



HISTORIC LANDMARKS COMMISSION AGENDA
Action Minutes

Wednesday, December 3, 2025

Regular Meeting
Commencing at 6:30 p.m.
City Hall Wing
Wing Rooms 118, 119 & 120
First Floor, City Hall Wing
200 East Santa Clara Street
San José, California

Commission Members

Rachel Royer, Chair
Sara Ghalandari, Vice Chair
Harriett Arnold
Himat Baniwal
Lawrence Camuso
Steve Cohen

Christopher Burton, Director
Department of Planning, Building & Code Enforcement

AGENDA

ORDER OF BUSINESS

WELCOME

ROLL CALL

The meeting was called to order at 6:32 p.m.

PRESENT: Chair Royer, Commissioners Arnold, Bainiwal, Camuso, Cohen and Kogura

ABSENT: Commissioner Ghalandari

1. DEFERRALS

Any item scheduled for hearing this evening for which deferral is being requested will be taken out of order to be heard first on the matter of deferral. If you want to change any of the deferral dates recommended or speak to the question of deferring these or any other items, you should say so at this time.

No Items

2. CONSENT CALENDAR

Notice to the public: There will be no separate discussion of individual Consent Calendar items as they are considered to be routine and will be adopted by one motion. If a member of the Commission requests debate, separate vote or recusal on a particular item, that item may be removed from the Consent Calendar by the Chair and considered separately. The public may comment on the entire Consent Calendar and any items removed from the Consent Calendar by the Chair. Staff will provide an update on the consent calendar. If anyone in the audience wishes to speak on one of these items, please make your request at this time.

No Items

3. PUBLIC HEARINGS

Generally, the Public Hearing items are considered by the Historic Landmarks Commission in the order in which they appear on the agenda. However, please be advised that the Commission may take items out of order to facilitate the agenda, such as to accommodate significant public testimony, or may defer discussion of items to later agendas for public hearing time management purposes. If anyone in the audience wishes to speak on one of these items, please make your request at this time.

No Items

4. PLANNING REFERRALS

- a. [PD25-013](#): Historic Landmarks Commission referral for Valley Title Project (PD25-013) under San Jose Municipal Code Section 20.70.110(c).

PROJECT MANAGER, ZACHARY JOHNSON AND NHU NGUYEN

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

**PROVIDE COMMENTS TO STAFF ON THE VALLEY TITLE PROJECT (PD25-013)
LOCATED AT 300 SOUTH FIRST STREET AND 345 SOUTH SECOND STREET
UNDER SAN JOSÉ MUNICIPAL CODE SECTION [20.70.110](#)(C)**

Chair Royer introduced the item.

Dana Peak Edwards, City of San José Historic Preservation Officer, presented the Valley Title project on behalf of project manager Zachary Johnson. She summarized the staff report including a description of the site, surrounding area, proposed project, adjacent city landmarks and applicable design standards. Ms. Peak Edwards concluded stating that staff requests the comments of the Historic Landmarks Commission (HLC) under San José Municipal Code Section 20.70.110(C).

Hunter Lien representing Westbank and architect Ernie Yamane (Steinberg Hart) presented the project program and design and heat transfer concept. The presentation included site plans, elevations, and various renderings.

Chair Royer opened public comment.

*Mike Sodergren, President of Preservation Action Council San Jose (PAC**SJ*), commented that PAC**SJ* met with Westbank during the previous entitlement (“Option A”) process about the historic integrity of the former Hales Department store (Valley Title building). He stated that Westbank agreed at that time to remove a portion of the existing cladding that may be covering the original Art Deco design of the building and to see if there is a way to integrate it into the project in a meaningful way (possibly in the walkway area). He commented on the project’s massing, that it is often difficult to achieve a sufficient setback in relation to adjacent City Landmark buildings and also to achieve high density objectives. Mr. Sodergren noted that PAC**SJ* previously commented the buildings should be pushed as far towards South Second Street as possible to protect South First Street. Hunter Lien commented that with the previously approved project (Option A) Westbank outlined a demolition procedure where pieces would be carefully removed to see what is behind the cladding and if it might be salvageable, Westbank intends to honor that commitment. He stated that any preservation opportunities would depend on the outcome of the cladding removal.*

Chair Royer closed public comment and called for commissioner comments and questions.

Commissioner Bainiwal inquired why the pedestrian inroad into the site comes from South Second Street and not South First Street. Mr. Lien responded that the orientation of the buildings and site access on a corner is intended to bring people into the open plaza and the SOFA district. He noted there are future housing plans for the Alquist site and San José State University has plans for student, workforce and graduate student housing and the proposed project has the opportunity to connect these developments to SOFA. Mr. Lien commented that if the diagonal pathway is carried across those sites, it will hit the Paseo at 13th Street and directly link San José State University to SOFA. Commissioner Bainiwal inquired what types of businesses would be in the North and South Towers on South First Street. Mr. Lien noted there is flexibility to orient the business to South First Street or the internal courtyard. Commissioner Bainiwal expressed hope that increased activity would better support the California Theatre, which currently seems isolated. Mr. Lien noted that small food establishments could benefit from foot traffic and provide an orchard environment a few steps away.

