.

Board Member Bower noted that the election of Chair and Vice Chair should probably be taken again, by roll call vote.

Motion by Board Member Bower moved, seconded previously by Board Member Shepherd, to nominate Caroline Willis as Chair. The motion passed, 7-0, by roll call vote.

Motion by Board Member Bower moved, seconded previously by Board Member Shepherd, to nominate Christian Pease as Vice Chair. The motion passed, 7-0, by roll call vote.

Board Member Questions, Comments or Announcements

Chair Willis invited questions and comments from the Board.

Board Member Shepherd shared that she has enjoyed serving on the HRB. She encouraged the Board Members to let others know about Leadership Palo Alto, which is how she learned of the opportunity five years ago, when she was new in town. She reported that the City Council voted at their last meeting to extend the lease for the Palo Alto History Museum, in their efforts to restore the building, including using grant money awarded from the County for the roof, so hopefully there will be great momentum again. She said the survey is completed regarding the community stakeholder group in the San Juan Hill neighborhood. The County commissioned the survey 15 months ago. The consultant was ESA. The community group met five times. The County Planning Department will make their recommendations at the next Board of Supervisors meeting. The survey identified four potential historic districts and 180 eligible historic homes. They did not do HSAs as initially proposed in the contract for 15 structures. She said nothing new will be added to the Historic Resource Inventory as a result of the survey, but the appendix exists with all of the data that has been collected by the Stanford Historical Society, and it is a good resource. Planning staff is not proposing to go forward with any historic districts. Unfortunately, coming out of this, people are even more confused about what that might mean, thinking it's expensive and invasive. They don't understand that it might increase the value of their homes.

Board Member Shepherd went on to comment that, in thinking of what to do at their retreats and training, the Board might consider ESA, who did a nice 30-minute presentation about historic districts in general.

She said when she came to Palo Alto she didn't know anything about its historic districts, and she thinks they are looking pretty good now after the experience she's had. She suggested it might be helpful for some of the newer or returning people to have a brush-up about what Palo Alto has, how they got there, and how well it's working now. Going forward, there will be no new historic districts, there will be no additions to the Historic Resource Inventory, unless someone applies for a demolition permit or a major renovation. She explained the three choices staff is giving to the Supervisors. One is to continue the status quo, which is somewhat better than it was when it started, because staff did go back and look at the 2000 General Use Permit, where they found in the Historic Resource section that there were regulations that were not being enforced either by the County or by Stanford, so they are attempting to be more vigilant. The second option is to invest money in further research around one or more of the historic districts. She said she is sure there will be absolutely no appetite for that because there is no money and no community support for it. The third plan is to work with the Stanford Community Plan, which would possibly present an opportunity in the future to restrict the increasing density in large lots in the San Juan Hill neighborhood. She thinks this came about partly because there were concerns that buildings and homes were being left derelict and would be torn down, and more units would be built on the properties. The thought is that within the Community Plan it is possible to restrict density there, but only if they find other higher density housing elsewhere on campus, which could be a very long process.

Council Member Cormack offered a minor correction regarding the Palo Alto History Museum, that the Council did not vote to extend the lease. There is no lease. They voted to direct staff to work to create a lease. The funding is quite complicated. If anyone is interested in where it came from, she was happy to explain that and why she voted against using the funding in that manner at another time. She thanked Ms. Shepherd for her service and was sorry she could not shake her hand. She wished her the best. The City Council and community appreciates her service and are glad she has been a part of the community.

Chair Willis thanked Council for approving the funding for the Roth Building, saying might not have been the best use of those funds, but it is easier to encourage preservation in Palo Alto when the City is onboard with its own properties. They are grateful that this happened.

Chair Willis said she hopes all will be at the next meeting on July 22nd. The two subcommittees she envisions for this year are one on the Mills Act and one on public engagement, so they might be thinking about where they might want to engage on those. She would like to see everyone do one or the other. She asked Ms. French about a letter regarding a house built in the commercial district, near Fry's, in which the writer was requesting assistance. She said it was an attached to the agenda, and she wondered if anyone had responded to it. Board Member Bower said this was in regard to 340 Sherman. Ms. French added that she had replied to the email.

Board Member Bower commented, in regard to the Fry's site, that the committee that has been working on the site once again came up with nothing that works in terms of historic preservation of Fry's. He thought the worst recommendation for the Fry's Building – which is an incredibly important historic building in Palo Alto and California history – was to tear it down and replace it with multiple units. The last plan proposal was going to modify the building, much the way the Varsity Theater Building has been modified to totally obliterate its interior historic features and characteristics. Board Member Bower said he was dumbfounded that there wasn't better representation about the importance of the building and thought that Sobrato, oddly enough, gets it right. It ought to remain, in his opinion, as a mixed commercial building, because that is the only way to preserve its historic character, but the committee examining it was tone deaf about it. He feels they ought to be watching that situation, because it's an important building for Palo Alto.

Adjournment

Chair Willis moved to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Vice Chair Pease, the motion carried, 7-0, by voice vote.