



HISTORIC RESOURCES BOARD MEETING

MINUTES: February 9, 2023

Council Chamber & Virtual Zoom
8:30 A.M.

Call to Order/Roll Call

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

Absent:

1. Adoption of a Resolution Authorizing Use of Teleconferencing for Historic Resources Board During Covid-19 State of Emergency

Board Member Bower moved to approve the Resolution. Seconded by Board Member Heinrich, the motion carried (6-0) by voice vote.

Public Comment

Agenda Changes, Additions and Deletions

City Official Reports

2. Historic Resources Board Schedule of Meetings and Assignments

Ms. French indicated that there will be absences on February 23rd, so March 9th will be the next meeting. This will allow time to get started on the Inventory Update project. Ms. French will also bring forth the bylaws for the Historic Resources Board for final discussion and action on the number of remote meetings, since the COVID-19 State of Emergency will end in March.

Study Session

3. Study Session: Historic Resources Inventory Update Kickoff

Ms. French reminded the Board that the City Council, in March of 2022, directed staff to work with the HRB to review the approximately 165 properties that were previously deemed eligible in the 1998-2000 survey to see if they are still there, not demolished or significantly altered, and to make recommendations for listing these National Register eligible properties to the City's Historic Resources Inventory. They would then be subject to the provisions of Palo Alto Municipal Code Chapter 16.49.

Ms. French reported that staff prepared a Request for Proposal. They reviewed several proposals, and the contact is now ready. The Inventory Update will implement Comprehensive Plan Policy L7.1.1. This was listed on the HRB's work plan for 2022 as Goal 2.

The tasks included in the scope were presented. The first task is a reconnaissance survey of residential properties, including approximately 130 National Register properties that are in the residential category. Previous work had been done by the HRB committee to discover which ones have been demolished. It was believed that about 11 properties had been demolished. There will be some kickoff activities with the consultants and staff. Any potential subcommittee of the Board would be welcome to participate in the

kickoff. There is an optional task involving commercial properties. There were approximately 35 of those on the survey from 2000 which were not residential.

The second task will involve making use of work done previously, using original photographs and forms. Further tasks will include public outreach on the website, public hearings, community meetings. Maps showing locations of the inventory properties are posted on the City's website.

Christina Dikas of Page and Turnbull addressed the Board. She will be the project manager on the Page and Turnbull side. Ms. Dikas advised that Page and Turnbull will be providing information for the City's website, including a FAQ. Incentives for being on the HRI will be emphasized, as well as the mechanics of how the project will work. They are also tasked with two community meetings, one at the start of the project to introduce the scope of work and another at the point where the reconnaissance survey has been completed and they have a sense of which National Register eligible properties they will be working towards adding to the Local Inventory. At that point there will be an opportunity to share their findings and have community input.

Ms. Dikas noted that potential letters have been discussed, perhaps two letters, aligned with the intentions of the community meetings. One would let all property owners know about the project and perhaps another would go out after completion of the reconnaissance survey, which would be more focused on the properties that will likely be nominated for the inventory, to do some outreach. The draft of the letter will be tweaked, specifically discussing the National Register rather than California Register and how they will use the information that already exists to apply the criteria for nomination to the National Register to the Local Inventory instead.

Vice Chair Pease asked Ms. Dikas if they would be willing to review the draft letters with representative members of the property owners for feedback in terms of clarity and completeness. Particularly, if a person's property is listed, what responsibilities and potential benefits come with that. Ms. Dikas responded that they do not specifically have scope to work directly with the homeowners. She thought perhaps Isabel Castellano may be doing that on behalf of the City to do outreach directly with the property owners. Ms. French said that this is one of the reasons that they have expanded through the use of another qualified historic preservation professional. Ms. Castellano, being one of the on-call consultants, can provide the ability to have outreach, emails, phone conversations, back and forth with each property owner.

Ms. Dikas added that Page and Turnbull is happy to look at the draft letter that was previously developed and provide comments, work with the HRB and City staff. They would like to focus most of their outreach time on the community meetings and material for the website that is within their scope.

Chair Willis wondered, for homeowners who are excited to have their house on the National Register, if there is an easy path for them, through which the HRB can assist them to get beyond just the Local Inventory. Ms. Dikas responded that anyone could initiate a National Register nomination. It takes a lot of historic research, and it helps to have a consultant to prepare it and work with the California Office of Historic Preservation. She thought they could provide some basic guidance or direct them to the OHP website or the National Park Service to find the instructions on how to initiate a National Register nomination if they are interested in doing so.

Chair Willis thought it would be helpful to hold some sort of workshop and wanted to see the Board go as far as possible. She feels some people would be enthusiastic, and she would like to keep in mind creating the easiest path forward for them. She also wondered about people whose house was analyzed and determined not to be eligible for the National Register and whether it would be possible to re-look at some of the properties that were analyzed 20 years ago. She was surprised when her own property was taken off of the list. She also wondered, if someone has a property on the list and is enthusiastic, if they could cut the process short and just put it in the Local Inventory.

