



HISTORIC RESOURCES BOARD MEETING

DRAFT MINUTES, March 28, 2024

Council Chamber & Virtual Zoom
8:30 A.M.

Call to Order/Roll Call

Present: Vice Chair Samantha Rohman; Board Members Michael Makinen (remote – microphone malfunction at the beginning), Margaret Wimmer, Christian Pease and Caroline Willis

Absent: Chair Alisa Eagleston-Cieslewicz and Board Member Gogo Heinrich

Public Comment

Agenda Changes, Additions and Deletions

Chief Planning Official Amy French announced changes to the meeting agenda. The revised order is as follows: City Official Reports will remain as the first item. Agenda Item 3 (Action Items) concerning 261 Hamilton Avenue will be addressed immediately following the City Official Reports. Agenda Item 2 (Study Session) will be addressed after Agenda Items 4 and 5 (Minutes of Approval).

City Official Reports

1. Historic Resources Board Schedule of Meetings and Assignments

Ms. French announced an upcoming HRB meeting scheduled for April 11, 2024, which will include the annual CLG report to the Office of Historic Preservation and the Work Plan. She proposed a new meeting structure where the HRB would convene once a month with the full Board, and the alternate date would be available for subcommittee meetings. She advised that the City has not received enough applications for the HRB seats. Current members are to serve until the replacement members are appointed. Board Member Gogo Heinrich confirmed her availability for the April 11 meeting but indicated she would not be available in May and thereafter. Board Member Michael Makinen expressed his willingness to participate remotely when possible. Ms. French noted that a seven-member board requires four in-person members in Palo Alto for quorum, while a five-member board only requires three, suggesting a reduction in board size as a potential solution to facilitate quorum and board operations.

Board Member Willis voiced her long-standing support for a five-member board, believing it would lead to stronger, clearer consensus on project reviews. She sought clarification on the process for such a change.

Ms. French clarified that reducing the board size would necessitate an ordinance change. However, since it is not part of Title 18, it would not require Planning Commission involvement.

Study Session **

2. Work Plan and Certified Local Government Report

Ms. French provided an update on the Work Plan and the Certified Local Government (CLG) Report. She clarified that the Board was not required to take action on this item during today's meeting. Ms. French informed the Board that she had not yet prepared a draft CLG report for the reporting period of October 2022 through September 2023, with the due date for the current year's report set for April 26, 2024. Ongoing activities, such as reviewing alterations and implementing Comprehensive Plan Policy L7.2, were

cited as accomplishments and goals in HRB Work Plan. The upcoming report will detail the Council's actions regarding all nominations. Ms. French advised that the Board would be discussing the Work Program, noting the general expectation for Work Plans to be presented to the Council before their July break. She announced that on April 11th, she would present a draft plan that includes any outstanding items from the previous year, including discussions on the Tailored Mills Act Program. Ms. French highlighted that one of the goals for the Work Plan was to initiate discussions on the Preservation Ordinance. The Board has already begun examining the incentives in the zoning code. She reminded the Board of the Comprehensive Plan's policy program, which mandates an evaluation of the effectiveness of the existing historic ordinance—a task that could be included in the next Work Plan year starting in April. Ms. French emphasized that the purpose of the current discussion was not to advance any items but to gather ideas for the upcoming Work Plan. She encouraged Board Members to propose new items for consideration, which she could incorporate into the draft to be voted on April 11th. Ms. French brought to attention that the April meeting might be the last session for some board members.

Vice Chair Rohman requested clarification on whether the Board needed to take any action on the 2021-2022 Work Plan.

Ms. French clarified that the CLG report was for 2022-2023 and had not yet been prepared. The CLG report does not technically require the Board's approval but is meant for sharing and review. Ms. French intends to present and review the CLG report on April 11th, which serves as a retrospective of the Board's accomplishments. She mentioned that the Work Plan will require a vote by the Board, which is why she plans to bring the Work Plan forward on April 11th while there are still board members to review it

Board Member Willis inquired about the necessity of aligning the Work Plan with the CLG report.

Ms. French explained that that she was currently synchronizing the two by including them in the same agenda—a practice she has maintained since assuming the liaison role. She clarified that the CLG report's schedule is determined by the State, whereas the Work Plan's timeline is established by the Board and Commission handbook and the Council. She suggested the possibility of adjusting the Board's Work Plan year to begin in July.

Board Member Willis asked if the Work Plan could adhere to one timeline while being presented to the Council before the start of that period.

Ms. French answered yes, the Board outline plans starting July 1st, which would then be submitted to Council. She noted that the Board is currently addressing items from the previous year's Work Plan, which extends through next month.

