

August 21, 2023

Dear Ms. Raybould,

Below is my request to have the Historic Resources Board review and determine the historic designation of the former Fry's site (known as 340 Portage) and its associated Ash office building (3201-3225 Ash). I understand that any citizen or individual can ask for this historic review, you don't have to be the property owner of the stated property to request this review.

I have included in the document below (as outlined in the Code 16.49.040) the various steps/details that are requested for this historic review.

- A) Official request for a City historic site designation for 340 Portage Avenue and 3201-3225 Ash Avenue (APN 132-38-071) and adding these two existing buildings to the City's official Historic Inventory, under Categories 1 or 2.

Other storefront addresses, including 200, 210, 220, 230, 336, 360, 370, and 380 Portage use the main cannery building, however, 340 Portage is the largest space in the building, so 340 Portage -- in this document -- refers to the entire building.

- B) 340 Portage is the recent, former home of Fry's Electronics, but was originally built in 1918 by Thomas Foon Chew, one of California's first Chinese-American minority entrepreneurs. 340 Portage became one of the principle operational sites of the Bayside Canning Company, which became the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest cannery operation in the world in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Today, our city, state, and nation still struggle with the consequences of centuries of mistreatment of minorities as well as discrimination that continues to this day. The significance of Thomas Foon Chew's extraordinary accomplishments in face of the enormous obstacles of his time can not be overstated. For a city such as Palo Alto, which prides itself on equality for all, to lend its hand to the destruction of one of last surviving and most impressive monument to Chew's achievements is wrong,

especially because it completely unnecessary. No legal nor financial obstacle exists to the preservation of this extraordinary building, 340 Portage. We should designate it as historic so that we and generations to come can truly honor Chew and his legacy.

C) Requested by the City, details on the building's significance and its historic resource evaluation were officially done by Page & Turnbull in early 2019 and the Page and Turnbull Report was issued on April 11<sup>th</sup>, 2019. As outlined in that report, 340 Portage and its associated former office building, 3201-3225 Ash Street were found to be both eligible for listing in the California State Register of Historical Resources at the local level of significance under Criterion 1 (Events) for its association with the history of the canning industry in Santa Clara County.

City Staff and the HRB should review the April 11<sup>th</sup> 2019 Page & Turnbull report for specific details.

D) The current condition of 340 Portage is now under threat of a significant demolition of the site (over 40%), which will directly impact its historical value as outlined in the 200 Portage Townhome Project Environmental Impact Report (EIR). As the EIR clearly indicated, destroying 40% of this historic structure will also end its historic significance. Quoting the EIR, "The most substantial impact would occur through the demolition of 89,639 square-feet of the eastern portion of the building, constituting a loss of approximately 40 percent of the building. The proposed demolition would result in the removal of distinctive materials like the removal of canning platforms and cooling porches, the loss of several character-defining features, such as the form and massing and varied roof forms and structures and would, therefore constitute material impairment to the historical resource. The proposed demolition would significantly diminish those characteristics of the historical resource that convey its historical significance and justify its eligibility for listing in the CRHR". In addition, the proposed permanent modifications to the remaining "monitor roofs" section of the 340 Portage/cannery building will be so significant that its historic value will also be lost forever, if allowed to

be done by the developer. This was clearly outlined in the May 25<sup>th</sup> Staff Report to the HRB.

- E) Restoration and adaptive reuse of 340 Portage is possible and needs further study and planning by both the developer and City staff. Destroying an important historic resource that gave hope to thousands of local migrants and impacted the lives of everyone in the Bay Area in the 20<sup>th</sup> century should not be considered nor tolerated.
- F) All sketches, drawings, photographs, and other descriptive materials can be found in the Page & Turnbull Report, April 11, 2019. I encourage HRB members and City staff to be read this P&T report and become familiar with its analysis and conclusions.
- G) Supporting documents (in addition to the Page & Turnbull report) include: “Historic Bay Area Visionaries”, by Robin Chapman, 2018, The History Press – a full length chapter on Thomas Foon Chew is included, pp. 91-108. In addition, another Chapman book, “The Valley of Heart’s Delight”, 2022, The History Press. Includes an update on Thomas Foon Chew and the Bayside Canning Company.