Ms. French weighed in to say she thought they should stay within the scope and the timeline that they have, because even if they want to be immediately put on an inventory, if they have removed the front of the house or made changes, they need to see the house to evaluate the integrity of it. Chair Willis agreed on this point, but thought if they had some core group that agreed early on, she would support momentum in any way they can promote it. Ms. French imagined that with the community meetings that some people

will come forward, some excited and some not, so they need to get ready for that as part of the preparation for the outreach.

Chair Willis asked for a copy of the slides Ms. French had presented.

Board Member Bower noted that one of the barriers to a listing on the California or National Register is the nomination form. He said that former HRB member, Debbie Shepherd, had investigated having her house listed. The house is a stunning example of late 18th Century architecture in Palo Alto. But when she got to the point of seeing the cost of the research that would be required, it was a barrier she couldn't overcome. He wondered if there was a way, using this process, to help people who want to be on a register move past that financial barrier.

Ms. Dikas said it was something they could think about. The National Register is not necessarily meant to have a financial barrier because technically anyone could draft a nomination if they spent the time reviewing the instructions and if they were a good writer. However, she said certainly many people do end up using a professional consultant to get the job done, and that does cost money. She thought it was something they could discuss to see if there are suggestions for assisting homeowners, to make the process easier.

Ruth Todd, Page and Turnbull, commented that, although it's a little premature because they don't know how many properties remain National Register eligible properties, it could be part of a discussion for the City to offer a cost share, or offer an incentive if property owners want to go through those extra steps. It could be an outgrowth of this part of the preservation program, but it would be up to the City to consider something like that. Otherwise, there is a financial or time burden on a property owner who wanted to move forward.

Board Member Bower clarified that he was also thinking of California Register as well and didn't want to limit it to the National Register.

Ms. Dikas said the level of effort is somewhat similar and the Office of Preservation Registration Unit has indicated that if someone is going to nominate the property to one of the registers, they might as well nominate it to the National Register. They consider the level of significance to be the same within a national, state, or local context of history, so they wouldn't necessarily recommend using the California instead of the National register.

Ms. Todd added that anything that is on the National Register is automatically listed on the California Register.

Vice Chair Pease referred to the communications in the letter. He thought it was important to put information on the City website, because that is a given nowadays, but he wondered if there might be scope and budget to possibly include that content in hard copy form in the letters, because some people don't take the time to go online to check something out just because they've provided a URL in a letter. They might be interested in finding out more if they could thumb through at least some of the content that's there and understand what's available to them to look at.

Ms. Dikas said they had talked about that internally, and if they are going to be developing an FAQ anyway, she didn't see a barrier aside from mail cost in including something such as a front and back sheet with the letter. This could be discussed with Ms. French and Isabel.

Board Member Wimmer asked how much participation the homeowner would need to have in the process of nominating and actually getting on the Register. She said there are some significant homes that should be on the Register, but she wondered what would happen if the homeowner did not want their house to be on the Register. She said many homeowners think that an historic designation is limiting.

Ms. French said when they take nominations forward, first to the Historic Resources Board and then to City Council, they will include the homeowner as part of that correspondence, and if they've done a good job of outreach ahead of that, they will fully understand what it means, what the incentives are and the benefits are, taxwise, extra floor area, et cetera, things that can be offered in the existing Code, as well as the value of having a historic resource in general.

Board Member Wimmer felt that incentives will be imperative to making it appealing, especially if the homeowner has to financially invest in the process, as the past Board member had wanted to do, but it

was financially prohibitive. Incentives have been discussed in the past, and she felt they need to focus on making the incentives very real, which opens up the Mills Act question. Although it might be unrelated to this project, incentives are necessary to lead a homeowner to want to take advantage and see the process as a real benefit.

Ms. Dikas asked Ms. French if the properties that are National Register eligible, have the same or similar review process in terms of CEQA, in terms of whether they would be added to the inventory or not. Ms. French thought if they were already determined to have been eligible for the National or California Register, they are already subject to the CEQA process. The difference is that their ordinance in Chapter 16.49 of the Palo Alto Municipal Code talks about coming to the Historic Resources Board for those properties that are category 1's and 2's throughout the city, and Categories 1 through 4 if they are in the Downtown or Professorville. If they are nominated to a Category 1 or 2, then they are subject to the City ordinance that says there is a review process that's not simply at a staff level, depending on the extent of the changes. There is assistance from qualified professionals to look at minor changes to buildings, but if there are more major changes – and in Professorville no matter which category, because it is a historic district – then the ordinance sets forth the process. Currently, they are not subject to the ordinance, because they are only eligible. Ms. Dikas responded that it may therefore be helpful to, in a simple and clear way, outline what the change in process might be, so that there are some expectations of what they would potentially need to undergo if they did have a project that went to the HRB. Ms. French agreed and said this is part of why they need an FAQ.

