



Historic Preservation Commission Executive Minutes

February 26, 2018

MONDAY

6:00 p.m.

2600 FRESNO STREET
CONFERENCE ROOM A
2nd Floor, City Hall

I. CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL- 6:00 p.m.

The meeting was called to order by Chair Patrick Boyd at 6:01 PM.

Commissioners Present: Patrick Boyd, Robin Goldbeck, Paul Halajian, Jason Hatwig, Ron McNary, Kristina Roper, Don Simmons.

Staff Present: Laura Groves van Onna, Dan Zack, John Hastrup (CAO) and Amber Piona.

II. APPROVE MEETING MINUTES

A. Approve Minutes for January 22, 2018.

The meeting minutes were approved 7-0, with a motion by Commissioner Roper and a second by Commissioner Simmons.

III. APPROVE AGENDA

The agenda with was approved 7-0 with a motion by Commissioner Hatwig and a second by McNary.

IV. CONSENT CALENDAR

No Items on Consent Calendar

V. CONTINUED MATTERS

No Continued Matters

VI. COMMISSION ITEMS

A. REVIEW AND APPROVE FINDINGS FOR RE-SURVEY OF POTENTIAL L STREET HISTORIC DISTRICT PURSUANT TO FMC 12-1606

Historic Preservation Specialist Laura Groves van Onna presented staff report on the resurvey of the potential L Street Historic District. After a reconnaissance level survey, staff found that the area did not retain enough integrity to create a cohesive historic district. Staff recommended that the commission approve the findings of the re-survey of a potential L Street Historic District.

Commissioner Ron McNary: How many houses in the L Street section would meet the criteria for local designation on their own?

Commissioner Paul Halajian: That aren't already listed?

McNary: Yes.

Historic Preservation Specialist Groves van Onna: There are several properties that if there were a district, they could potentially contribute, but they were not necessarily individually eligible.

Commissioner Don Simmons: I'm not aware that residential use is one of the criteria for a historic district.

Groves van Onna: In my research, looking at early maps, this neighborhood was heavily residential area. In the most recent [2007] survey it was noted as a residential historic district.

Commissioner Kristina Roper: "Between 1897 and 1937, a mix of residential styles," so that is the proposed district theme.

Groves van Onna: Earlier surveys, like the 1977 and 1994 included non-residential buildings, but I don't believe that that was an accurate understanding of the historical context of the neighborhood in the early 20th century.

Roper: Thank you for your work on this. It's thorough and succinct; no we do not have a historic district.

Simmons: I have a question about the boundaries. Other historic districts, such as Wilson Island and the Porter Tract are those more defined boundaries than this area? How does this compare? What about non-contiguous districts that have more floating boundaries?

Groves van Onna: I did look at the existing historic districts, and the Porter Tract is a solid rectangle of contributing buildings and Wilson Island is also rectangular. The most recently adopted historic district, Huntington Boulevard is not as compact, but it is within a few blocks of one street. In this case, there is just not continuity in the area to support a

district.

Simmons: Doesn't that set a precedent in the future for thematic districts that might be non-contiguous. If we made this decision, that it's not a district, that in the future when we have thematic, non-contiguous districts, such as the Hitching Post and Old Armenian Town, how do you make that argument?

Deputy City Attorney John Hastrup: This district was considered as a potential residential historic district, there are different criteria.

Assistant Director Dan Zack: A thematic district, by its definition is discontinuous right? It would seem to me that that would be its own thing. In this district, which is spatially coherent and is defined by its continuity, that's an entirely different animal than a thematic district, like the Bungalow Court which can be scattered. Tell me if I'm wrong, Laura, but it doesn't seem like doing one one way and another the other way precludes each other.

Groves van Onna: No it would not.

Halajian: It seems to me that this whole process of recognizing identifiable districts is to have any merit it has to be based on the facts, which [Groves van Onna has] uncovered here. Looking at all the "N"s [non-contributing] on the map and saying well this is still a district because we want it to be, then that diminishes the importance of creating districts.

Roper: it lacks integrity of feeling; you don't go through there and get that feeling that this is a residential district.

Halajian: The lesson here is that we've allowed that to happen. If we don't want this to happen anymore then we have to be more diligent about being proactive.

Roper: Where do we go from here regarding the original impetus to do this?

Hastrup: The vote today is whether to approve the findings, that there is not a district here. Then, essentially you're voting it out of your jurisdiction, and the original impetus becomes a ministerial matter.

Public Comment Open

Mickey Chacon (615 E Keats): I would like a clarification regarding the markings on the map. Yellows compared to non yellows, etc.

