



CITY OF  
**PALO  
ALTO**

# Historic Resources Board

## Staff Report (ID # 14531)

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**Report Type:** Approval of Minutes **Meeting Date:** 7/14/2022

**Summary Title:** HRB Draft Minutes May 12, 2022

**Title:** Approval of Historic Resources Board Draft Minutes of May 12, 2022

**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):

- May 12, 2022

### **Attachments:**

- Attachment A: HRB Draft Minutes May 12, 2022 (DOCX)



# HISTORIC RESOURCES BOARD MEETING

## MINUTES: May 12, 2022

Virtual Teleconference Meeting  
8:30 A.M.

### **Call to Order/Roll Call**

Present: Chair Caroline Willis; Vice Chair Christian Pease Board Members, Michael Makinen, Margaret Wimmer, Gogo Heinrich, and Alisa Eagleston-Cieslewicz

Absent: Board Member David Bower

### **Oral Communications**

### **Agenda Changes, Additions and Deletions**

### **City Official Reports**

1. Historic Resources Board Schedule of Meetings and Assignments

Chair Willis asked if the Boardmembers had looked over the schedule and if it was accurate as far as planned absences. Ms. French confirmed a June 30<sup>th</sup> HRB meeting is scheduled, contingent on having a quorum.

### **Study Session**

2. HRB Study Session to Explore Outreach Program Approaches. Discussion to Include Potential Questions and Answers to Assist the Community with Understanding Palo Alto's Historic Resources Inventory Designations.

Ms. French began a discussion of HRB's plan to interact with the community regarding the historic preservation program, the kinds of outreach in place currently, and thoughts about a program going forward. She directed attention to the Planning and Development Services Department/Historic Preservation section of the City's website which provides links to multiple topics of interest, including which types of projects require review; how to know if a property is a historic resource, multiple registers, and nomination processes; historic districts and past surveys; the City's inventory, how to request a parcel report; criteria, benefits, and incentives for listing a property on the inventory, among other items.

Chair Willis asked, regarding the parcel report, how owners can view the information on the DPR documents. Ms. French said the parcel report shows if the property is California Register Eligible, Category 1 through 4, or potentially eligible. The DPR form is not provided, but phone numbers and email addresses are provided for individuals wanting to obtain DPR information. Staff regularly communicates back and forth with email and phone calls from realtors, property owners, and interested buyers. Board Member Eagleston-Cieslewicz asked if the Dames and Moore information is included in the parcel reports. Ms. French indicated it is. The information as to whether it is deemed eligible or whether still in the potentially-eligible, un-evaluated category, older than 1948, is included.

Ms. French shared additional pages that the public is able to view pertaining to available resources and asked that Board members peruse them as well and let staff know how they can be improved. Criteria for designation on the inventory are included as well as information about the four categories and the processes, procedures, and regulations that may apply to them. The webpage provides information on the benefits of historic reviews and incentives. Ms. French shared where these are found in the Municipal Code, the Building Code, and the Zoning and Subdivision Codes.

Ms. French noted where Comprehensive Plan policies advocate for incentives to retain historic buildings. The South of Forest Area (SOFA) has its own coordinated area plan with its own zoning, and there are benefits such as transferrable development rights in the Downtown and floor area bonuses when a historic building is rehabilitated. Title 16 incentives in the Building Code include alternatives to meeting the Building Code, including a number of alternatives in the Historical Building Code. Through Title 18, property owners can ask for additional floor area for homes by way of the home improvement exception process that non-historic, unlisted homes, do not get. Other items such as attics that would normally count in a non-historic home are given a break on Category 1 and 2 buildings, which is a 500-square-foot perk. There are transferrable development rights, bonus floor area, and other items as well.

Ms. French pointed out the Bulletin from October 2016, when the HRB reviewed and finalized it. This was before the Comprehensive Plan was updated in 2017. One of the current HRB goals is to review changes to this Bulletin, and this is on the HRB agenda for July 2022. Group A resources are the Category 1's and 2's, plus 3's and 4's in the Downtown or Professorville, or the Ramona district. The Bulletin explains what to expect in the conversation and that when the project scope exceeds what is considered minor exterior alterations, then the planner refers the application to the HRB. Previous discussions have centered on what constitutes a minor exterior alteration. Ms. French said that is a conversation that can be picked up again.