Vice Chair Rohman invited Board discussion on the item.

Board Member Wimmer believed that one goal should be the ongoing review and update of the ordinance. She emphasized the importance of ensuring that the ordinance remains effective and accurately represents the Board's efforts.

Vice Chair Rohman acknowledged the Board's successful completion of a significant project this year. She expressed confidence about the Board setting one big, bolder goal per Work Plan as the main focus, and then subsequent goals to continue working on until that first goal is accomplished. Perhaps, the goal for this upcoming year is to make changes to the ordinance.

Board Member Willis thought the Board needed to undertake achievable goals. She expressed the importance of working on the Mills Act, acknowledging it as a long-term objective. The immediate priority should be to clearly communicate the benefits of being listed on the inventory. Despite the complexity of the task, she has been making efforts with some assistance. She suggested that the Board consider minor modifications to the ordinance that could help facilitate the realization of these benefits. She asked Ms. French if she knew of instances where the Board could cite the City's use of the Historic Building Code so the community can understand see it as beneficial. She proposed that providing examples could enhance understanding and appreciation.

Ms. French stated that sadly, she did not. She offered to ask the Chief Building Official to request that his staff flag whenever someone asks for the Historic Building Code so that she becomes aware.

Board Member Willis advocated for increased contact with the Building Department regarding the Historic Building Code, emphasizing their role as the gatekeepers.

Ms. French presented the five proposed goals for the HRB Work Plan via screen sharing. The goals are as follows:

- 1) Review exterior alterations to historic resources.
- 2) Prepare evaluations to determine the eligibility of properties for the California Register of Historical Resources (Policy L7.2).
- 3) Continued implementation of Policy L7.1.1.
- 4) Improve outreach, review incentives, and develop a work program for the next year, considering the implementation of additional Historic Preservation policies in the Comprehensive Plan, such as L7.1.2: Reassess Historic Preservation Ordinance.
- 5) Tailored Mills Act Program discussion: Finalize the outreach approach and present a program report to the City Council.

Ms. French opened a discussion on possibly consolidating these into three goals. She encouraged the HRB to affirm what has been accomplished and identify what would continue forward. She noted the concept that the Board has goals that are just part of their regular work, which is reviewing projects, and so it does not necessarily have to be a goal.

Vice Chair Rohman sought clarification on whether the Board had reviewed any projects this year.

Ms. French responded that it is uncommon for projects to be brought before the HRB.

Vice Chair Rohman inquired about Goals 1 and 2.

Ms. French confirmed that Goal 1 essentially articulates the Board's role and suggested that it could be reported on rather than listed as a distinct goal. Goal 2 pertains to implementing Policy L7.2, which is when people come forward to sell their property and they ask if it is historic, and then the Board works with a consultant to find out. She continued by explaining that Goal 3 involves the launch of the implementation of Policy L7.1.1, which the HRB has done, so now it is in the Council's court looking towards the April 22nd date.

Vice Chair Rohman inquired about the necessity of including Goals 1 and 2.

Ms. French confirmed that it was not necessary to include them.

Board Member Pease sought clarification on whether there was a retrospective method to observe any data on what benefits have been taken advantage of by individuals with historic homes.

Ms. French indicated that it is possible that she could gather some information from the planning entitlement process, specifically regarding home improvement exceptions and non-residential properties.

Board Member Pease asked if that was something that had to be done manually or if there was a more efficient method.

Ms. French responded that the current system requires manual tracking due to the lack of a specific flagging mechanism for incentives in the tracking system. The process involves more discussion and citing examples rather than percentages of building permits utilizing incentives.

Vice Chair Rohman asked whether the idea of bringing to the forefront the review and potential amendment should be included under Goal 4, which pertains to outreach and incentives.

Ms. French stated that perhaps the Work Program for the next year is not just to review incentives but work on improved incentives. She mentioned that there are various ideas from the public and the HRB that could be considered for proposing changes to the Council.

Vice Chair Rohman stated that in theory, Goals 4 and 5 could be the primary goals for the Board in the upcoming Work Plan year.

Ms. French agreed, adding that Goal 4 could likely be divided into specific actions for proposed incentives and methods to enhance outreach.

Board Member Willis shared her perspective on the HRB's performance in public communication, suggesting that outreach deserves dedicated attention. She proposed initiatives like conducting tours and engaging with the community to promote preservation and revitalize the momentum seen in the 1970s. Emphasizing the importance of public support, she recommended treating outreach as a distinct focus area. She also addressed the need for at least one more board member. She proposed reaching out to the Council to nominate potential candidates, which could facilitate more efficient communication and decision-making.

