

Historic Preservation Element | 9



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DISCUSSION

San Ysidro has played an important role in the City of San Diego's agricultural and international tourism history. The community contains a number of potential historic resources that date primarily to the Little Landers farming period of the 1910s. San Ysidro has been a residential area enhancing the economy along the border, and primarily housing Mexicans and Mexican Americans since the mid-twentieth century. The community's connection to the rest of the City and region via railroad, interurban electric streetcars, and freeways, has provided access to employment and leisure activities for residents of the community, as well as commerce for San Ysidro's establishments. Over time, the character of the area has developed to include residential subdivisions and strip malls, but the heart of old San Ysidro, including its Craftsman bungalows and the City park, remains largely unaltered.

The Historic Conservation Element contains specific recommendations to address the history and cultural resources, unique to San Ysidro, in order to encourage appreciation of these resources. These policies, along with the General Plan policies, provide a comprehensive historic preservation strategy for San Ysidro. A complete discussion of the community's pre-history and history can be found in the Historic Context Statement (Appendix C).

GOALS

- Recognize, preserve, and rehabilitate architecturally significant buildings, districts, landscaped areas, archaeological sites, and urban environment.



"A community is tied to its history. Without knowledge of the individuals who developed the area before us, we are doomed to misunderstand the current issues and miss the opportunities for growth and betterment."

- *Barbara Zaragoza, Local historian and writer*

9.1 IDENTIFICATION & PRESERVATION

San Ysidro contains a variety of property types and architectural styles, reflecting the significant themes and associated periods of development in the community. Identified themes discussed in the Historic Context Statement (Appendix C) include:

- Pre-history and Spanish Period (1800-1922)
- Rancho Period and Early Border History (1822-1908)
- An Agricultural Community (1906-1964)
- Development of a Border Town (1916-1956)
- Annexation to the City of San Diego (1957-Present)

Within each era, growth and evolution of the built environment in San Ysidro are discussed relative to the residential development, commercial development, and institutional and government development.

DESIGNATED HISTORICAL RESOURCES

Three buildings in San Ysidro are listed on the San Diego Historic Register:

- HRB #236, El Toreador Motel, 631 San Ysidro Boulevard
- HRB #451, San Ysidro Public Library, 101-105 San Ysidro Boulevard
- HRB #820, Harry and Amanda Rundell House, 123 East Seaward Avenue

In addition, the U.S. Custom House located on the U.S./Mexico border is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Properties found to be potentially significant through the reconnaissance survey highlight those properties which may contribute to a potential historic district, or which may be potentially significant as an individual property. This survey is provided along with the Historic Context Study found in Appendix C.

The pre-history of the San Diego region is evidenced through archaeological remains, representing up to 10,500 years of Native American occupation that are locally characterized by the San Dieguito complex, the Archaic La Jollan and Pauma Complexes, and the Late Prehistoric. Based on ethnographic research and archaeological evaluations, Late Prehistoric materials in southern San Diego County are believed to represent the ancestral Kumeyaay.

The Ethnohistoric Period, sometimes referred to as the ethnographic present, commences with the earliest European arrival in San Diego and continued through the Spanish and Mexican periods, and into the American period. The founding of Mission San Diego de Alcalá in 1769 brought about profound changes in the lives of the Kumeyaay. The coastal Kumeyaay were quickly brought into the mission or died from introduced diseases. Earliest accounts of Native American life in San Diego were recorded as a means to salvage scientific knowledge of native lifeways. These accounts were often based on limited interviews or biased data collection techniques. Later researchers and local Native Americans began to uncover and make public significant contributions in the understanding of native culture and language. These studies have continued to the present day, and involve archaeologists and ethnographers working in conjunction with Native Americans to address the continued cultural significance of sites and landscapes across the County. The myths and history that are repeated by the local Native American groups now and at the time of earlier ethnographic research, indicate both their presence here since the time of creation and in some cases, migration from other areas. The Kumeyaay are the identified “Most Likely Descendants” for all Native American human remains found in the City of San Diego.

