

November 13, 2017

FROM: DANIEL ZACK, AICP, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR  
Development and Resource Management Dept.

SUBJECT: CONSIDERATION OF A MILLS ACT HISTORICAL PROPERTY CONTRACT  
FOR THE ROWELL BUILDING (HP#170) LOCATED AT 2100 TULARE  
STREET PURSUANT TO FMC 12-1706.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends that the Commission hold a public hearing and recommend that the Director of Development and Resource Management enter into a Historical Property Contract for the Rowell Building (HP#170) located at 2100 Tulare Street pursuant to FMC 12-1706.

## **BACKGROUND**

The Rowell Building was one of the earliest mid-rise buildings in Fresno, signaling the transition from the three story brick buildings of the Victorian period to the era of steel-framed neo-classical structures skyscrapers. It is very representative of a unique period in American history in which the centers of small and medium-sized cities urbanized heavily around streetcar lines. This was a brief window after the development of structural steel and elevators but prior to mass suburbanization. In the present time buildings of this height are typically constructed only in large cities, but this grand, six-story edifice was erected in 1912 when Fresno's population was only about 25,000.

The Rowell family was very influential in Fresno, California, and the United States. Dr. Chester A. Rowell was the second physician in Fresno County, the mayor of Fresno, the founder of the Fresno Republican newspaper, a California state senator, a University of California regent, and a veteran of the Civil War. His nephew Chester H. Rowell was editor of the Fresno Republican and the San Francisco Chronicle, lectured at the UC Berkeley and Stanford University, and was also a University of California regent. Later in life he worked actively to promote general international good will among nations bordering the Pacific Ocean and spent much time in Asia as a member of the Institute of Pacific Relations.

In addition, the Rowell Building was designed by one of Fresno's most important architects, Richard F. Felchlin. His firm designed or built many of Fresno's largest buildings, including the Bank of Italy Building, the Patterson Building, the San Joaquin Light and Power Building, the Pacific Southwest Building, and the Californian Hotel.

The owners have requested to enter into a Historical Property Agreement (also known as a Mills Act Contract) with the City.

Mills Act contracts are a very effective historic preservation tool. Such agreements provide for yearly property tax savings for the owner in exchange for a commitment to maintain and improve the historic character of the property. This Mills Act program was adopted by the City Council in 2016, and this proposal, if approved, will be part of the first group of contracts enacted under the program.

The minimum duration for a Mills Act Contract is 10 years. Once granted a Mills Act contract, a property owner saves approximately 40%-50% of the individual assessed tax valuation of the property. The estimated loss of revenue to the City for a property valued at \$1,000,000 would be approximately at \$800 to \$1,000 per year.

In order to ensure compliance with the proposed program, staff and/or the Historic Preservation Commission conduct periodic inspections of the properties to verify that the agreed-to improvements are being made by the owner.

The Rowell Building is currently undergoing an extensive restoration and renovation, which is due to be complete in June of 2018. Their proposed 10 Year Improvement Plan reflects this near-new state that the building will be in within the first year of the contract term, and merely proposes to maintain the building in that state, which is appropriate. Further improvements will be unnecessary.

## **CEQA**

The proposed historic designation seeks to insure the long-term preservation of the subject resource which is exempt from CEQA (California Environmental Quality Act) review, per section 15331, Class 31 of the CEQA guidelines.

Attachment:       Exhibit A - DPR Evaluation for the Rowell Building  
                          Exhibit B – Proposed 10 Year Improvement Plan

# HISTORIC RESOURCES INVENTORY

## IDENTIFICATION

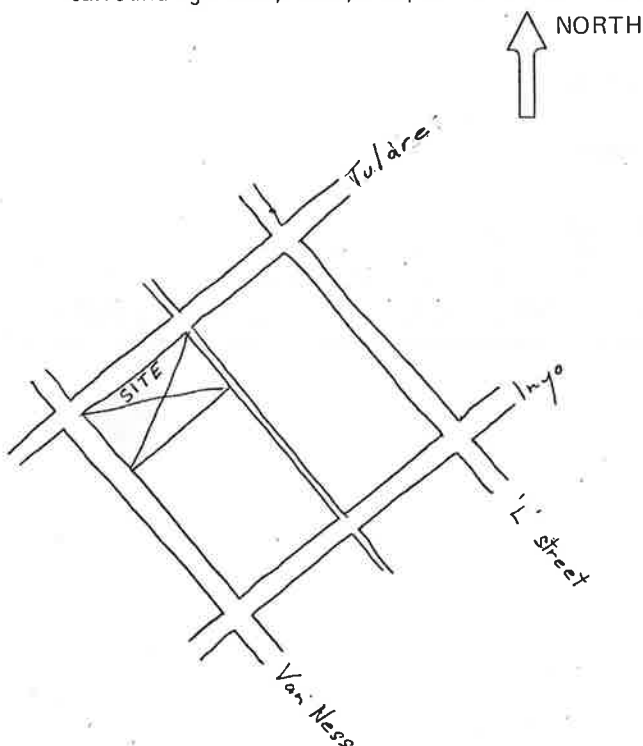
1. Common name: Rowell Building
2. Historic name, if known: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Street or rural address: 2100 Tulare Street  
City: Fresno ZIP: 93721 County: Fresno
4. Present owner, if known: Rowell Company Address: 405 Rowell Building  
City: Fresno ZIP: 93721 Ownership is: Public ☐ Private ☒
5. Present Use: Offices Original Use: Same
- Other past uses: \_\_\_\_\_