Board Member Wimmer recalled a story that Martin Bernstein, former Board Member and very experienced, had a house in San Francisco and said that San Francisco considers every house to be historic, and the homeowner has to prove that it's not historic, which she found to be an interesting and not a bad way to think about it. They are trying to identify and preserve and prevent people from tragically demolishing the city's historic fabric. Board Member Wimmer wondered if maybe they should just consider all houses that are at least eligible for the Register, already identified by the age of the house. In looking at the parcel report a lot of the houses are eligible, so she felt this is a historic status in itself. It is eligible, so it is historic, and maybe people should have to work hard to remove their house from a potential historic listing, and perhaps that would be their incentive. If they don't want to be historic, then they can go through the arduous process to take their property off. She asked why they can't just consider all of them to be historic.

Ms. French noted that that would be a change to the Historic Ordinance, a Council-level decision. Board Member Wimmer responded that now would be the time to do it. She felt that with all of the effort the Board puts into this, the Council should embrace what they are doing a little more directly. Chair Willis said hopefully they will, and this is a great baby step, just adding to the inventory after so many years. She wondered how long it had been. Ms. French said the last time the Council touched the Historic Preservation Ordinance was 1998, and it did not go well.

Chair Willis said the inventory dates from the late 70's and early 80's. Ms. French confirmed it was initiated in the 70's and updated through the 80's. Chair Willis said it is a huge step to have anything significant added to the inventory in trying to bring it up-to-date. She hoped in the process they will discover community members who are enthusiastic about their historic fabric and are willing to help maneuver through to get a comprehensive and up-to-date historic inventory, because they are not even addressing properties that have become 50 years old within the last 20 years. She encouraged the Board Members to be very positive about the experience and look for small things that can be accomplished at this point, and hopefully it will be the beginning of getting the ball rolling. Hopefully people will start to understand the process and value the houses that hold so much history, and they can start building some momentum.

Ms. Dikas noted that it is not uncommon for cities to tier their survey efforts and start by either looking at properties that are on an existing inventory to determine if they should still be listed after many years, or as the Board is doing, look at a select group of buildings that have been determined to be eligible, and then potentially to add to the work plan at a later date and when fiscally able to do so, a larger survey update. It is recommended to do updated surveys at least every ten years. She said other cities as well have started out with a smaller group and gone from there. Chair Willis hoped that would be their direction.

Chair Willis wondered whether the Board Members wished to form a three-person subcommittee to help with the project. Board Member Wimmer advocated for staying as one inclusive committee, together, with the entire Board being available for this effort.

Ms. French expressed appreciation for the subcommittee group which had researched which resources still existed in the survey group.

Approval of Minutes

4. Approval of Historic Resources Board Draft Minutes of January 12, 2023

Board Member Bower moved to approve the minutes of the January 12, 2023, meeting. Seconded by Board Member Heinrich, the motion carried (6-0) by voice vote.

Commissioner Questions, Comments, Announcements or Future Meetings and Agendas

Ms. French updated the Board on the Council and ARB's activities on bylaws changes in regard to attendance. The Council decided to set the maximum number of remote meetings at five during any calendar year. Discussion of the bylaws will be included in next month's meeting. She asked the Board Members to think about the maximum number they would be comfortable with.

Board Member Eagleston-Cieslewicz reported that she attended the meeting of the Public Art Commission where they discussed initial ideas and siting for an art installation at the Fry's site. The Commission is receptive to and in favor of incorporating aspects of the site's history into the public art plan for the sites under consideration. A corner area that could include a sculpture was one idea as well as installation of a mural in one area of the building. She felt that engaging with the history of the property is something that is top of mind for the Commission.

Board Member Heinrich reported that she attended the PAST meeting the previous evening. On May 7th they will hold their 27th recognition of historic homes and buildings, including institutional and commercial buildings. The list this year includes Birge Clark's 100th Centennial. She relayed that PAST is wondering if the City would do a proclamation recognizing Birge Clark's contributions. She asked if the Board Members thought they should do something such as that. Chair Willis thought this was a good idea and that City Council would be enthusiastic about supporting it.

Board Member Heinrich shared that PAST will begin their spring walking tours at the end of April. There will be four different tours this year, including Downtown North, which has never been included before. There will be a synopsis of each walk posted on PAST's website.

Board Member Bower asked Ms. French for a brief review of how the ARB's review of the Frye's site went. Ms. French said she had not prepared a concise summary for the Board.

Vice Chair Pease announced that the California Preservation Foundation is doing a webinar on California state housing laws and preservation planning on February 16th from 9:00 to 2:00, for anyone who would like to participate. He was interested in hearing the point of view of the panelists and whether there are questions from other cities, or comments about how those doing similar things in other cities are responding to the new environment. Ms. French asked anyone interested in attending the webinar to let her know, and she will sign them up.

Board Member Bower also announced that the California Preservation Society's annual meeting is being held in San Francisco this year, and it is a fabulous way to be immersed for a couple days in the various issues involved with preservation. The last time they were in San Francisco most of the Board Members went, and it was a very valuable experience. Chair Willis asked Ms. French to check on whether there is a cost for Board Members to attend.

Adjournment

Motion by Vice Chair Pease to adjourn. Seconded by Board Member Bower, the motion carried, by voice vote.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:17 a.m.