Groves van Onna: Yellow on the map indicates that the property is listed on the Local Register. Yellow with a red border indicates that the property was listed on the Local Register but has been demolished. "Y"s in Purple are properties that could contribute to a historic district, given that they were constructed between 1897 and 1937, and they retain integrity and

possess a historic residential use. There are also “Y[c]” and “Y[i]” on the map indicating that the property was built in the time frame but had either commercial or institutional use. Properties marked with “N” were not constructed in that time period and don’t possess integrity.

Chicon: So, demolished buildings that were constructed during the time period are important for establishing the historic district?

Groves van Onna: No.

George Hostetter (730 W San Ramon): Not clear to me why this area is not a historic district, it could be. I walk it a lot, and have done for many years when I was at the [Fresno] Bee, and there was a feel to me. There are a lot of old buildings there. Is there some ratio that it doesn’t meet legal standards or this is a subjective opinion by staff?

Chair Patrick Boyd: Is there a percentage ratio of homes to overall structures? Or could we define contiguous a little bit better?

Groves van Onna: It’s a borderline thing; do we count percentages of buildings or area? There were pockets of properties that could contribute, but in my professional opinion I did not encounter the continuity that a historic district requires. If there were an obvious majority of properties my conclusion would be different.

Vice-Chair Jason Hatwig: There have been a number of properties that have been lost, through fire, or being demolished, and had those still been there, there would be a much larger chance of there being a potential district there.

Groves van Onna: This is true, there have been numerous alterations and demolitions since this area was first surveyed and also since the most recent survey in 2007.

Boyd: Some of these properties are of a historic nature but are of commercial use?

Groves van Onna: There are commercial properties along M St. and Divisadero that are on the Local Register.

McNary: So commercial properties cannot be considered contributors to a district?

Roper: They can, but the theme of this district is residential.

Simmons: What is the current zoning for this area? It’s not residential, is it?

Zack: This area is zoned Downtown Neighborhood, which allows residential among other uses.

Simmons: So the zoning would preclude the residential nature of this district.

Zack: Prior to that the zoning was C-4, also a mixed use kind of zone. So, in the very early days of city planning that residential use was identified, but post-war the mixed use nature of downtown worked its way into regulation and practice. The pocket around the core block (1700) block of L Street, that immediate area has an overlay to preserve the low-rise nature and setbacks that give it a residential character. So anything that infills right around that core block, it could be any number of uses, but the building form would have to be similar to those homes. That's only a very small area that has a zoning overlay, as you get past San Joaquin Street, Calaveras and Stanislaus then it's a six story height limit and urban buildings up to the sidewalk.

Boyd: Clarification, if a project is being proposed adjacent to a listed property, we get to review it for continuity, yes?

Zack: Yes.

Hatwig: And even if it's not listed, but of a certain era, that also comes onto staff's radar to see if there could be issues there, right?

Zack: Per the General Plan and the Development Code, whenever a demolition permit is applied for on any property, we do a quick scan to check if it's on the state, local and national registers and historic districts. Or, if it's 50 years old or older, we flag it, pull it aside and analyze it; if we think it could potentially be historic we bring it to you and start that process. If, like most properties it isn't eligible or potentially eligible, we approve the demo permit and move on. Most properties get demo permits, a fraction of those get pulled and reviewed, and a fraction of those come to you.

Public Comment Closed

Halajian: Crude math shows 35% of the properties are listed or eligible and that doesn't appear to hold up as a district.

Hatwig: Additionally, trying to find a thematic district within these properties is difficult to do, given the varied architecture, but it's one of my favorite neighborhoods at the same time! It's nice to know that a lot of these are already protected already. There's a lot of adjacency to yellow, which means things will come back.

The findings of the re-survey of the L Street district were approved 6-1(Simmons) on a motion by Commissioner Roper and a second by Commissioner Goldbeck.

B.REVIEW AND APPROVAL (WITH CONDITIONS) OF THE WILLIAM SAROYAN HOUSE MUSEUM PURSUANT TO FMC 12-1617

Historic Preservation Specialist Laura Groves van Onna gives an overview of the project. The applicant is proposing to turn the William Saroyan House (HP 243) into a house museum. Changes are proposed to be limited to the

interior of the building. Staff recommends approval of the project with 9 conditions.

Halajian: One question on [condition number] 9, is that limited to the exterior only, is that correct?

Groves van Onna: I left the wording as “any changes” to make sure that we are fully aware of what is being proposed on the property.

Halajian: Including the interior?

Groves van Onna: I can revise if the Commission would like to restrict my review to the exterior; that is an option.