Commissioner Camuso inquired if Westbank is aware what is underneath the existing cladding and Mr. Lien responded it is not currently known how much damage there is to the exterior of the Hale building underneath the cladding. Commissioner Camuso inquired what Westbank planned to do if there are parts of the original façade that are salvageable. Mr. Lien responded Westbank would need to see what parts and how much is salvageable. He commented that something interesting could be done in the large public plaza. Commissioner Camuso inquired about the data center. Mr. Lien responded there is no identified tenant but there would be power coming from PG&E to serve the 49-megawatt data center. He noted Westbank is trying to bring data centers into downtown San Jose to challenge negative perceptions about their environmental impact by providing community benefits like harnessing the waste heat to repurpose for surrounding residential and business service and providing a more sustainable

downtown infrastructure. Commissioner Camuso inquired if there are additional elevation drawings of the data center building. Mr. Lien commented that Westbank tried to tie the design language of the towers into the data center through the greenery and the programming/administrative offices have been placed on South Second Street to provide activation and vibrancy. Deputy Planning Director, Manira Sandhir, added for context that typically data centers are not an allowed use because there are no jobs, housing or commercial uses associated with them; however, the City has an Innovative Projects Pathway Program that allows City Council to approve projects that provide significant public benefit like energy efficiency or revenue.

Commissioner Kogura commented that the project design is beautiful. He inquired how the data center would affect the surrounding community because previously built data centers often result in increasing the cost of electricity. Mr. Lien responded that there should be no impact on the grid because a new substation would be constructed to deliver power downtown. He asserted that the project could have a positive impact in this regard because harnessing the heat waste would reduce the demand on the grid. Commissioner Kogura suggested there should be more studies done on how the data center would affect the residents of San José. He commented on the project's potential impact on the city's cultural amenities, like Original Joe's, Nirvana Soul, and Jackie's Place (Black-owned businesses). Commissioner Kogura expressed concern that the project could result in rent increases for surrounding businesses and inquired how they could be protected. Mr. Lien commented that Westbank celebrates these businesses and is looking for opportunities to add to the neighborhood, not push people out. Mr. Yamane commented that the increased residential density and foot traffic would help those businesses thrive. Commissioner Kogura inquired how the development would be treated with respect to homelessness, would it be gated? Mr. Lien responded that the planned density and activity would discourage that. Commissioner Kogura expressed skepticism because he has firsthand experience in the area.

Commissioner Cohen expressed concern about the proposed 300-foot height and airport restrictions, noting they would be the tallest buildings in downtown San José. He inquired about parking and commented that the low parking ratio, 292 spaces for 1,167 units, is inadequate. Commissioner Cohen inquired how could the project work when other downtown developments with more parking are struggling financially. Mr. Lien responded that the City eliminated parking minimums to encourage walking and biking and TDM measures are required to build out pedestrian networks. Mr. Yamane noted that the City Council also supported the elimination of parking requirements because of the economics of construction - underground parking is costly to construct. Commissioner Cohen expressed concern about the pedestrian experience along San Salvador Street, where he asserted the design of the data center presents a long, inactive wall with no retail. Mr. Yamane noted the street level would be glass. Commissioner Cohen asserted the design should be focused on the pedestrian flow from San Salvador into the SOFA district because there are business and residences there. He inquired about the trees and greenery on the buildings and Mr. Lien responded they are a nod to the orchards that used to define the Santa Clara Valley. Commissioner Cohen inquired whether the vegetation would be maintained, and Mr. Yamane responded that Westbank is committed to that and worked with City staff and arborists. Commissioner Cohen inquired about the size of the retail spaces and Mr. Yamane responded that flexibility is built into the project. Commissioner Cohen inquired how the project will recognize Hale's Department Store. Mr. Lien responded that would be determined when they investigate during demolition and find out what opportunities there might be to incorporate elements on the ground floor. Staff clarified the building is not a historical resource due to extensive alterations, so no environmental mitigation measures are required, though the applicant offered to explore interpretive elements if feasible. Commissioner Cohen expressed disagreement with the data

center and the benefits of using the waste heat in San José and asserted it would harm the historic character of the SOFA district.