The valleys and mesas of the Tijuana River Valley, portions of which are in San Ysidro, were relatively undisturbed throughout the Spanish Period. The Ranch Period and Early Border History (1822–1908) is important as the earliest period of Anglo settlement in the San Ysidro area, including the brief existence of the first American town (Tia Juana City) on the north side of the Tijuana River, as well as establishment of the first ranches. Of these ranches, the Belcher homestead is the oldest surviving building in San Ysidro and continues to be used. Other than the ranchos, there was no development in the area until after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hildago in 1848, which

established the U.S. Mexican border south of San Ysidro. By the mid 1860s, temporary markers were erected at 258 locations across the 1,200 mile border between Brownsville, Texas and San Diego. Border Monument 255 can still be seen today and is located near the Port of Entry building.

Following the floods of the late 19th century, settlers re-established their homesteads and the small town that had started to develop along the U.S./Mexico border. The small town became an agricultural community in the model of the Country Life Movement, and was known as the Little Landers Colony No. 1 at San Ysidro. The town was named “San Ysidro” after the original rancho grant along the Tia Juana River Valley, which had been named for the patron saint of farmers. The Little Landers Colony struggled in its early years due to the availability of water, but by 1912, the community was well-established. Dairies carried on the agricultural business in San Ysidro after the collapse of the Little Landers Colony, due to the Hatfield Flood of 1916, and maintained a rural belt around the town for a number of years. Agricultural uses continued in San Ysidro after World War II, as border traffic in San Ysidro related to tourism and commercial interests increased. The Little Landers Colony is important because it comprised the earliest development of the present-day town of San Ysidro including: construction of the original neighborhood of Craftsman homes, some of which are still extant; the City park and a few early commercial buildings; the earliest infrastructure and transportation systems, laying the basis for further property development in the town; and much of the parcel and street layout of the old town area.

The history of San Ysidro is intimately connected to the history of the U.S./Mexico border. As the agricultural community of the Little Landers Colony waned, the community evolved with a new focus on border activity, entertainment, tourism, and civic development. The following section highlights the impact of events, people, and border activity on the development of San Ysidro. The development of a border town period is important for addressing the needs of a growing population of both residents and tourists from California and Mexico. Americans were attracted into the area because of recreational gambling and horse racing, just over the border, in Tijuana, Mexico, while both Americans and Mexicans were attracted to agricultural employment opportunities in and around San



Historic structures in San Ysidro.

Ysidro. Consequently, the era saw the further construction of single-family residences in the original platted neighborhood, as well as multifamily housing, like the first small apartment buildings and bungalow courts. Commercial development also expanded greatly along San Ysidro Boulevard, and many of these commercial properties remain extant. Institutional facilities, such as the Customs House, public library, and churches were established to service the tourists and/or residents. The town was now a full-fledged city that supported the various economic, social, religious, and recreational needs of the residents and visitors.

Water concerns from San Ysidro residents and commercial owners precipitated the idea of annexation; the City of San Diego as a whole recognized the importance of the border to the region and voted for annexation in 1957. San Ysidro continued to play an important role in the local, regional, and national economy as the border crossing became the busiest crossing in the U.S. in 1988. The annexation period is important because it represents the transition of a small, relatively sleepy border town to a bustling community, which is today characterized by a heavy influence of Mexican culture and primarily Mexican and Mexican American residents. Further expansion of the transportation infrastructure between San Diego and the border has encouraged the growth in the amount of travel between Mexico and California. Development of subdivisions and commercial areas in San Ysidro are indicators of various cultural, economic, and political changes in the last fifty or so years that have promoted both commerce and residency on the U.S. side of the border.

Historic and cultural preservation efforts can be some of the most effective tools used to maintain the character of the community, while stimulating civic pride and inspiring new businesses. San Ysidro is well-positioned to benefit from its history. San Ysidro recognizes the benefits associated with preserving historic resources and creating additional destinations for visitors and residents. Holding cultural events by local organizations and conducting walking tours are methods to increase interest in San Ysidro. Preservation and promotion of these resources could continue to help create new businesses, provide job opportunities, and increase property values by inspiring local job creation, generating tax revenue from consumer purchases, supporting small businesses, and enhancing quality of life and community character.

