



AGENDA REPORT

MEETING DATE: October 22, 2012

TO: Historical Commission

FROM: Janis Ahmadjian-Baer, Historical Commissioner
Zachary Dahl, Staff Liaison

SUBJECT: Historic Plaque Program

RECOMMENDATION: Discuss and edit the draft historic plaque program proposal as appropriate.

BACKGROUND:

At the April 23, 2012 Historical Commission meeting, the Commission discussed the idea of developing a historic plaque program to recognize properties on the Los Altos Historical Resources Inventory (HRI). Over subsequent meetings, the commission researched plaque programs used by other cities and plaque manufactures, and discussed intent and scope of a potential Los Altos plaque program. The Commission focused on the plaque programs used by the cities of Palo Alto and Santa Cruz to guide the structure of the draft plaque program. However, the underlying goal was to develop a historic plaque program unique to the City of Los Altos.

DISCUSSION:

The Historical Commission is charged with encouraging public knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of the City's past, and fostering civic and neighborhood pride and sense of identity based upon the recognition and use of the City's historic resources. The Historical Commission has identified the creation of a historic plaque program as a way to recognize properties and structures listed on the HRI to further the City's goals of community outreach and education about Los Altos History.

As outlined in the attached criteria, which was originally drafted by Commissioner Ahmadjian-Baer and edited by Staff Liaison Dahl, the City should adopt a historic plaque program. Staff recommends that the program not have a yearly cap or allocation on the number of plaques that are to be awarded and that the process is owner initiated.

However, as previously discussed, the Commission could take a more proactive role and seek to award and install a certain number of plaques each year. In order to get the program started, in the first year, plaques could be given to all properties with Historic Landmark designations. There are currently 19 properties with Historic Landmark designations. However, owner support and participation would be needed if the Commission is going to successfully install these historic plaques and it is unclear if all property owners support the historic designations on their properties.

In order to move forward and finalize the draft of the historic plaque program, the Commission should consider the following questions:

1. What will the plaques cost and what company will manufacture them?
2. Who will pay for the cost of the plaques and their installation? City of Los Altos, property owners or a joint venture.
3. How should the plaque be designed and what information should be included on it?
4. What are the benefits to Los Altos residents and the public?
5. How should the plaque program be promoted to the public?
6. How should the Los Altos History Museum involved in the program?

Once a design of the historic plaque template is finalized and the program details are agreed upon, a final plaque program proposal should be forwarded to the City Council for consideration. In addition, the Commission should discuss whether or not a funding request for a certain number of historic plaques should be included in the proposal to Council.

Attachments:

Draft Historic Plaque Program Criteria

CITY OF LOS ALTOS

HISTORIC PLAQUE PROGRAM

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION:

The intent of the Los Altos Historic Plaque Program is to recognize properties and structures listed on the Los Altos Historic Resources Inventory in order to support the spirit of historic preservation in the City. This program will outline the criteria and design for a historic plaque that can be installed on Historic Resource and Historic Landmark properties. All properties and structures listed in the Los Altos Historic Resources Inventory are eligible to receive a historic plaque.

PROGRAM PURPOSE:

Historic plaques can provide Los Altos residents with a means to identify and learn about the historic properties and structures in their neighborhoods and around the City. This program will encourage greater public knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the City's past, foster civic and neighborhood pride, and further develop a sense of identify based upon the recognition and use of the City's historic resources.

PLAQUE DESIGN:

The design of the historic plaque shall be unique to Los Altos and will include the City name, identify historic status (Historic Resource or Historic Landmark), the year in which the structure was built, and in some cases the name of the original owner/family. In order to ensure that all historic plaques are consistent, the design included as attachment A shall be used as the template for all historic plaques. Each design shall be reviewed and approved by the Historical Commission prior to manufacture and installation.

PLAQUE LOCATION:

The desired location of the plaque will be adjacent to the front door of the historic residence or structure. In cases where the front door is not visible from a public street, the plaque may be mounted adjacent to the front walkway at or near the property's frontage on a public street.

PROCESS:

The property owner may submit a request for a historic plaque to the Historical Commission staff liaison. The property owner would work with staff to input the appropriate information in the plaque design template. At the next available meeting, the Historical Commission would review and approve the historic plaque design and the location on the property that the plaque would be installed. Once approved by the Historical Commission, the property owner can move forward with manufacturing and installation of the historic plaque.

CITY OF LOS ALTOS

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Deleted: All properties on the Historic Resources Inventory will eventually receive plaques. The first year properties in Landmark status category will be awarded plaques. In subsequent years homes in the historic category will receive plaques starting with ones that are exceptionally well maintained and exemplify the value and success of historic preservation.