Chair Royer commented there aren't any views in the plans of the historic buildings and inquired about views from the plaza looking at the historic resources or views that show the connection between the new buildings and the historic resources. Mr. Yamane responded they could be provided, and Chair Royer noted that would be helpful because that is the focus of the HLC. Chair Royer commented that while the project generally aligns cornice lines with historic buildings, it does not include a step back which is one of the design standards. She noted there is a lot of space on site and inquired if there is a reason step backs are not provided to give deference to the historic resources. Mr. Yamane responded a five-foot setback is provided from the property line. Chair Royer clarified she is referring to a step back. Mr. Yamane commented that they could pull into that 5 feet with a colonnade and create a step, but there are limitations with that approach on the round tower which steps out. Chair Royer encouraged further exploration of step-backs. She inquired about ground-floor articulation. Mr. Yamane responded that there are steps, ins and outs, to relate to the rhythms, but they can work with staff on articulation and can play with like elements. Staff recommended eliminating the vegetation in the renderings to facilitate evaluation of the project design.

The comments of the Historic Landmarks Commission were received, and no formal action was taken.

5. GENERAL BUSINESS

No Items

6. REFERRALS FROM CITY COUNCIL, BOARDS, COMMISSIONS, OR OTHER AGENCIES

No Items

7. OPEN FORUM

Members of the public are invited to speak on any item that does not appear on today's Agenda and that is within the subject matter jurisdiction of the Commission. The Commission cannot engage in any substantive discussion or take any formal action in response to the public comment. The Commission can only ask questions or respond to statements to the extent necessary to determine whether to: (1) refer the matter to staff for follow-up; (2) request staff to report back on a matter at a subsequent meeting; or (3) direct staff to place the item on a future agenda. Each member of the public may fill out a speaker's card and has up to two minutes to address the Commission.

Mike Sodergren, PAC SJ, commented on the City Council approval of the Historic Preservation Ordinance Amendments. He noted that Council members understood the input from PAC* SJ and the HLC and the importance of preserving historic assets, but the litigation complicated the issue, and he commented that people try to over-correct in these situations. Mr. Sodergren commented that in the end, no ordinance will save a building, and the power lies with the people. He noted it is the perseverance community's job to speak up about the importance of historic preservation.*

8. GOOD AND WELFARE

a. Report from Secretary, Planning Commission, and City Council

Ms. Peak Edwards reported that the City Council approved the amendments to the Historic Preservation Ordinance on December 2, 2025 (second reading December 16, 2025) and the amended ordinance will go into effect January 15, 2026. The amendments approved were those presented to the HLC on October 1, 2025. She also reported that the City Council approved the Eichler Neighborhood Design Standards on December 2, 2025 and they will go into effect on

January 2, 2026. Finally, Ms. Peak Edwards reported the Rules Committee considered a memorandum on December 3, 2025 on historic preservation reform (streamlining and Japantown). She reported that staff responded by submitting a workload analysis which included the historic preservation work program for FY 2025-2026 and a recommendation to conduct Historic Resources Inventory maintenance which would need to be considered by City Council as part of the City's budget and project prioritization process. Ms. Peak Edwards noted that staff would report back on any direction provided by City Council. Chair Royer inquired whether proposed changes would come before the HLC and Ms. Peak Edwards responded that any proposed modifications to the Historic Resources Inventory or historic preservation requirements would be brought to the HLC.

i. Accept updates on Code Enforcement and historic resources

Ms. Peak Edwards provided information in response to questions about code enforcement from Commission Cohen at the November 5th HLC meeting. She reported on how to report code violations (telephone, email, fill out online request form), provided an update on fine increases adopted by the City Council in August 2025 and highlighted the Abandoned and Vacant Buildings Ordinance. Commission Cohen asked for a blighted buildings prioritization list and an update on the compliance status for those properties.

ii. [Accept update on Five Wounds Trail planning and the Coyote Creek Trestle.](#)

Ms. Peak Edwards reported on behalf of the Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services (PRNS) department that the Five Wounds Trail Master Plan and preparation of an EIR will be announced during the Directors Report at the December 3, 2025 Parks and Recreation Commission meeting. She reported that PRNS tentatively plans to present the project to the Parks and Recreation Commission on February 4, 2026 and the HLC in March 2026, and to hold the public scoping meeting for EIR preparation in April 2026. As background, Ms. Peak Edwards reported that to manage overall project costs one community meeting was held by PRNS for the Five Wounds Trail Master Plan and EIR as part of the consultant scope. She reported that PRNS staff attended a September 2025 Save Our Trails meeting to provide early notification that the project description includes removal of the trestle. Ms. Peak Edwards reported that PRNS staff told the public at that time the tentative schedule was to deliver presentations to Parks and Recreation Commission and HLC by the end of 2025, but definite dates hadn't been decided. She reported this is why the community brought the item to the attention of the HLC.