Ms. French explained that not all projects need review by the HRB, and these situations are all noted on the web pages. The Comprehensive Plan policy that was adopted in December 2017 was pointed out, addressing that when someone comes in and wants a demolition of a potentially eligible property, back to 1948, an evaluation is required to see if it is California Register-eligible before issuing a demolition permit. Also, sometimes when owners want to sell their property they want to know if the property is a historic resource. When they come in, staff will evaluate their property for a fee to determine this. People also want to know what is meant by minor changes, and whether they can make changes. Their answer is that, yes, changes can be made to historic homes and non-residential buildings, as long as they are done in a way that meets the Secretary of the Interior Standards for rehabilitation. These measures help to retain the historic integrity of resources. However, anything done to the interior of a historic home in Palo Alto is fine and does not require a discretionary review. This applies to accessory dwelling units as well.

Ms. French offered a few reminders about events coming up. The Preservation Alliance Awards Night is on May 21<sup>st</sup>. The CPF conference is coming up in June, and staff can help interested Boardmembers with that. Also, May 13th is the deadline for submitting the CLG report, which she is putting final touches on to email to the Office of Historic Preservation.

Chair Willis invited comments.

Board Member Wimmer asked about getting a list of the various tax credits from federal and state, Title 16, Historic Building Code, Title 18, and any others. She asked if the tax credits from federal and state are related to the Mills Act. Ms. French said they are not Mills Act, and the California Tax Credit was supposed to be funded, but she did not know if it was funded. It is recent state legislation that enables income tax benefits for California Register homes, or homes on any list, where there is the ability to write off something on taxes for changes. It is not a Mills Act but is something akin to it, without the contract, but it is not yet funded. It was to be funded before COVID happened, so she wasn't sure where they are with the state one. These incentives are listed on the Incentives page of the website.

Chair Willis asked if there was a discussion about listing the incentives separately by Category on the webpage. Ms. French described different ways of categorizing the information on the page. For example, the home improvement exception bonus floor area for homes is available for Categories 1 through 4. This change was made in 2018 when Category 3 and 4 homes were added to the list that could get that benefit. Chair Willis felt it is hard to wade through it all and thought a reorganization of the information would be very helpful.

Chair Willis noted the slide mentioning that garages and ADUs need to meet the Secretary of the Interior Standards and wondered where that came from. Ms. French said that accessory dwelling units are a ministerial process, requiring a building permit only, but they do have the capability of reviewing them at a staff level for Secretary of the Interior Standards compliance when it is on a listed historic property. Most that occur in the city have been a conversion of existing detached garages, carriage houses, et cetera.

There is also a ministerial process for new ADUs on a historic site which must be reviewed for the Secretary of the Interior Standards.

Chair Willis described a framework of what she would like the Board to think about over the next couple of months while they wait to get the consultants on board and get moving. She remarked that the better versed the Board is with the parameters and conditions, the better it will go, and she hoped Board members would think about taking on one of the activities, perhaps in teams. She suggested, first, taking the evaluation table and sorting the properties by Category 3's and 4's, Category 1's and 2's, commercial, residential, and those demolished.

Secondly, Chair Willis advocated focusing on the letter to homeowners before sending it on to Legal and Planning, to check for accuracy and tone and different ways to convey information to owners about their homes that they would like to put on the inventory. She suggested each Board member come up with their version of the letter, and then decide which voice might work the best.

Thirdly, Chair Willis wanted to call out more clearly in the Bulletin the differences and the processes of getting a building permit for a house identified as National Register-eligible and one that is already on the inventory. She felt this would be the primary question that people have. When their house is identified, what process do they have to go through and what changes to expect by being on the inventory? She was also curious whether the process would be affected for a commercial or civic property to be added to the inventory. Ms. French responded that for a Category 1 or 2 property in the Downtown, there is access to bonus floor area with a historic rehabilitation, or the ability to transfer the bonus floor area to another Downtown site that is not historic. In other words, money for someone who wants to buy those to add to their non-historic building. Chair Willis said these should be identified separately as well.

Fourth, Chair Willis suggested continuing to develop the list of questions and answers, many of which are on the internet, although she wasn't sure she could find them again.

