

APPROVED MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING OF THE
CITY OF ALAMEDA HISTORICAL ADVISORY BOARD
THURSDAY, MAY 6, 2021

1. CONVENE

Chair Thomas Saxby called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm.

This meeting was via Zoom.

2. ROLL CALL

Present: Chair Saxby, Board Members Jones, Lau, Sanchez, Wit.

Absent: None.

3. MINUTES

3-A 2021-908

Draft meeting Minutes - March 4, 2021

Board Member Norman Sanchez corrected his statement on page 5, it should be *could* and not *would* ask to file a report with Historical Advisory Board (HAB).

Board Member Sanchez made a motion to approve the minutes with this correction. Board Member Alvin Lau seconded the motion and the motion passed 5-0.

4. AGENDA CHANGES AND DISCUSSION

None

5. ORAL COMMUNICATION

None

6. WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS

Allen Tai, City Planner and HAB Secretary, wanted to address the Written Communication for item 7-A. Since there were many letters submitted the staff had posted those on the City of Alameda's website and for the staff report, they were compiled and attached as an exhibit. Staff had also emailed out those comments to the board prior to the meeting.

7. REGULAR AGENDA ITEMS

7-A 2021-907

PLN20-0431 - Delisting from Historical Building Study List and Certificate of Approval - 620 Central Avenue - Alameda Federal Center. Applicant: Alameda Point Collaborative. Public hearing to consider delisting the Alameda Federal Center site at 620 Central Avenue from the Historical Building Study List. In addition, the applicant requests a

Certificate of Approval to demolish two main buildings and four accessory structures on the project site. The property is listed on the Historical Building Study List with an “s” designation. The City of Alameda has prepared an Addendum to a Mitigated Negative Declaration pursuant to Section 15164 of the CEQA Guidelines and no further environmental review is required.

Staff Member Tai introduced this item and gave a presentation. Staff Report and attachments can be found at

<https://alameda.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=4928317&GUID=F79F3F4C-F1FD-421E-857A-E6F1C7FB096D&FullText=1>.

Stacy Kozakavich, Cultural Resources Planner/Archaeologist with Page & Turnbull, also presented the history of the location and the findings from the 1996 report they had done.

Doug Biggs, the lead applicant on this project, discussed the intended plans for the location and why they had decided to try and delist this location from the Historical Building Study List.

Chair Saxby asked the Board for clarifying questions.

Board Member Sanchez asked about the buildings outside of the site, the buildings in the East Bay Regional Park District’s parcel, and wanted to know if they were listed separately on the Historical Buildings Study List.

Staff Member Tai answered that they were not. The staff could clean up the Historical Buildings Study List administratively and make it clear that there are multiple buildings on this site.

Board Member Sanchez asked if the buildings on the Alameda Federal Center Site were listed together on the Historical Buildings Study List.

Ms. Kozakavich clarified that the Seamanship Building is listed separately on the Study List as the Boat House.

Board Member Sanchez wanted to know if the Crab Cove Visitor Center falls into one or the other.

Ms. Kozakavich said she did not believe it did, the Visitor Center and the sewage building were not part of the delisting. She also added that Building 7 was included in the original 620 Central Avenue address.

Board Member Sanchez asked if they wanted the Crab Cove Visitor's Center to be listed separately from the Alameda Federal Center that it could be done administratively by the staff. Staff Member Tai said that was correct.

Chair Saxby clarified that they were only asked to consider delisting the Northern part of this site, and the Southern part of the site was excluded from the request.

Staff Member Tai said that was correct. He added that Building 7, the boathouse, and the infirmary were not part of the delisting request.

Chair Saxby wanted to know the logic of that approach of separating the Southern part of this parcel.

Staff Member Tai explained that the request is related to the McKay Wellness Center. The applicant determined the buildings could not be feasibly reused, which led to questioning what other buildings on this site needed to be demolished. To continue with the McKay Wellness Center Project the staff was only looking at the 3.5-acre portion.

Board Member Sanchez asked if the original application also included the demolition of the small accessory structures.

Henry Dong, Planner III, said it included four accessory buildings.

Board Member Sanchez wanted to know if the General Services Agency (GSA) were to propose a new building on that site then they would not have to go through the City of Alameda's approval process.

Staff Member Tai said that was correct.

