



HISTORICAL COMMISSION MINUTES

7:00 p.m., January 27, 2003
Council Meeting Chambers
One North San Antonio Road, Los Altos, California 94022

CALL TO ORDER

ROLL CALL

Present: Chair Foerster; Vice-Chair Carpenter; Commissioners Hull, Humphries, McDonald, and Sandoval. Absent: None

MINUTES

Approval of the minutes of the meeting on November 25, 2002 was moved by Commissioner Hull and seconded by Commissioner McDonald. Passed.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

- A. Owner, 439 Rinconada Ct., spoke to the Historical Commission and audience about his families' interest in creating a Mills Act agreement for their home. He had been in touch with a community member who recently went through the process. This topic will be on the agenda for the February meeting.
- B. Mark Connolly, Assistant Planner briefed the Historical Commission on a request to enlarge the ATM at 300 Main St. Commissioners Hull and McDonald were appointed to a subcommittee to work with Connolly. A report on the result or status will come forward at the February meeting.

DISCUSSION/ACTION ITEMS

- A. 110 University Avenue – The owner of 110 University Avenue is amenable to the Historical Commission gathering a photo documentation of some of the interesting features of the interior and exterior. 110 University Avenue is not on the Historic Resources Inventory and possibly would not rank over 59 points on the Kalman scale if it had been reviewed by a previous group of Commissioners. Vice-Chair Carpenter moved that the owner, Planning staff, and the Planning Commission consider the streetscape and the neighborhood ambience in trying to preserve the site, while recognizing that the demolition of the home can be accepted. Seconded by Commissioner

Hull. Commissioner Sandoval amended the motion to include working to preserve significant heritage trees on the property particularly those visible from the street, if possible. Hull seconded the amended motion. Passed unanimously.

- B. 160 West Portola Avenue – Public Comments: A Palo Alto resident spoke in favor of preserving the garden, house and tank house, as a link back to Los Altos' earlier architectural and agricultural history. This potential buyer had researched a previous owner, Clementine Gurnsey from 1928. Paul Eckert, 100 University Avenue, Los Altos, spoke for the current owner and her family. He presented drawings developed by real estate appraiser, Ivan Eagleson, that identified the components of the original house and the additions. A Los Altos resident, 185 West Portola, spoke about the charm of the home, garden, and a wish that it could be preserved. Another Los Altos resident, 227 West Portola, spoke about the rural quality of 160 West Portola and that it is why they moved from Palo Alto to that neighborhood. A third Los Altos resident, 781 Linden Avenue, talked about the award winning honey produced by the current owner's bees and their wish that the farmhouse could remain. Tim Trailer of Coldwell Banker in Palo Alto spoke about the effort made by himself and the potential buyer to provide a counter offer for the property. It is their wish to purchase the property to preserve.

The Commission closed public comments. Commissioner McDonald commented on the neighborhood ambience, his research into the families that have lived there, and his wish that the home and property had been rated for the Historic Resources Inventory. Vice Chair Carpenter commented on properties in Mountain View where historic farmhouses had been moved and re-oriented so that sub-division and preservation had been made possible. Hull commented on the difficulty of stopping progress and his concern that removing the farmhouse, water tower, and the established trees damaged the character of the neighborhood. After significant discussion, Vice-Chair Carpenter framed a motion which did not achieve a second. Chair Foerster stated a motion and then reversed the order so that the Commission heard this motion: "Moved that the farmhouse, water tower, garden and established trees are representative of the original farmhouses of the area which the Historical Commission hopes that the Planning Commission will consider if significant changes to the property are proposed. The property and the buildings—home and water tower—are not currently on the Historic Resources Inventory (HRI). The Historical Commission cannot support the assertion that the house would rank more than 59 on the Kalman scale used in the inventory." There was a second to this motion by Vice-Chair Carpenter. Additional discussion took place based on the motion on the table.

Commissioner Humphries spoke about the house and water tower having to stand on their own merits as they are not on the HRI. It was her opinion that consistency in use of the HRI is very important to the success of the Commission's preservation efforts through persuasion and education. Commissioner Sandoval spoke about the additions and renovations to the house and fairness to homeowners. Vice-Chair Carpenter and the staff liaison repeated the motion. The Chair called for the vote. The motion passed unanimously. (Community members in the audience for this item included about 17 interested parties. Several spoke briefly during the Commission's discussion. Los Altos Senior Planner, Curtis Banks, responded to some questions and comments from the audience about state law and planning practices at the City of Los Altos.)

Chairperson's report:

1. Point values for Historic Designations: Chair Foerster had prepared a hand-out or memo proposing that the Landmark point range be 100 to 85; the Important point range become 84 to 60; the Significant point range be 59 to 50; and the Contributing range would stretch from 49 down to 0 points; all of these ranges relating to the Kalman scale used in the Historic Resources Inventory. After a lively discussion, this range system was adopted by consensus, and Commissioner Hull took the Historic Resources Definitions material he developed to update.
2. Advantages of Landmark Status: Prestige, possibility of negotiating a Mills Act Contract which can be an asset in a future sale of the landmark property, possible use of the Historic Building Code as opposed to the present day code, and the possibility of variances in use of land or buildings on the property.
3. Mailing of Certificates: Chair Foerster, Vice-Chair Carpenter, and Commissioner Hull will work on the mailing. Envelopes will be franked at Recreation.

Commission Discussions and Reports:

- A. Essay Contest 2003 – Humphries: Cumulative estimate: approximately 12,000 students served over the life span of the contest. Information out to teachers; the deadline for students is March 6. Judging of essays will be on Thursday, March 20, '03.
- B. Handout or Memo on Process for Historical Commission and Planning Staff regarding properties ranking 60 and above on the HRI – Humphries – Complete at this date from the Commission's point of view
- C. Historic Resources Inventory Update Process – Carpenter – Filemaker Pro is owned by the Museum Association; Carpenter is working with T. Anderson, an Association volunteer on licensing and use issues.

- D. Vacancies – More brainstorming on possible community members to contact, with Commissioner volunteers taking assignments
- E. Meeting with Community Development Department – Chair Foerster will set up a meeting with James Walgren.
- F. Meeting with Planning Commission – The annual sub-committee meeting between the two commissions: date, time, and agenda to be identified later. Commissioner volunteers to be identified at a future meeting.

HISTORY MUSEUM REPORT/STAFF REPORT

One page of the Quarterly Report for the City was distributed.

OTHER MATTERS/NEW BUSINESS/WRITTEN CORRESPONDENCE: NONE.

ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Hull moved to adjourn, seconded by Commissioner Sandoval.
The Commission adjourned at 9:35 p.m.

Madelyn Crawford, History Museum Director, Liaison to the Historical Commission, 650-948-9427
X10, e-mail: madelyn.crawford@ci.los-altos.ca.us; fax: 650/559-0268