Fifth, Chair Willis suggested working on revising the Bulletin, which is on the agenda for July. She felt formatting and understandability are huge issues, so she thought it would be useful for one or two of the Board members to look at that.

Sixth, she suggested evaluating the map of historic resources. She said she finds it too small. Palo Alto is divided into three sections, and she thought if it was divided into more sections, perhaps in varying sizes based on the number of historic buildings in the section, it would be something useful to look at.

Lastly, she felt they should figure out how to get the current inventory in better shape than it is now. They have the DPR sheets, and she asked if they are online. Ms. French said they are on the website, and they are also on the PAST website. Chair Willis thought they should have the whole official DPR sheet on the website and make it easy for people to find.

Chair Willis said the seven topics she commented on are not all topics she understands the end game on, but they are all things that have given her pause over the course of the year and could use some improvement. If anyone is interested in taking one or two of these and coming back to the July meeting with some definitive information on these topics, they would be ahead when they start moving forward with the inventory.

Chair Willis said the list she presented is in a WORD format, and she advocated adding columns for potential Category 1's and 2's, a column for civic buildings, commercial buildings, and demolished buildings. She felt if the evaluation table was sortable, it would be much more useful. Board Member Heinrich offered to take that task on. She had started putting properties on a spreadsheet when she rode her bike through the neighborhoods.

Ms. French noted that she has maps that she had presented in a prior meeting. She offered to show those if the map committee was interested in speaking to that. Board Member Eagleston-Cieslewicz said she would be interested in working on mapping if needed. Chair Willis said it would help identify potential historic districts or clusters of houses that have been identified and are of interest because of their traditional environment. She thought there was some advantage to having that along with the ones on the existing inventory.

Board Member Eagleston-Cieslewicz suggested that a flow chart might also be helpful in helping people sort out and narrow down what incentives a property might be eligible for. Ms. French said they do have these for the application processes and thought there would probably be a way to capture that related to the incentives. She showed some of the available, maps for example, the Category 3's and 4's outside of Downtown which she didn't believe were shown on the webpage. Vice Chair Pease asked if the maps were available in high resolution to be sent to Board members so that they could look at them on big screens and zoom in and out. Ms. French stated she would have to ask about that. Board Member Wimmer said the maps are available on the website although she did not know the resolution, but they are easier to see on the website with the ability to zoom in.

Chair Willis said she liked the map that had only the historic buildings and not the gray background of the houses. She thought when there is so much information, it gets lost. She thought that map was the one they would work from, in sections, making it more readable where properties are more dense, such as College Terrace, Downtown, Crescent Park, et cetera. Vice Chair Pease thought that stand-alone files of high or variable resolution would enable zooming in and out of areas of the map and that the geo system could produce them.

Ms. French advised there was a member of the public who wished to speak.

Ms. Darlene Yaplee stated she lives on Waverly and is a resident who is not currently on the historical list but possibly could be. She underscored the comments of Chair Willis and encouraged an effort to make this information more understandable, accessible and transparent, both in regard to the letter to the homeowners and the website. She said she saw nothing about the Mills Act, such as why or why not to participate, and what it would take to participate. The incentives comment was confusing, to have an incentive listed when funds for it haven't been approved, and that it should probably be a TBD. She said the DPR sheet should be made available. She thought the question that wasn't answered was if you're not on the list, who gets to decide if you're on the list? The options for deciding that you're on the list, et cetera, is important to residents, and it would be important to be transparent about sharing that. She also encouraged validating their letter and their information with people that are going to read the information for the first time, as opposed to the Board members themselves, who are familiar with the content, because the audience is not. The audience is being introduced to these concepts for the first time and don't understand all of the buzz words and their meaning to them. She thought that people are interested, and it would be good to start out on the right foot with clear, unbiased and straightforward information.

Chair Willis responded that they will give Ms. Yaplee their letter as soon as they review it themselves and thanked her for her suggestions.