Hastrup: Your review would be limited to the scope set out here, so it wouldn’t be any tiny little alteration.

Zack: The approach that Laura has taken in her recommendation is to be very permissive with what’s being done inside, focus on keeping the exterior in its original state and with that as the tone she’s set, she could evaluate the changes for how they might affect the exterior of the house, at least this way things are called to her attention.

Halajian: I think 9 is vague, and because it’s a museum, I think we should give them as much freedom to do what they need to do inside and make it clear that all we are concerned about is the outside.

Roper: Number 6 stipulates that, so there is a redundancy.

Halajian: Yes, I think 9 and 6 are contradictory.

Roper: Yes, as long as they adhere to 6 then there should be no problem with 9. I think 9 should be eliminated.

Groves van Onna: I put 9 in as a safeguard to ensure that alterations that take place in the interior don’t affect the exterior, during construction or upon completion.

Zack: To that point, I was involved in a museum in an old courthouse whose windows were proposed to be walled-in to provide more space for exhibits. That affected the outward appearance of the building. Some interior changes could affect the exterior appearance.

McNary: Isn’t that covered by number 6?

Hastrup: Number 6 doesn’t talk about submitting to the Historic Preservation Specialist. Do we have a motion to amend?

Groves van Onna: Possible language to could be “any changes that have the potential to affect the exterior”?

Ralph Kachadourian, Supervising Planner: I am the supervising planner and overseeing the conditional use permit process on this project. I think it’s important to look at number 9, and possibly reword it. There may be minor modifications that are proposed in this project and this condition captures

Historic Preservation Commission, February 26, 2018

those changes for review.

Halajian: To the exterior?

Kachadourian: Yes to the exterior. The intent is to make all alterations to the interior and to not touch the exterior.

Hatwig: Further clarification, we're not approving any kind of hours, or number of visitors, that's all staff handled through the CUP process.

Kachadourian: That's correct.

Hastrup: So we have a motion on the table to accept the staff recommendation with the change to number 9 "any exterior changes"?

Boyd: We don't have a motion yet, we need to take this to the public.

Public Comment Open

Paul Miller (1035 E Olive Ave): I am working with the applicant on this project. The idea is to not change the outside of the building because this is [William] Saroyan's last residence and there are others who can speak better to that than I can. The interior is going to be great; there will be a hologram, a display area for Saroyan's work. The idea is for this to fit in with the community, to have it look the same as it did when Saroyan lived here. We are not trying to change any of that.

Public Comment Closed

Simmons: I'm pleased we can do this. Part of it is what took us so long? And secondly there are so few designated properties and further more house museums from this time period. People think that to have a house museum it needs to be like the Meux Home or Lincoln's Log Cabin and people have been born since 1950, and house museums are going to look and seem different. The fact that it is in the middle of this neighborhood is perfect, I can't think of anything better. I hope that the County will do the same with Philip Levine's house in their purview, so that we can recognize our writers here in ways like this.

Hatwig: What is the anticipated opening date? So we can start organizing tours and getting things together for Preservation Week.

Boyd: I have to tell you I thought you had messed up the address, because when I went there, I thought there was no way this where I was supposed to be. I had no idea, it was awesome and very much a learning experience.

Halajian: The design team involved in the project is international, and it's a really great project.

Roper: I propose that we change number 9 and insert after "approve project" language such as "that have the potential to affect the exterior."

The William Saroyan museum project, with amended conditions, was approved 7-0 on a motion by Commissioner Roper and a second by Commissioner

Halajian.

VII. CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

None

VIII. UNSCHEDULED ITEMS

A. Members of the Commission

1. Mills Act

McNary: Can commission members take advantage of the Mills Act?

Hastrup: We researched this topic and my belief is that we will have to streamline the procedures to make sure they apply to everyone equally. This is a benefit that is generally available to the public and so as long as we follow the appropriate procedures and that any member of the commission is not associated with approving or disapproving their own property, then I think it will not be a concern going forward. There will be a formal opinion forthcoming. As we're currently doing the program, it's fine. Where it gets tricky is if the program becomes way too popular and then we have to start applying subjective criteria, to set up a system where everyone is treated equally is tricky. For the time being, where if you meet designated criteria and you're in, then it should be fine. Hopefully we can design it so that no matter what it is not a deterrent to joining the Commission.

Zack: If every currently eligible property in the city was on the Mills Act, it would still be less than one percent of the properties in Fresno. There are about 400 to 500 eligible (when you consider contributors to districts) and we have 125,000 parcels in the city.

