



HISTORIC LANDMARKS COMMISSION

Action Minutes

Wednesday, March 6, 2024

Regular Meeting
Commencing at 6:30 p.m.
City Hall Wing
Wing Rooms 118, 119 & 120
200 East Santa Clara Street
San José, CA 95113

Commission Members

Paul Boehm, Chair
Rachel Royer, Vice Chair
Harriett Arnold
Lawrence Camuso
Sara Ghalandari
Edward Janke

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

Access the video, agenda, and related reports for this meeting by visiting the City's website at:
<https://www.sanjoseca.gov/your-government/departments/planning-building-code-enforcement/planning-division/commissions-and-hearings/historic-landmarks-commission>

AGENDA

ORDER OF BUSINESS

WELCOME

Meeting called to order at 6:31 p.m.

ROLL CALL

PRESENT: Commissioners Boehm, Royer, Camuso, Ghalandari, Arnold

ABSENT: Commissioner Janke

1. DEFERRALS

No Items

2. CONSENT CALENDAR

No Items

3. PUBLIC HEARINGS

No Items

4. PLANNING REFERRALS

- a. [File Nos. PDC23-104, PD23-016 & T23-016](#). Planned Development Zoning, Tentative Map, and Planned Development Permit applications to rezone the site to the PQP(PD) Planned Development Zoning District, demolish all structures on site, and merge all lots to construct a new two-story, approximately 10,720-square-foot religious education building containing alternating uses of a religious school, preschool, language school, and a privately-operated community center, including outdoor uses approximately 50 feet from a residentially-zoned property, and an approximately 1,950-square-foot auxiliary building.

PROJECT MANAGER, JASON LEE

Recommendation: Receive public comment and provide recommendations regarding information to be included in the analysis of the proposed San Jose Buddhist Church Betsuin Expansion Project (“Project”) located at 639-645 North Fifth Street and 620-642 North Fourth Street (APNs 249-41-075, -009, -022, -023, -024, and -025) (File Nos. PDC23-104, PD23-016, and T23-016) under the City Council Policy on the Preservation of Historic Landmarks.

Chairman Boehm introduced the item.

Project Manager Jason Lee presented an overview of the project, noting the Commission is not being asked to make a decision today, but rather to provide comment as part of the Early Referral process. Mr. Lee gave an overview of the proposed plan, showing architectural plans and giving background on the existing structures proposed for demolition. Mr. Lee informed the Commission the appropriate pathway for CEQA documentation has yet to be determined, but the Commission would be given the opportunity to review and comment on those documents at a future meeting if so determined.

The project applicants: Michael Charney of Spectrum Management Group; Afsha Ali, Principal architect for AEDIS Architects; and Reverend Gerald Sakamoto of the San Jose Buddhist Church Betsuin, delivered a presentation to the Commission about the project goals for community space and the design of the proposed Dharma Center building and grounds.

Chairman Boehm called for Commissioner questions.

Commissioner Camuso commented the architecture and design of the grounds is appropriate and compliments the nearby structures and surroundings. He then inquired about the properties slated to be demolished, asking what historic research was done on those properties and if the applicant would consider moving them instead of demolition.

Mr. Charney of Spectrum PMG responded that a report was created about the status of these properties by their historic resources consultant, TreanorHL, a representative which is in attendance at the Commission meeting. Mr. Charney said they had considered the idea of relocating the properties, but expressed concern the significance is in the location and the structures would lose significance if moved to another location.

Commissioner Camuso inquired if three of the structures proposed for demolition would become a parking lot, to which Mr. Charney responded, yes, that is correct.

Commissioner Camuso asked for more information about one of the properties, the Kurasaki House on 624 North Fourth Street. Project Manager Jason Lee responded there was a letter from the granddaughter of the former owners of the home which was included in the information provided to the Commission.

Commissioner Arnold inquired about the properties at 624 and 642 North Fourth Street and 645 North Fifth Streets whether any heirs or owners of the properties had provided comment about the proposed demolition. Mr. Charney responded there was a letter in support for 624 North Fourth Street, known as the Kurasaki House by the granddaughter of the Kurasaki family. He noted that all of the structures are owned by the Church, but one is being used by the Church as storage.