Board Member Eagleston-Cieslewicz responded that she hoped for a way to reassure homeowners that this would be an easy process for them and that they should make sure it's easy, convenient, and with no cost associated with it so that people will want to participate. Chair Willis agreed and thought they could start by making the incentives easier to understand, as well as the repercussions of being on the inventory, rather than just being identified as historic. Regarding the letter, if the Board members understand the circumstances as best they can it will enable them to write the best letter. She thought the Q&A section would entail simply collecting data that is already available. Questions have been identified and there is a significant amount of information on the internet, but it all needs to be found in one place. She expressed that in her opinion, a lot of what they need to do is re-organize their web situation. Even if duplicated, the information needs to be clear for people on how to find information for their specific situation without having to wade through all of the other commercial and other information to get there. She thought the Q&A section could be a fairly quick cut-and-paste and figuring out how to put it all in one section or reference it all in one place on the website. In regard to the Bulletin, she thought it might be difficult to comprehend in its current form simply due to its formatting.

Board Member Wimmer said she is working on the draft letter and has been trying to add more information to it. She wondered about sending it directly to Chair Willis for preliminary review, or how to move forward with it. Chair Willis encouraged Board Member Wimmer to send it to her, including how much information goes into the letter and how much is on a separate Q&A sheet attached to the letter. Board Member Wimmer and Chair Willis discussed who the letter should go to and that the potentially eligible group is where there is a lot of confusion. Board Member Wimmer said she has had several of her own clients with

potentially eligible property, wanting to develop or sell it. The cost of doing an environmental evaluation report through the City is \$7,625, not inexpensive, due to the fact that it must be done by a qualified firm to do the time-consuming review and write the full report. She thought they should all be aware of the cost of being on this potentially eligible list, and if someone wants to determine whether they are or are not, they need to know what it takes to determine that. Talking about incentives, she wondered if there were any cheaper alternatives for applicants to achieve that information without incurring those costs and time commitments, which are probably around a month to six weeks. She thought people who are coming forward with questions are probably people on the list wanting a better understanding of why they are on it and how to move forward.

Chair Willis thought Board Member Wimmer made a good point. The lists they are working from are ones that are already identified as National Register-eligible and a much larger list of potentially California Register-eligible, somewhere in the 500 range, so she agreed that they can't lose sight of that, but didn't believe it will be within the next year. They need to focus their efforts on the smaller list, getting processes in place for adding the ones that have already been identified, getting the inventory in a better format, and then they could have a fairly smooth process for adding to the inventory. They could roll those through Council, and then continue with houses that have been identified as deserving of review and assessment.

Board Member Wimmer wanted to be clear on the groups of houses they were discussing, and if DPR sheets were done for all houses on the inventory in the different categories, and if there are DPR sheets for properties that are potentially eligible. Ms. French said the DPR forms completed are for ones that were deemed eligible for the National Register in the last survey of 2000, as well as ones more recently deemed eligible for the California Register since the Comprehensive Plan was adopted. The Comprehensive Plan directs that they should be doing the DPR forms. They also have a collection of DPR forms that reflect ineligible properties. These were from the 1998 to 2000 survey where Dames and Moore prepared them for potentially eligible properties and got it to the point where they determined it was not eligible. Then, for the remainder of the properties, those are case-by-case the ones that were looked at when a property owner pays to do so and come up with an evaluation. Those are being added one by one. Ms. French said those are the ones that are reflected in the CLG report provided each year and transmitted to the State.

### **Approval of Minutes**

3. Approval of Historic Resources Board Draft Minutes of April 14, 2022

Chair Willis noted two corrections on the minutes.

### **MOTION**

Motion by Board Member Wimmer to approve the minutes of April 14, 2022, Historic Resources Board meeting with corrections as noted. Seconded by Vice Chair Pease, the motion passed (4-0-1) by roll call vote.

### **Subcommittee Items**

#### **Board Member Questions, Comments, or Announcement**

Chair Willis requested that Ms. French put up a reminder about Preservation Month. She encouraged all to attend the event on the 21<sup>st</sup>. She said she had reached out to PAST and commented on her appreciation for their website and what a great community service it is. She reiterated that the Historic Resources Board is giving Carolyn George and PAST an award at the event. Also, the StarGeezers will be performing. Ms. French shared that her dad was a founding member of the band; that they play bluegrass-type music, and she had sung with them in the past. Chair Willis also reminded the Board of the upcoming CPF conference.

### **Adjournment**

Board Member Vice-Chair Pease moved to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Board Member Eagleston-Cieslewicz, the motion was carried unanimously by voice vote.