Ms. French pointed out the presence of a Council Liaison, indicating a connection to Council in that manner. She was hopeful that future discussions at the Council level might consider reducing the HRB's board membership from seven to five. She also suggested the possibility of decreasing the frequency of meetings to once a month, with the option of special evening meetings as needed, to potentially attract those hesitant to commit to bi-monthly hearings.

Board Member Willis expressed opposition to this idea.

Vice Chair Rohman supported the suggestion. She also agreed with the proposal made by Board Member Willis that outreach be moved into a completely separate goal from incentives. Vice Chair Rohman believed that approach could get the Board to three really easily between the Mills Act, outreach, and incentives. She shared that Karen Holman has reached out to her to participate in social work for the new museum, and she was keen on involving HRB members more in the community again. She suggested that one meeting per month would facilitate greater community engagement.

Board Member Wimmer recalled that one meeting per month is the way it used to be. She noted that under Ms. Carolyn's chairmanship, the HRB shifted to meeting at least twice a month. Board Member Wimmer observed that while this increase seemed substantial, it ultimately fortified the structure and communication of the meetings. The frequent gatherings allowed the Board to maintain continuity and strengthen as a group. On the topic of the Historic Building Code, Board Member Wimmer mentioned that it serves as an incentive and recalled a beneficial presentation by a building official, highlighting the value of such educational sessions for both new and existing members.

Board Member Willis concurred with the benefits of meeting twice a month, stating it helps her stay engaged with the Board's tasks. Regarding the requirements for board members, she asked Ms. French if there had been any consideration regarding the composition of the five members.

Ms. French shared her screen to display the stipulations of the Chapter 2 Administrative Code regarding Board membership. According to the current code, the Historic Resources Board shall be composed of seven members in which one member shall be an owner/occupant of a Category 1 or 2 historic structure, or of a structure in a historic district, three members shall be architects, landscape architects, building designers or other design professionals, and at least one member shall possess academic education or practice experience in history or a related field.

Vice Chair Rohman asked whether the material interest includes the architect or owner.

Ms. French clarified that was not part of the existing code but was included in a previous ordinance proposal. She suggested that it would be beneficial to consider including an item on the agenda to discuss what the Board perceives as an ideal composition regarding skills and membership.

Vice Chair Rohman asked the Board Members about that potential addition to the agenda for the upcoming meeting.

Board Member Pease reflected on the foundational nature of the Mills Act and the ordinance, suggesting that the recent exercise produced a mailing list of historic homeowners, which presents an opportunity for outreach. He acknowledged the complexity of the ordinance process and the long-standing examination of the Mills Act, viewing these as leverage points for the hard work they represent. Board Member Pease expressed caution against altering the ordinance without precise and careful consideration, emphasizing the importance of assuring property owners that these measures are not mandatory. The Mills Act ties together all things such as advantages, benefits, and the Building Code. It is not a big technological leap

to put on the website for Historic Preservation a link to YouTube where that can be explained in an easily digestible format.

Board Member Willis sought clarification from Board Member Pease regarding his reference to “that,” questioning whether it pertained to the Historic Building Code or the Mills Act.

Board Member Pease clarified that “that” referred to the Historic Building Code, emphasizing its role as an incentive or a benefit. It needs to be explained. He recalled Board Member Wimmer’s mention of a past presentation on the Historic Building Code to the Board and suggested leveraging that work by providing a link to a video explanation, which would be more accessible than textual content on a webpage.

Vice Chair Rohman inquired if Board Member Pease wished to include a discussion on this topic in the agenda for the next meeting.

Board Member Pease advocated prioritizing outreach to the foundational work and using it to communicate with people. The Board has a list of things that can be used for this purpose, and it is a more efficient way to use time and energy. He questioned why the Mills Act has taken over a decade and still needs more to be accomplished. He expressed reluctance to include it in a plan and trying to work through the details quietly without anyone outside the Board knowing what is going on. He felt these efforts could be made more accessible now with a link, through the City website, without reconstructing anything.

Ms. French interpreted the discussion to outline the Work Plan for the next meeting, suggesting Goal 4 focus solely on outreach, including web page updates with YouTube videos and training opportunities. Goal 5 would address the continuation of the Mills Act, determining the Council’s interest in it, and Goal 6 might involve proposing Zoning Code incentives.

Board Member Pease clarified his intention to reevaluate the foundational aspects of the Board’s work and to identify which elements would benefit from enhanced communication strategies. He suggested utilizing the existing list of those qualified and have expressed strong opinions about it, and somehow communicate the minimal time commitment that would be required.