Commissioner Arnold inquired about how the historical and research library in the new buildings would interface with the nearby Japanese American Museum of San José in Japantown. Reverend Gerald Sakamoto replied there was a close relationship with Museum and the new research library would augment the Museum's existing resources for the community and would continue in a cooperative relationship.

Commissioner Arnold inquired if the applicants would be open to community comments from the Museum. Reverend Sakamoto responded they are always welcoming of comments on the project.

Vice Chairman Royer inquired if there was any study of feasibility of reuse of the existing education building.

Mr. Charney responded it is impractical for both structural and financial reasons as the building is unsuitable for reuse being only one story and it cannot be expanded. Reverend Sakamoto said that many of the congregation have positive memories of the building, but they understand the need to have a building that can accommodate the space needed to continue their work.

Vice Chairman Royer asked if there was a feasibility study of below-grade parking or a parking structure rather than surface parking. Mr. Charney responded the cost for alternatives to surface parking was prohibitive which led to their current plan.

Commissioner Ghalandari inquired about the streetscape experience of the eligible historic district and whether or not there would be screening of the parking lot. Afsha Ali of AEDIS Architects responded the open space was important not just for parking but as usable space for outdoor events, and the plan is to maintain a visual and physical connection across the street to the Church. Mr. Lee, City of San José Project Manager responded city design guidelines require 75% of total length along a secondary street for surface parking must be screened and this will be part of the requirements as the applicant moves forward for Planning approval.

Commissioner Ghalandari inquired whether or not the historic status of structures on the proposal site has been determined or will be updated or evaluated under CEQA. City of San José Historic Preservation Officer, Dana Peak Edwards, responded the district is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places and as a City Landmark District, which makes the project site a historical resource under CEQA. She stated that the four buildings were also evaluated individually, and none of them were determined by a qualified historic resources consultant to be individually significant. Ms. Peak Edwards stated that two of the buildings are contributing structures, and the CEQA analysis will evaluate the potential impact the proposed demolition on the significance of the eligible historic district as a whole.

Commissioner Ghalandari inquired whether some kind of interpretive display or other method of allowing the structures to continue to be part of the site would be possible. Ms. Peak Edwards responded that with a Mitigated Negative Declaration it would be possible to make that a requirement.

Chairman Boehm inquired about the Historic Resources Inventory status of the structures on the project site. Ms. Peak Edwards clarified they are listed on the Historic Resources Inventory, and properties evaluated more than five years ago are reevaluated when projects are proposed to determine eligibility and treatment under CEQA.

Chairman Boehm inquired about the material cladding of 642 North Fourth Street to which the applicant responded the building is sided with clapboard.

Chairman Boehm called for public comment.

Roy Hirabayashi expressed support for the expansion of the Church Betsuin. He commented the Betsuin has been a key organization for cultural preservation in Japantown, supporting many other organizations like the Nikkei Matsuri and hosting festivals like their Obon Festival. Mr. Hirabayashi noted he is a co-founder of San Jose Taiko established in 1973, and the organization is now in its 51st year as a performance ensemble. He stated that San Jose Taiko was the third such group in the country and was started at San Jose Betsuin, showing how instrumental the Betsuin is in preserving Japanese culture and music. Mr. Hirabayashi remarked that Japantown is viewed as a cultural hub in San Jose and the Betsuin is the center of that hub.

*Ben Leech, of PAC*SJ commented they reviewed the TreanorHL report and expressed initial concerns about the findings in the report, but he noted that after visiting the site it was more apparent why the report concluded the structures are contributors to the district rather than individually significant buildings. Mr. Leech said the structure at 639 North Fifth Street is an interesting structure that contributes to the “texture” and sense of place in Japantown, and this is an opportunity as the design is refined, to identify what the building adds to the district and to ensure the new building could contribute those same characteristics. Mr. Leech said PAC*SJ is always in support of finding solutions to move buildings or reusing materials whenever feasible.*

Gail Sueki read the letter she sent in support of the project as the granddaughter of the Kurasaki family which used to reside at 624 North Fourth Street. Ms. Sueki and her extended family support the demolition of the house and the construction of the new Dharma center. She stated the family has found it painful to see the house in such disrepair. Ms. Sueki stated her grandparents, and many family members were lifelong members of the Betsuin Church, and it was her grandparents’ intention for the Church to use the property in any way they deemed appropriate, so Ms. Sueki and her family are in support of the proposed plan.