Board Member Sanchez continued saying if GSA wanted to demolish all the buildings on this site they could do that without an application for approval.

Staff Member Tai said that was also correct, that was what had happened to the other buildings of the Alameda Federal Center previously.

Board Member Sanchez further clarified that having this location on the Study List would do nothing to sway or stop GSA if they wanted to tear down and build a new building.

Staff Member Tai said that was correct.

Board Member Lynn Jones wanted more information about the adaptive reuse feasibility study that was brought up in the public comments.

Mr. Biggs said they had done an exploratory demolition of the existing building, and had engineers analyze the ability to adaptively reuse the building. The costs to rehabilitate the existing building are enormous.

Chair Saxby asked if that study was focused on structural concerns.

Mr. Biggs said that was correct.

Board Member Jones asked if there was any possibility that the architect of these buildings was notable. She referenced public comments that note prominent architects were associated with the buildings.

Ms. Kozakavich explained their research and what would make a building noteworthy and historically significant. The original plans for these buildings could have come from more centralized wartime plans which were used across the country to quickly build an installation for training and housing of armed forces. To find those plans they would need to dig into federal archival records, the 1996 report did not find those records. She added that even if this building did have a note-worthy architect it would not change the fact that the building had lost integrity.

Board Member Jones wanted to know if this facility would qualify as a Historical Monument.

Mr. Biggs brought up that most of the people who had written letters to ask the Board to save the buildings had no issue with the buildings being torn down when they previously asked the City to turn the site into open space. Since the City does not own the buildings they cannot turn them into a museum.

Chair Saxby asked if it were possible these buildings could be restored to their original historical condition or whether the question is irrelevant.

Ms. Kozakavich said it wasn't irrelevant, in many cases buildings can be restored to their historical appearance. In this case, if Building 1 was rehabilitated to its original appearance it would be a well-preserved single building but that still wouldn't restore integrity to the campus. It would only go a little way toward bringing back the original character of the site.

Board Member Sanchez asked if the original application for Building 2 assumed Adaptive Reuse.

Mr. Biggs said the original design and intent for Building 2 was to adaptively reuse the building. It was only after they had submitted everything with the Planning Board and the City Council that they were able to do the exploratory demolition. Then with the exploratory demo and the analysis from the engineers, it was determined that the original plan for adaptive reuse was no longer feasible.

Chair Saxby opened the public comment.

Board Member Jones reminded everyone that they were not here to discuss the use of the building.

Chair Saxby concurred and he added that the topic tonight was the potential delisting and or demolition of this site. He said that people could combine their time to give a speaker extra time.

Staff Member Tai said that he had been contacted prior to the meeting by Carmen Reid and Janet Gibson regarding a presentation they wished to give.

Carmen Reid had been researching the original architect of the site, and she had reason to believe that it was Gardner Daily. She had also reached out to the National Archives and as soon as they open she hoped to gain access to those files. She had also found some 1946 drawings by Joseph Esherick, the architect of Sea Ranch, who had designed an addition at the training school. She had also submitted an application to designate the site on the National Register, and she pointed out that GSA had incorrect information about which buildings had been demolished. She urged the board to give this item more time, at least until they heard back from the National Register so that the site could be fully evaluated by the state and national historians. She said the Merchant Marines deserved this and discussed the petition going around to save the buildings that was fully supported by the National Veterans Association. She believed that destroying the buildings without doing a full evaluation would be a disaster.

Chair Saxby asked when the application with the National Register had been submitted and what the expected turnaround time was.

Ms. Reid said she had submitted the application on the Friday before this meeting and the full evaluation process was between 6-12 months.

John Healy believed there was a way for historians to feel that history was being preserved and for Mr. Biggs to get what he needed to make his project happen. He also thought the memo presented by Page & Turnbull didn't cut it and he disputed that there really hadn't been an Adaptive Reuse study. He felt that there was a lot of misinformation on both sides. He addressed the importance of this site and that it was the only one like it in the country. He felt that the City had also given out a lot of misinformation and believed there needed to be another forum so everyone could have their say.

Jay Garfinkle said that even though the buildings had been modified that shouldn't take away the fact that the area had historic significance. He believed the push to do this project was because of financial significance which should carry no weight in the decision

process. He wanted the board to focus on the historic significance as perceived by the citizens of Alameda not by historians in Timbuktu or San Francisco.