## DESCRIPTION

6. Briefly describe the present physical appearance of the site or structure and describe any major alterations from its original condition:

A six story steel frame, brick faced structure in the commercial style. Ornamented cornice surrounds the top of the building on two sides. Some terra cotta design work at the top windows and at belt courses and cornice frieze. The bottom floor has been remodeled and completely glazed in the past five years - one of many revisions. The remainder of the building remains as it was built - massive and assertive. The original bottom floor was wood frame glazed with leaded glass lights over the framed show windows.

7. Locational sketch map (draw and label site and surrounding streets, roads, and prominent landmarks):



8. Approximate property size:

Lot size (in feet) Frontage 75  
Depth 150  
or approx. acreage 0.22

9. Condition: (check one)

a. Excellent ☒ b. Good ☐ c. Fair ☐  
d. Deteriorated ☐ e. No longer in existence ☐

10. Is the feature a. Altered? ☒ b. Unaltered? ☐

11. Surroundings: (Check more than one if necessary)

a. Open land ☐ b. Scattered buildings ☐  
c. Densely built-up ☒ d. Residential ☐  
e. Commercial ☒ f. Industrial ☐  
g. Other ☐

12. Threats to site:

a. None known ☒ b. Private development ☐  
c. Zoning ☐ d. Public Works project ☐  
e. Vandalism ☐ f. Other ☐

13. Date(s) of enclosed photograph(s): 1978

NOTE: The following (Items 14-19) are for structures only.

14. Primary exterior building material: a. Stone ☐ b. Brick ☒ c. Stucco ☐ d. Adobe ☐ e. Wood ☐  
f. Other ☐
15. Is the structure: a. On its original site? ☒ b. Moved? ☐ c. Unknown? ☐
16. Year of initial construction 1912 This date is: a. Factual ☒ b. Estimated ☐
17. Architect (if known): Felchlin
18. Builder (if known): \_\_\_\_\_
19. Related features: a. Barn ☐ b. Carriage house ☐ c. Outhouse ☐ d. Shed(s) ☐ e. Formal garden(s) ☐  
f. Windmill ☐ g. Watertower/tankhouse ☐ h. Other ☐ i. None ☒

#### SIGNIFICANCE

20. Briefly state historical and/or architectural importance (include dates, events, and persons associated with the site when known):

One of earliest multi-story buildings in Fresno, contemporary with the Helm Building. The building is intimately connected with the Rowell Family - one of the most influential and important families of Fresno - past and present. Chester H. Rowell who was editor of the Fresno Republican from 1898 - 1920; Dr. Chester Rowell - the second physician in Fresno County, etc. Started in 1912, the Einstein Department Store, leased space on the lower floors in 1913 - long before completion. One of the major buildings in Fresno County - connected with an important family and long a landmark in the downtown area. Significant because of its early date, the earliest major office building still standing in Fresno.

21. Main theme of the historic resource: (Check only one): a. Architecture ☒ b. Arts & Leisure ☐  
c. Economic/Industrial ☐ d. Exploration/Settlement ☐ e. Government ☐ f. Military ☐  
g. Religion ☐ h. Social/Education ☐

22. Sources: List books, documents, surveys, personal interviews, and their dates:

"As Pop Saw It" Jerome P. Laval, 1975  
Assessor's office

23. Date form prepared: 6/29/78 By (name): William E. Patnaude  
Address: 1050 "S?" Street City: Fresno, California ZIP: 93721  
Phone: (209) 486-8150 Organization: Allen Y. Lew & William E. Patnaude, Inc.

(State Use Only)

# The Rowell-Chandler Building



## 10-Year Improvement Plan

<u>Year</u>	<u>IMPROVEMENT</u>
2017	Removed 160 Tons of Toxic Material and complete Restoration of Building Exterior
2018	Complete Rehabilitation and Restoration. Begin Building Tenant Improvements in Spring of 2018. Occupancy by end of June 2018
2019	Maintain as Needed
2020	Maintain as Needed
2021	Maintain as Needed
2022	Maintain as Needed
2023	Maintain as Needed
2024	Maintain as Needed
2025	Maintain as Needed
2026	Maintain as Needed

*\*Note: The following project is actively under construction working toward the completion of its 10-Year Improvement Plan.*