- 9.1.1 Conduct subsurface investigations at the project level to identify potentially significant archaeological resources in San Ysidro.
- 9.1.2 Protect and preserve significant archaeological resources. Refer significant sites to the Historical Resources Board for designation.
- 9.1.3 Ensure adequate data recovery and mitigation for adverse impacts to archaeological and Native American sites at the project level. In order to determine ethnic or cultural significance of archaeological sites or landscapes to the Native American community, meaningful consultation is necessary.
- 9.1.4 Include measures during new construction to monitor and recover buried deposits from the historic period and address significant research questions related to pre-history.
- 9.1.5 Identify, designate, preserve, and restore historical buildings in San Ysidro and encourage their adaptive reuse.
- 9.1.6 Catalogue and preserve historic street lighting and furniture. Maintain and preserve other non-structural features of the historic and cultural landscape, such as sidewalk scoring and coloring, sidewalk stamps, and landscaping.
- 9.1.7 Encourage the reuse of materials and the adaptation of historically significant structures to help sustain the community character.
- 9.1.8 Preserve notable landmarks and areas of historic, architectural, or aesthetic value.
- 9.1.9 Promote the preservation of buildings and features that provide continuity with the past.

- 9.1.10 Encourage new buildings to express a variety of architectural styles, but to do so with full awareness of and respect for, the height, mass, articulation, and materials of the surrounding historic buildings and culturally significant resources.
- 9.1.11 Look to historic buildings for design, architectural ideas, and inspiration.

9.2 EDUCATION, BENEFITS, & INCENTIVES

Revitalization and adaptive reuse of historic buildings and districts have many benefits. These include: conservation of resources, use of existing infrastructure, local job creation, tax revenue from consumer purchases, support to small business development and heritage tourism, and enhancement of the quality of life and community character.

There are a number of incentives available to owners of historic resources to assist with the revitalization and adaptive reuse of historic buildings and districts. The California State Historic Building Code provides flexibility, in meeting building code requirements for historically designated buildings. Conditional Use Permits are available to allow adaptive reuse of historic structures consistent with the U.S. Secretary of the Interior's Standards and the character of the community. The Mills Act, which is a highly successful incentive, provides property tax relief to owners to help rehabilitate and maintain designated historical resources. Additional incentives recommended in the General Plan, including an architectural assistance program, are being developed and may become available in the future. In addition to direct incentives to owners of designated historical resources, all members of the community enjoy the benefits of historic preservation through reinvestment of individual property tax savings into historical properties and an increased historic tourism economy. There is great opportunity to build on the existing tourism base drawn to the community's unique cultural influence in the region and its bi-national location by highlighting and celebrating the rich history of San Ysidro.

In addition to General Plan Historic Preservation Element Policies, the following recommendations are specific to San Ysidro for implementation of educational opportunities and incentives for preservation of the community's historical resources.

- 9.2.1 Promote San Ysidro's history through the distribution of printed brochures and walking tours, and the installation of interpretative signs, markers, displays, and exhibits at public buildings and parks (also see 4.11).
- 9.2.2 Promote the maintenance, restoration, rehabilitation, and continued private ownership and utilization of historical resources through a variety of financial and development incentives.
- 9.2.3 Continue to use existing incentive programs and develop new approaches, such as architectural assistance and relief from setback requirements, through a development permit process, as needed.
- 9.2.4 Expand cultural heritage tourism opportunities, such as the preservation of the San Ysidro Boulevard Village area, and encourage its use as a mixed-use entertainment venue. Conduct walking tours of historical resources and protect historical properties and cultural assets.
- 9.2.5 Partner with interested parties to promote conservation, restoration, educational programs/tours, stewardship, and create cultural tourism programs focusing on the community's heritage.

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