Conchita Perales was very concerned that the delisting and demolition of these historic buildings would set a precedent and would open the door for the delisting and demolition of every building on the Study List. She believed that one by one every home in Alameda would go to the chopping block. She wondered how anyone can prove that their home is worth saving. She believed that the HAB was the only hope to fight back against special interest groups that put economic gain before the preservation of Alameda's history. She felt approving this delisting and demolition of the building would be the beginning of the end of hope for Alameda.

Matt Reid discussed site integrity and encouraged the board to think creatively about what that meant. He gave an example of the Ming Dynasty Wall Park in Beijing, China, it was an area that could have been easily demolished if no one had defended it. He talked about the McKay Ave property and how unique it was, he also believed the monument there needed to be redone because it did not capture the full importance of the site. He recognized it was not the full beautiful campus it once was but still had importance. He said there were many examples of when just a fraction of a site remained but it was important to the citizens.

Mike Van Dine said the buildings of the US Maritime Officers Training School on McKay Ave were on the Study List for a good reason. Their walls hold the important story of the role Alameda played in WWII and Merchant Marine history. He believed the Page & Turnbull report clearly described the historical importance and significance of these structures. He believed the HAB should deny the application to delist and demolish our historical assets. He said the project was different from the scale and scope of the project that the voters voted for in 2019. He believed if the special election had mentioned demolition back then the measure would have lost that vote. He pointed out that the only other time a building was delisted and demolished in Alameda, a Victorian for a parking lot, those findings were also based on a Page & Turnbull report. He pointed out the applicant was complaining about cost after the Federal Government had offered these buildings to help the homeless and now the applicant was saying they had no use for these buildings. He believed the HAB should vote to keep the buildings on the Study List and preserve and reuse them.

Harvey Rosenthal addressed some misstatements made in regards to the project. He felt the statement that the opponents of this project had been fine with the buildings being torn down for open space was not true. The open space initiative would have allowed the buildings to stay and be reused for the park. Secondly, the statement that from day one Building 1 was always going to be torn down. He pointed out that the applicant first applied to the Federal Government for these buildings to be reused. Public presentations were also provided by the applicant that discussed "Adaptive Reuse" and showed how each building would be reused. He felt that the public and the voters had been misled. He

believed the buildings could all be returned to the original design and finish. He felt that there was no research provided as to why the site had been put on the Study List in the first place. He believed if the site could not serve the needs of the project it should be relocated elsewhere.

Rosalinda Fortuna spoke on behalf of her father, a Navy Veteran, and shared a letter he had written. He spoke about how saddened he was to learn that the city was trying to delist the property at 620 Central Ave and to tear down these buildings was a disgrace. The city should be striving to preserve Alameda's military history. He was also disappointed that the applicant was not sticking to their original promise of reusing the buildings instead of tearing them down. Ms. Fortuna compared the site to the Rosie the Riveter Museum in Richmond, California.

Chris Buckley, from the Alameda Architecture Preservation Society (AAPS), discussed a letter they had sent. He pointed out that the criteria for integrity Page & Turnbull used was based on the National Register in California but the City's criteria don't clearly state what the integrity standard was. He discussed the Historic Preservation Ordinance for Alameda and the definition for Historic Monuments and how integrity wasn't even mentioned. He believed this gave flexibility to the HAB do to decide what standard of integrity to apply to this location. An example of this flexibility would be to allow the demolition but to allow the site to stay on the Study List, which suggests there is still some integrity to this site. He felt that there was some contradiction in the staff analysis and in the Page & Turnbull report. He discussed other ways the integrity issue was flexible.

Janet Gibson discussed her personal history with Alameda and was even born before the buildings were built. She talked about Alameda's unique history and how important these buildings are. She understood the need to create a home for at-risk homeless individuals but perhaps this site was not the right place for it. She wanted the board and the city to rethink the use of the land that would bring people to Alameda.

Chair Saxby reminded Ms. Gibson that the use of the site was off-topic.

Zac Bowling acknowledged all the information that had already been provided that showed that these buildings were not historically significant. He made clarifications about previous statements by other commenters. He felt the online petition that was circulating against this project was being shared with false information. He summarized that the same issues are being brought up again to fight the project.