Larry Ames, Coyote Creek Trail park advocate, commented that it sounds like a decision has already been made to demolish the trestle and he has never heard any public comment or discussion about it. He inquired who has decided to tear it down and why. Mr. Ames commented that is why he would like the HLC to provide input on the project and he would like the opportunity for the public to comment on it and influence the decision. He commented that he reviewed the engineering report on the project website, and it noted the wood is good and strong and the trestle would need repair, so it doesn't fall down. Mr. Ames commented the trestle does not need to be demolished to achieve the trail connection, a new bridge could be put on the side. He advocated that the trestle should remain. Mr. Ames provided a brief history of the trestle, the last of its kind in San José.

b. Report from Committees

i. Design Review Subcommittee:

- 1) No meeting held on November 20, 2025. The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, December 18, 2025, at 11:00 a.m.

c. **Approval of Action Minutes**

- i. **Recommendation:** [Approve Action Minutes for the Historic Landmarks Commission Meeting of November 5, 2025.](#)

Commissioner Cohen made a motion to approve the November 5, 2025 action minutes. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Arnold and approved 6-0-1 (Ghalandari absent).

d. **Status of Circulating Environmental Documents**

No Items

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 8:06 p.m.

CITY OF SAN JOSÉ CODE OF CONDUCT FOR PUBLIC MEETINGS IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBERS AND COMMITTEE ROOMS

The Code of Conduct is intended to promote open meetings that welcome debate of public policy issues being discussed by the City Council, Redevelopment Agency Board, their Committees, and City Boards and Commissions in an atmosphere of fairness, courtesy, and respect for differing points of view.

1. Public Meeting Decorum:

- a) Persons in the audience will refrain from behavior which will disrupt the public meeting. This will include making loud noises, clapping, shouting, booing, hissing or engaging in any other activity in a manner that disturbs, disrupts or impedes the orderly conduct of the meeting.
- b) Persons in the audience will refrain from creating, provoking or participating in any type of disturbance involving unwelcome physical contact.
- c) Persons in the audience will refrain from using cellular phones and/or pagers while the meeting is in session.
- d) Appropriate attire, including shoes and shirts are required in the Council Chambers and Committee Rooms at all times.
- e) Persons in the audience will not place their feet on the seats in front of them.
- f) No food, drink (other than bottled water with a cap), or chewing gum will be allowed in the Council Chambers and Committee Rooms, except as otherwise pre-approved by City staff.
- g) All persons entering the Council Chambers and Committee Rooms, including their bags, purses, briefcases and similar belongings, may be subject to search for weapons and other dangerous materials.

2. Signs, Objects or Symbolic Material:

- a) Objects and symbolic materials, such as signs or banners, will be allowed in the Council Chambers and Committee Rooms, with the following restrictions:
 - No objects will be larger than 2 feet by 3 feet.
 - No sticks, posts, poles or other such items will be attached to the signs or other symbolic materials.
 - The items cannot create a building maintenance problem or a fire or safety hazard.
- b) Persons with objects and symbolic materials such as signs must remain seated when displaying them and must not raise the items above shoulder level, obstruct the view or passage of other attendees, or otherwise disturb the business of the meeting.
- c) Objects that are deemed a threat to persons at the meeting or the facility infrastructure are not allowed. City staff is authorized to remove items and/or individuals from the Council Chambers and Committee Rooms if a threat exists or is perceived to exist. Prohibited items include, but are not limited to: firearms (including replicas and antiques), toy guns, explosive material, and ammunition; knives and other edged weapons; illegal drugs and drug paraphernalia; laser pointers, scissors, razors, scalpels, box cutting knives, and other cutting tools; letter openers, corkscrews, can openers with points, knitting needles, and hooks; hairspray, pepper spray, and aerosol containers; tools; glass containers; and large backpacks and suitcases that contain items unrelated to the meeting.

3. Addressing the Council, Redevelopment Agency Board, Committee, Board or Commission:

- a) Persons wishing to speak on an agenda item or during open forum are requested to complete a speaker card and submit the card to the City Clerk or other administrative staff at the meeting.
- b) Meeting attendees are usually given two (2) minutes to speak on any agenda item and/or during open forum; the time limit is in the discretion of the Chair of the meeting and may be limited when appropriate. Applicants and appellants in land use matters are usually given more time to speak.
- c) Speakers should discuss topics related to City business on the agenda, unless they are speaking during open forum.
- d) Speakers' comments should be addressed to the full body. Requests to engage the Mayor, Council Members, Board Members, Commissioners or Staff in conversation will not be honored. Abusive language is inappropriate.
- e) Speakers will not bring to the podium any items other than a prepared written statement, writing materials, or objects that have been inspected by security staff.
- f) If an individual wishes to submit written information, he or she may give it to the City Clerk or other administrative staff at the meeting.
- g) Speakers and any other members of the public will not approach the dais at any time without prior consent from the Chair of the meeting.

Failure to comply with this Code of Conduct which will disturb, disrupt or impede the orderly conduct of the meeting may result in removal from the meeting and/or possible arrest.