Vice Chair Rohman acknowledged the validity of these points but had to depart from the meeting. She recommended adding this topic to the agenda for the next meeting to ensure a thorough discussion.

Ms. French noted that the upcoming meeting focused on the Work Plan and outreach would be the appropriate context for this discussion. She informed the Board that the April 11th meeting has three items scheduled, including two upgrade projects.

Board Member Wimmer announced her unavailability for the April 11th meeting due to out-of-town commitments.

Vice Chair Rohman inquired if there were any final remarks before the meeting adjournment.

Board Member Willis raised concern about the potential for increased meeting cancellations if the number of absent members exceeds the allowable limit.

Ms. French acknowledged the need for further discussion on this matter and expressed gratitude for Board Member Willis’s concern. She informed the Board that she has been in communication with Board Members Makinen, Heinrich, and Wimmer. Board Member Makinen has assured his commitment to attend meetings until a replacement is appointed. Regarding the possibility of transitioning to a five-member board, Ms. French admitted uncertainty about the implications for board composition and membership. She concluded by stating her intention to include an agenda item at the next meeting to discuss the Board’s desire to address board composition.

Action Items **

3. 261 Hamilton Avenue: Review and Recommendation of a Request to Update a Property’s Individual Palo Alto Historic Inventory Category to Category 2 from Category 3 the Property is Located in the National Register Ramona Street Architectural District

Ms. French shared a presentation showing the location of the building at 261 Hamilton Avenue across the street from the former University Art building. The building is a local Category 3 resource and contributor to the National Register historic district, which is called the Ramona Architectural District. The California

Register of Historical Resources was created in 1998. Because the subject property was already listed in the National Register, it was listed by default in the California Register of Historical Resources as a contributor to the Ramona Street Architectural District. There is no proposal to add bonus floor area to the property. She shared slides showing a couple images of the subject building drawn from the Page & Turnbull Report from 1928, 1986 and currently. Staff recommends that the City Council reclassify the building from a 'Contributing Building' Category 3 resource to a 'Major Building' Category 2 resource on the Palo Alto Historic Inventory.

Vice Chair Rohman stated that she would love to hear the history of the item.

Roxy Rapp, applicant, shared his personal connection to Palo Alto, having been a resident since 1947. He expressed a particular fondness for Ramona Street, highlighting its significance to him. Recalling its vibrant history as a hub for clothing, Mr. Rapp reminisced about the street's past activity and mentioned his mother's frequent visits to the dress shops there. He recounted a pivotal moment when he received an offer from his Little League coach, Bill Alhouse, to purchase the building. Mr. Rapp detailed his efforts to preserve the building's historical integrity, including obtaining its original drawings. He noted the modern alterations made by University Art over the years, such as concealing original tilework and changing the windows and awnings. Upon acquiring the building and conducting a study, Mr. Rapp discovered its historical significance as the site of Palo Alto's second post office. He expressed his appreciation for the building's current moniker, 'University Art,' while clarifying its origins as a dental and medical facility. During the process of demolishing what University Art had done, Mr. Rapp and his son discovered beautiful stonework hidden by the previous renovations. They sourced matching stone from the original manufacturer in Los Angeles, ensuring the new additions were indistinguishable from the original. The renovation also included extensive structural work to reinforce the building against earthquakes, involving deep excavation around the major support columns and foundational walls. Mr. Rapp concluded his remarks by reflecting on the excitement and fulfillment he experienced in revitalizing a building so rich in history and personal significance.

Vice Chair Rohman thanked Mr. Rapp for sharing his story and for setting a wonderful example of both adaptive reuse and preservation. She commended Mr. Rapp's meticulous attention to detail concerning Ramona Street and the district. Vice Chair Rohman highlighted Ramona Street as one of Palo Alto's most beautiful areas and assets of downtown.

Mr. Rapp expressed a sense of sadness regarding the current state of Ramona Street, contrasting it with memories from the past. He articulated a heartfelt desire to restore the street's aesthetic appeal, aspiring to revitalize its appearance to rekindle the community's admiration and attract visitors.

Samantha Purnell, Consultant, Page & Turnbull, supported Mr. Rapp's remarks, emphasizing the architectural and historical significance of the building. She described it as a cornerstone of the Ramona Street district, serving as a central point of interest within the community.

Board Member Willis inquired about the reasons for requesting a Category 2 update for the building instead of a Category 1.

Ms. Purnell replied that the building does have the potential to be listed as a Category 1, but the project scope given to the firm by the City was only for a Category 2 update.