Ryan Lalonde commented on statements made by previous speakers. He was frustrated that at every meeting there was always a new issue that needed to be studied just to delay this project. He added that the property was owned by the GSA, and it was not going to be magically be turned over to the city for a different project that some commenters are hoping for. He concluded that opponents to the project did not want the respite home in their neighborhood.

Laura Gamble said the speakers who were demanding to keep these buildings for historic value had previously advocated for their demolition. She did not appreciate the negative remarks directed at the applicant as well as the city staff in a bad faith attempt to further delay a project. She added that subject matter experts all concurred that the answer was to delist this property.

Bronwyn Harris said she had read AAPS's letter regarding this site and disagreed with their comments. She believed the same people who wanted to tear down these buildings to build a park are now trying to save the buildings to stop the wellness center. She felt it was time to listen to the experts and delist the property.

Brenden Sullivan discussed the rich military history that the Bay Area had and how unique the Merchant Marine history was. He believed taking the extra time to get this right was not a bad thing. He said we don't need to tear down our history and should preserve the buildings.

Ezra Denney discussed statements previously made by other commenters and urged the board to end this delay and move forward with this incredibly needed facility that would serve the community. Trust the experts, city staff, and voters and let the Wellness Center happen.

Margaret Hall discussed Adaptive Reuse and what had been in the Measure that had been voted on. She discussed her past work as a contractor and how this is something you should have figured out at the beginning of a project. She felt the buildings should be reused and saw the merit in the historic feeling of a building. She described her experience rehabbing 100-year-old homes and argued to save these buildings. She agreed with Matt Reid's comparison of saving the buildings to saving the Great Wall of China.

Thomas Stapleton, calling from Texas, discussed his history with Alameda and his time with the Merchant Marines. He talked about the Maritime Training School in New York, where his father had trained, and how it had been torn down in the 1950s without honoring the mariners who had served there. No one had stood up against the developers then so saving the buildings tonight was an opportunity to right what was previously lost. He said there was so little that had been done to honor the Merchant Marines and pleaded with the board not to delist this property. He did not believe Alameda needed more concrete and steel but needed to protect the sacred grounds of Alameda's maritime history.

Chair Saxby closed public comments and opened the board's discussion.

Chair Saxby thanked everyone for their comments and acknowledged they were still getting email comments as well. He noted everyone's passion and said this would add to the difficulty in making the decision.

Board Member Jenn Wit thanked everyone for their comments and agreed this was a big decision to make. She first wanted clarification on the Exploratory Demo that had been done and what had been found.

Mr. Biggs provided details about exploratory work they had done. He explained the extensive work and analysis done by the engineers.

Chair Saxby asked a question about the helical piers put in from the outside.

Mr. Biggs said it was not possible, and that they did not have the space for that.

Board Member Wit brought up the Del Monte project and the exploratory demolition that was done there, and how that was able to get rehabbed.

Mr. Biggs clarified that the expectations are different because the Del Monte building had already been declared a Historical Building, and the 620 Central location was just on the Study List, to be studied to see if it was historical. He had also accepted these buildings from the Federal Government to be used to help the homeless, the Del Monte building doesn't have that added constraint. The project is mandated to create a project that serves the homeless, and is financially feasible to serve the homeless.

Board Member Witt wanted to know if it was because of financial reasons that it wasn't being rehabbed.

Mr. Biggs said the financial reasons were paramount but it also of equal importance they could create a much better property for the clients they would be serving, and able to maintain

Staff Member Tai added that this step of the project coming before the HAB was always there from the beginning since the original project had anticipated the demolition of Building 1. He also discussed the differences between this project and the Del Monte project.

Board Member Alvin Lau agreed that the original site had historical value and understood its importance to some of the Alameda residents, however he believed the City did follow legal processes and provided a lawful report that states the buildings no longer have historical value because it was not a complete site anymore.

Chair Saxby said he thought that AAPS assumed the board had more flexibility in determining the historic value of the site due to some ambiguity in the language of the ordinance.

Board Member Jones wanted to know if what Mr. Buckley said was true. Could the board approve the Certificate of Approval to Demolish and still keep the site on the Historical Study List?

Chair Saxby believed that was true.

Staff Member Tai said that was true and that this board had done that in the past, most recently with Alameda Marina. It was a way of recognizing there was history on the property but that the buildings lacked integrity so you could allow the demolition.