Hastrup: Of course, there may be people who are encouraged to seek listing on the Local Register in order to take advantage of the Mills Act. But it doesn't look like we are anywhere near having a problem.

Zack: That is actually a benefit!

B. Staff

1. Priority Historic District List

Groves van Onna: Last meeting, it was brought up that the Commission had previously made a priority list of historic districts. I printed out what I found. The old list had Huntington Boulevard (already completed), Bungalow Courts, Chinatown, and the North Park Area. These were priority districts in 2010. Is this something we'd like to revisit?

Historic Preservation Commission, February 26, 2018

Zack: Does this sound like the list you were talking about?

Simmons: Yes, that is the list I was referring to.

Zack: North Park Area is also known as Lowell.

Groves van Onna: I imagine there are others?

Simmons: Yosemite. There are 18 properties and there were conversations taking place, but it wasn't on the list?

Groves van Onna: I also have a list of surveys conducted by 2010, which include the North Park area, Pinedale Historic resource Survey, Upper Triangle Area (L Street), City of Fresno Arts and Culture District, Broadway Row Survey. That's what I have, I welcome input.

Simmons: Does Old Armenian Town need to be on the list since it's been so long?

Zack: No. This list is for what would be brought forward to this room for consideration, and Old Armenian Town has already been approved by this body.

Halajian: You said Huntington, right?

Zack: Yes, this list was from 2010 before it was a district. One of the things that Laura and I talked about is to get together a list of the potential historic districts that have been identified at one point or the other and bring that raw list back here and see which ones might be priorities.

McNary: What is the one about Broadway?

Zack: My recollection is that is what is through now be called the Cultural Arts District.

Halajian: Between Tuolumne and Stanislaus.

Simmons: The survey that was done was to look for a potential automotive industries.

Boyd: Another potential district is a mid-century modern district around Shaw avenue, garden office. The concern was the development on Blackstone and Shaw area might affect some of those resources. There were a couple dozen.

Zack: Between Palm and Blackstone?

Boyd: Slightly further down to Fruit or West. That might be another area. There was a re-skinning of a property that made people concerned.

Zack: So was there a survey?

Commissioner Goldbeck: It was part of an effort to look at resources in a more proactive way.

Halajian: A great example is an adobe office complex right across from Fig Garden Village, a Bob Stevens. I could see someone getting ahold of that building and putting aluminum panels on it. It's on the west side of Palm and is a classic example of Bob Stevens' work.

Simmons: That was during the period of time we were talking about Cedar Lanes and we having a conversation about that architecture. It was a reconnaissance survey. Included in the Gougie buildings.

Recording Secretary Amber Piona: The document that came out of that work is a really good context statement about modernism in Fresno. It doesn't get into the level of a survey so there aren't DPR forms and photographs, it's more like here's a list of types, here's architects. It's a good groundwork to do a survey if that's what [the Commission] wants.

Halajian: Dan, do you know about the Better Blackstone Design Challenge? There has been talk of some sort of survey there. Oftentimes Blackstone gets maligned as this terrible thing, if you really looks closely at Blackstone there is some fantastic modernism buried in there. Some kind of survey of Blackstone from Radcliffe Stadium from up to Shaw or Herndon would be really appropriate.

Simmons: Are we making that list now, with this conversation?

Zack: What this could do, is if we go back and compile the entire list and add these as potential. Then we can agendize it, and you guys can discuss the entire list, which is everything that has a formal survey and a couple of these that don't but still might be worth looking at, and then make a priority list for the whole thing.

Groves van Onna: Are there others that aren't mentioned yet?

Piona: Yes, the South [Van Ness] Industrial Survey.

McNary: Adoline and Palm, through Pearl.

Simmons: The Practice Houses along Barstow that were built by the utility companies in the 1960s, they were featured in Sunset. Along Barstow near Palm.

McNary: Terrace Gardens.

Simmons: The Hitching Post district. I don't know how many years we've been talking about that district. There was a survey done on Bungalow Courts, funded by the state I believe.

2. Historic District Signage

McNary: I was looking at the Armenian Town street sign and for the historic districts, shouldn't we have a special sign for the historic districts, naming them?

Zack: We don't have anything like that in Wilson Island, Huntington

Boulevard has a sign but they put that in before they became a district. We can look at some best practices, and bring that back as part of the discussion.

McNary: People don't know it's a historic district.

Simmons: Tampa does an amazing job, each of their districts has a different color.

McNary: doesn't have to be a huge sign, but something to stick on top of the street sign to let people know.

Zack: In the Olive commercial are in the Tower District there's a custom Art Deco street signs. In Terrace Gardens for example they still have the subdivision monuments on some of the corners, that would be a good place to do signage if that were ever designated.