Chairman Boehm closed public comment.

Chairman Boehm called for Commissioner comment.

Commissioner Camuso commented he would like to see an effort made to relocate the existing homes if they cannot be incorporated into the project design, or at least offered to the public to relocate them before demolition.

Chairman Boehm commented that while the report did not find any significant associations for the houses, he believes 642 North Fourth Street should be considered significant under criteria number 4 for its representation of a large portion of San Jose immigrant history because residents were from Italy and Mexico. He suggested that house should be retained and for reused due to its significance. Chairman Boehm also suggested it would be a visual asset on the campus with some efforts to restore it.

Chairman Boehm commented he understand the education building is outdated and will need to be replaced, but that the houses are older and have more weight historically. He expressed appreciation for the screening of the parking lot and the need for the open space for events. Chairman Boehm thanked the applicants for their presentation.

Commissioner comments were received, no action was taken.

5. GENERAL BUSINESS

a. 2024 Santa Clara County Preservation Alliance Awards Night

Recommendation: Accept status report from the Historic Preservation Month/Preservation Awards Night Standing Committee.

Chairman Boehm introduced the item.

Commissioner Camuso gave a report listing the eleven candidates which were discussed at the Standing Committee meeting and will be further refined at the next Standing Committee meeting before referral to the Commission to select an award recipient at the April 3rd meeting.

Chairman Boehm inquired if the candidate list would be ranked, and a rationale provided for the Commission's consideration. Commissioner Camuso responded that would be done.

Commissioner Ghalandari inquired if photographs of the properties would be provided to commissioners. Commissioner Camuso responded that photographs and context for each candidate would be provided.

Commissioner Arnold inquired if any of the properties were contenders for the award in previous years. Commissioner Camuso replied, not to his knowledge, although the Smith House and Roy's Station were possibly candidates some years ago.

The Commission received the update, no action was taken.

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. If you have joined by teleconference and wish to speak on one of these items, please use the 'raise hand' feature in Zoom or press *9 from a touch tone phone to raise a hand to speak.

*Ben Leech commented that PAC*SJ submitted comments electronically on the draft EIR for Seely Avenue and Dana Peak Edwards was copied on those email comments. He commented that PAC*SJ would like the Commission to be more active in the commenting process. Mr. Leech commented that one of the project alternatives is the relocation of the house on the site and PAC*SJ supports that alternative. Mr. Leech also commented in support and appreciation of the Alviso StoryMap recently published on the City's website.*

8. GOOD AND WELFARE

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

- i. Verbal update on the status of Planning approvals by the City Council, Planning Commission and Planning Director of projects with a historic resource component.

No updates.

- ii. Summary of communications received by the Historic Landmarks Commission.

*An email from PAC*SJ with comments on the Seely Avenue Draft EIR was received and will be forwarded to the Commission.*

- iii. [Public release of Alviso StoryMap.](#)

Historic Preservation Officer Dana Peak Edwards announced the release of the StoryMap, the final part of the Alviso Historic Context and Survey project website. She shared her screen and presented the final product online.

Chairman Boehm suggested an adjustment of language for the Alviso StoryMap. He believed there is a small discrepancy in dates for the opening of the Bayside Canning Company.

- iv. Next Meeting is April 3, 2024, in San Jose City Hall, Wing Rooms 118, 119, 120.

b. Report from Committees

- i. Design Review Subcommittee: No meeting was held on February 15, 2024. The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, March 21, 2024 at 11:00 a.m.

c. Approval of Action Minutes

- i. **Recommendation:** [Approval of Action Minutes for the Historic Landmarks Commission Meeting of February 7, 2024.](#)

The Commission made no changes and approved the Action Minutes as presented.

d. Status of Circulating Environmental Documents

No updates.

ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned at 7:54 p.m.