Chair Saxby clarified that for the Alameda Marina project the City Council had already decided on that before it was brought before the HAB.

Board Member Sanchez asked if all the buildings had been scheduled for demolition in the Alameda Marina project. He thought some buildings were scheduled to be preserved.

Chair Saxby said 4 buildings were being preserved.

Board Member Sanchez said he didn't see the point in preserving the site on the Study List if the plan was to approve the demolition of the buildings.

Chair Saxby said with the Alameda Marina it was a much more intact Cultural Landscape. From all the public comments and the speakers, it appeared that the people valued the historical significance of this site and the buildings' connection to the Merchant Marines and that gave him hesitation to have this board decide to demolish these buildings. The importance to the community elevated this site in terms of the local historical register. He preferred the option of Adaptive Reuse for these buildings and said he would come down in favor of not delisting the property and not approving the Certificate of Approval to demolish. He was aware that would then promote this decision to the elected officials on the City Council.

Staff Member Tai made a clarifying point to help the board come to a decision. He said while public input and opinion were important the standard of review on the question of whether the site was historic or not was based on established criteria and standards for historic preservation. He recommended that the board rely on the criteria as presented by staff and the experts to come to a decision.

Chair Saxby pointed out that the Page & Turnbull report said that the site did have historic significance and that the real issue was that there had been a loss of integrity. He also added according to the AAPS they had a lot of flexibility in interpreting integrity and they didn't have to rely on national and state standards for that analysis.

Board Member Sanchez acknowledged that this was an emotionally charged issue and he is trying to evaluate this site and determine if he agrees with Page & Turnbull's

assessment that the site had lost its integrity. He discussed how the site was no longer integral and how a lot of the key buildings that were part of the school had already been removed. It would be a difficult decision to determine if what remains was sufficient to continue on the Study List. He said the Crab Cove visitor center and Seamanship building south of the site should be preserved.

Board Member Jones said she agreed with Board Member Sanchez that this was a difficult decision. She felt they did have some flexibility with integrity and it was a subjective thing. She appreciated the comment by Mr. Reid about small parts of the Great Wall in China that had been saved. She also felt that they should be preserving the history and if it was something the community cared about they should honor that. She addressed the state of the buildings now and questioned whether if they do still honor the significant historical events that happened there. That was why she was leaning toward approving the Certificate of Approval for demolition but keeping the location on the Study List. She wanted them to do more to highlight its significance since it was such a big part of Alameda.

Board Member Sanchez clarified that Board Member Jones's point was not to delist but to approve the Certificate of Approval to demolish.

Board Member Wit said yes but only because she agreed with all the research that was done.

Board Member Wit agreed this was a very tough decision because everyone cared about the historical character of the island. There was such a need for respite housing and the land is vacant and even though half of the structure was torn down it was still hard to decide that the other half should be torn down as well.

Chair Saxby acknowledged that the preservation movement didn't really start in America until the 1960s. This building had fallen into that time when people were not thinking too much about the historical record.

Board Member Lau personally felt that the site was no longer complete after all the demolition of buildings that had already taken place.

Chair Saxby made a motion to delist from the Historical Building Study List the Northern part of the property at 620 Central Ave and Board Member Sanchez seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and the motion failed 3-2 with Chair Saxby and Board Members Jones and Wit voting against.

Board Member Jones made a motion to approve the Certificate of Approval to demolish two main buildings and four accessory structures on the project site at 620 Central Ave and Board Member Wit seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and the motion passed 4-1 with Chair Saxby voting against.

Staff Member Tai reminded everyone in attendance that the board's actions were appealable to the City Council and that the City Council may also call this decision for a review in the next 10 days.

8. BOARD COMMUNICATIONS

None

9. STAFF COMMUNICATIONS

Staff Member Tai gave an update on the status of the update on the Historic Preservation Ordinance. Due to the demands of the staff they had not had much time to work on it but hoped to have an update soon. He encouraged the board to read up on the Mills Act.

10. ORAL COMMUNICATIONS

Jay Garfinkle wanted to discuss the agenda item some more, he was confused about how something could stay on the study list and still be demolished. He was not criticizing the vote, just the two things seemed inconsistent to him.

Chair Saxby reminded Mr. Garfinkle that Oral Communications was an opportunity to discuss something that was *not* on the agenda.

11. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Saxby adjourned the meeting at 9:36 pm.