McNary: We should advertise our historic districts.

Zack: We'll look into that.

3. Historic Property Plaques

Simmons: The plaques are extraordinarily expensive it's almost prohibitive. Very few of the designated properties have the plaques. Perhaps we could look at a less expensive plaque option. Other cities have found more affordable options; there are materials that can replicate the same look. The brass is frequently stolen. Very few of the properties have the plaques because they are expensive.

Zack: In Redwood City we did wood plaques.

Goldbeck: Pacific Grove did wood, as well.

Hatwig: With CNC [Computer Numerical Control] machines it's pretty easy to get wood signs.

McNary: I like a brass plaque; I have one on my house.

Simmons: Mine was stolen.

Kachadourian: The one on the Saroyan House was stolen, too.

4. Armenian Town Historic District

Boyd: What is the status of the Old Armenian Town Historic District?

Hastrup: We're still in a holding pattern, resolving the outstanding legal and political concerns. I've been instructed that we don't have any more, and I don't personally know any more than that. I know that's a deeply unsatisfying answer and hopefully by the next meeting I can give a better answer.

Boyd: I hope the issues won't go against the district.

Hastrup: That I can speak to, there is no concern about these issues

affecting the district in any more. These are just formalities. Whatever project could potentially happen, it would only be enhanced by the district, that's part of the attraction. It is frustrating getting the delay on the district. I was specifically instructed "no updates."

Boyd: Maybe by next meeting?

Hastrup: There's a good chance. Please feel free to always ask, ask whomever you'd like about the project.

5. Historic Preservation Week

Goldbeck: Do we have any events in store for Preservation Week?

Groves van Onna: We have not planned anything specific yet, I am open to ideas. My first year here, a lot of my effort will be put towards promoting our incentives, including the Mills Act Program, and our recently adopted Historic Preservation Mitigation Fund. I know for 2019, Wilson Island want to plan a centennial celebration as well as the Fresno Historical Society, so it will be a big year. If you have any ideas for this year, let me know.

6. Historic Preservation Mitigation Fund

Groves van Onna: The funds were approved last year for this fiscal year, \$50,000, and now City Council has approved our administer those funds to people. We're in the process of developing an application for people who are interested. It's a reimbursement grant that can be issued in the amounts of \$7,500 or 40% of project costs whichever is less. It's for all listed properties, including Heritage Properties, and it's to reward work that is being done to preserve, rehabilitate, restore and reconstruct historic properties.

Zack: It's to fund the difference between vinyl and wood windows, stucco wraps and repairing wood siding.

Hastrup: For the first year, it's first come, first served. In the future we may have to institute a competitive process.

Boyd: I have a feeling with that program we might get to a competitive process pretty quickly. For a long time we haven't had anything to offer and now we have this and the Mills Act; I'm kind of overwhelmed!

7. Historic Preservation Commissioner Training

Hatwig: I know that soon we're going to have to think about our training. I know we either went out of town for, or last year we had it presented here, I don't know what's on the radar.

Zack: Yes, that's part of our CLG obligation, and we're always on the lookout, if you see any good training opportunities let Laura know. We want to keep up on that, not only for CLG, but it also helps us do

our jobs better.

8. Thorn Home (2543 E Madison Ave, HP#243)

Groves van Onna: On February 7, the Thorn Home was destroyed by fire. It was “unusual for Fresno as a vernacular example of Arts and Crafts architecture. The ‘woody’ quality of this home links it closely to the residential building of the San Francisco area of the early twentieth century, often called ‘the First Bay Tradition.’ ” We lost one home. There was another fire adjacent to a historic resource.

Boyd: Do we know how it started?

Groves van Onna: The house was vacant, it had caught fire once before. This time the fire department decided to let it go.

Boyd: Do we know who the architect was?

Groves van Onna: I don’t have it on hand, I can send notification around.

Goldbeck: What was its number again?

Groves van Onna: 243. It wasn’t clear what caused the fire, but they think it might have been someone who entered the house and started a warming or cooking fire.

Zack: The other house was adjacent to a historic residence but wasn’t a listed historic building. That building is not a total loss, and the owner has reached out to us about repairs.

Groves van Onna: Sorry to end on that note. It was a very eventful month!

C. General Public

No Public Comment.

IX. NEXT MEETING: March 26, 2018, 6 PM Conference Room A, City Hall.

X. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Boyd adjourned the meeting at 7:22 PM.

***Respectfully submitted:
Laura Grove van Onna, Historic
Preservation Specialist
Amber Piona, Recording Secretary***