Ms. French mentioned that the request was for a Category 2 update, which was what was analyzed. She suggested that the description of Category 1 could be reviewed if desired but clarified that it was not advertised as such. However, with the action to elevate the category to Category 2 as requested, further exploration regarding Category 1 could be considered.

Vice Chair Rohman wanted to clarify that it could skip two levels and does not have to go to Category 2 and then to Category 3.

Ms. French responded that just as long as it meets the criteria, that could be a recommendation for the Council to consider.

Board Member Willis asked for clarification on the staff's position that the HRB cannot choose to elevate it to Category 1 without advertising it again.

Ms. French explained that the project description was to elevate to Category 2, but she believed there could be comments to that effect. There is no material difference in terms of how the code applies. Category 1 and Category 2 are the same regarding applying incentives and similar factors.

Vice Chair Rohman suggested that the board obtain input from the property owner concerning any potential objections to being classified Category 1 instead of Category 2.

Mr. Rapp stated that the only difference is that it makes it more prestigious as a Category 1 and makes it more outstanding than a Category 2.

Vice Chair Rohman asked Mr. Rapp if he had any objections to the HRB recommending that Council recommends it as a Category 1 versus a Category 2.

Mr. Rapp said no, he was thrilled that the HRB would even consider it.

Vice Chair Rohman asked Ms. French if Category 1 could be reviewed.

Ms. French informed that she was in the process of uploading Chapter 16.49 of the Palo Alto Municipal Code, Historic Preservation, to access the relevant definitions.

Board Member Willis explained that part of her position on elevating it to Category 1 was its prominence on Ramona Street in the City's historic district. She resonated with Mr. Rapp's sentiments of discontent regarding the current state of what exists there now.

Ms. French displayed the definition of a Category 1 resource from Chapter 16.49, highlighting that "an exceptional building has had either no exterior modifications or such minor ones that the overall appearance of the building is in its original character." She noted that any minor modifications to the building had been reversed and restoration had taken place, so she believed that there were no impediments to elevating the building, given its significance at both the National and State levels.

Vice Chair Rohman invited Board discussion on the item. There was none.

MOTION

Motion by Vice Chair Rohman to recommend that the City Council reclassify the building from a 'Contributing Building' Category 3 resource to a Category 1 resource on the Palo Alto Historic Inventory.

Vice Chair Rohman invited public comment.

John Shenk, CEO of Thoits Brothers, provided remarks on the historical significance of the Thoits family in Palo Alto, dating back to the late 1800s. He expressed his enthusiasm for Mr. Rapp's efforts in recognizing and preserving the city's heritage. Mr. Shenk highlighted the Thoits family's involvement with the Palo Alto Improvement Company, responsible for developing notable landmarks such as the Cardinal Hotel and other structures on Ramona Street. He conveyed his support for the ongoing preservation initiatives and commended the direction in which they are progressing.

Vice Chair Rohman thanked Board Member Willis for the proposal to reclassify the building as a Category 1 resource. She indicated her intention to restate the motion.

MOTION

Motion by Vice Chair Rohman to recommend that the City Council reclassify the building at 261 Hamilton Avenue from a 'Contributing Building' Category 3 resource to a Category 1 resource on the Palo Alto Historic Inventory. Seconded by Board Member Willis, the motion carried (5-0) by voice vote.

Board Member Willis thanked Mr. Rapp for all he has done to preserve heritage.

Mr. Rapp informed the Board that he, along with Mr. Ken, intends to return shortly to present a project they have been collaboratively working on.

Approval of Minutes

4. Approval of Historic Resources Board Draft Minutes of January 11, 2024

Board Member Willis identified a discrepancy on page 66 regarding the first two motions. The minutes incorrectly stated that the motions were made and seconded by the Vice Chair. Board Member Willis

suggested that Chair Eagleston-Cieslewicz was likely the individual who made the motions, as indicated by the minutes showing the motion restated by Chair Eagleston-Cieslewicz.

MOTION

Motion by Vice Chair Rohman to approve the draft minutes of the January 11th meeting as corrected. Seconded by Board Member Pease, the motion carried (5-0) by voice vote.

5. Approval of Historic Resources Board Draft Minutes of January 25, 2024

MOTION

Motion by Vice Chair Rohman to approve the draft minutes of the January 25th meeting. Seconded by Board Member Willis, the motion carried (5-0) by voice vote.

Board Member Questions, Comments, Announcements or Future Meetings and Agendas

Adjournment

MOTION

Motion by Vice Chair Rohman to adjourn. Seconded by Board Member Pease, the motion carried unanimously by voice vote.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:46 a.m.