



CITY OF
**PALO
ALTO**

PLANNING & COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT

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MEMORANDUM

To: Chair Kohler and Members of the Historic Resources Board (HRB)
From: Matthew Weintraub, Planner
Date: May 28, 2015
Re: City Council/ Historic Resources Board Study Session, May 6, 2015

Executive Summary

The City Council and the HRB conducted a Study Session on May 6, 2015. At the meeting, Council and HRB members provided comments and recommendations on matters related to Palo Alto's historic preservation program. No actions were taken. A recording can be found at <http://midpenmedia.org/city-council-special-meeting-3/>.

As a next step, staff recommends that the HRB provide the Council with a memorandum communicating the HRB's recommendations and responses to comments.

Study Session Topics

This memorandum summarizes the topics of discussion at the Study Session.

Role of the HRB

The role of the HRB under the Municipal Code was reviewed. Discussion centered on the HRB's advisory role to the Council, the Architectural Review Board (ARB), staff and property owners. In addition to the HRB's specific duties to provide design advice for certain kinds of building permits and to make recommendations regarding nominations to the Historic Inventory, the Municipal Code provides for the HRB to "perform such other functions as may be delegated from time to time to the Historic Resources Board by the City Council".

Historic Inventory

The Council generally supported HRB's recommendation to include National Register and California Register properties in the Palo Alto Historic Inventory, which is the City's official list of designated historic structures/sites. Federally and State listed properties are not automatically designated or nominated for local designation. Currently, two districts listed in the National Register in 2005, Green Gables and Greenmeadow, are not locally designated.

Modern Age Context

Council members were supportive of HRB'S recommendation to develop a Palo Alto Modern Age context statement to facilitate the identification of Modern Era resources. It was noted that the Historic Inventory lacks representation of Modern Era resources, even though Palo Alto

is known to be associated with important Modern Era themes and contexts, including the birthplace of Silicon Valley and modernist builder Joseph Eichler.

Survey Update

Council and HRB members expressed interest in updating the City’s survey data, which is used in CEQA review and as a basis for designating properties and districts at the local, State and federal levels. The last survey update was completed in 2000. Specific resource types that were recommended for survey update included early research and development facilities, commercial buildings, and Eichler-built neighborhoods. It is anticipated that the Comprehensive Plan Update could recommend survey updates as part of an implementation program.

Preservation Incentives

The Council and HRB discussed ways to make local preservation incentives more effective and available. Specific recommendations included making more incentives available to “contributing” buildings (Category 3 and 4). There was also interest in making greater use of the Mills Act Property Tax Abatement Program, which is the most effective economic incentive for preservation in California. It is anticipated that the Comprehensive Plan Update could recommend new and updated preservation incentives as part of an implementation program.

Outreach and Education

As noted by Council and HRB members, community outreach and public education by the City is necessary and beneficial to proceeding with any component of the preservation program. In addition, organizations exist whose purpose it is to provide education and outreach in cultural heritage, such as Palo Alto Stanford Heritage (PAST), the Palo Alto Chamber of Commerce, Stanford University, and local museums, libraries and schools.

Certified Local Government

Mayor Holman recognized Palo Alto’s Certified Local Government (CLG) status as important to the City’s preservation program. CLG status allows the City to benefit from California Office of Historic Preservation (OHP) technical assistance and to apply for federal preservation grants. Mayor Holman recommended that the City ensure that the CLG requirement to maintain an updated local inventory is met.

Recommendations

Staff recommends that the HRB provide the Council with a memorandum to summarize and respond to the topics discussed at the Study Session. Staff recommends that the HRB consider recommending the following specific action items:

Topic	Recommended Action
Role of the HRB	No specific recommendation. The HRB may continue to meet regularly twice a month to provide expertise and advice on historic preservation matters as requested by the Council, ARB,

Topic	Recommended Action
	staff and/or other public agencies, in addition to conducting reviews and making recommendations pursuant to Municipal Code Chapter 16.49.
Historic Inventory	Pursue nominations of properties and districts listed in the National Register and/or the California Register and conduct associated outreach to affected property owners. Historic Inventory applications initiated by the HRB would be prepared by staff and submitted for HRB recommendation and Council decision according to the procedure in the Municipal Code.
Modern Age Context	Prepare a CLG grant application in 2016 for federal funding to prepare a Palo Alto Modern Age context statement in 2017. In the meantime, the HRB and staff may conduct preliminary research and fieldwork for a Modern Age context statement.
Survey Update	After the Comprehensive Plan Update, engage the community in establishing a (multi-year) survey update program, in developing program goals and parameters, in setting priorities for survey update, and in providing for public input and review of recommended survey findings. In the meantime, the HRB and staff may conduct preliminary research and fieldwork for a citywide survey update. Survey update projects may be eligible for federal funding under the CLG grant program.
Preservation Incentives	After the Comprehensive Plan Update, engage the community and property owners in exploring, developing and adopting an updated preservation incentives program. In the meantime, as recommended by Council member Dubois, the HRB may propose specific amendments to make existing development incentives more available to “contributing” properties and/or to historic buildings in more existing zoning districts; and research and recommend potential Mills Act program parameters.
Outreach and Education	To accomplish the above objectives, invite partnerships with local organizations and institutions, in order to coordinate outreach and education activities about Palo Alto’s cultural heritage. Also, advise staff on ways to augment the City’s public information portals such as the website, printed bulletins, and the Development Center.
Certified Local Government	As described above, during upcoming CLG grant application periods, apply for federal funds to develop a Modern Age

Topic	Recommended Action
	context statement and to conduct recommended survey updates. Also, continue to meet CLG annual reporting and training requirements for HRB and staff, and assist OHP in implementing the Statewide Historic Preservation Plan.