

# San Diego LGBTQ Historic Sites Project

April 26, 2024

Shannon Mulderig  
Senior Planner  
City Planning Department  
City of San Diego

**RE: Hillcrest Focused Plan Amendment Draft March 2024  
Chapter 5: LGBTQ+ Cultural and Chapter 11: Historic Preservation**

The San Diego LGBTQ Historic Sites Project (The Project) welcomes this opportunity to offer its comments to the March 2024 Hillcrest Focused Plan Amendment Draft regarding Chapter 5: LGBTQ+ Cultural and Chapter 11: Historic Preservation components.

Many of our comments repeat what we have previously offered in October of 2023 and some of which do not appear to have been incorporated into this revised March 2024 Draft. It is noted that Chapter 11: Historic Preservation incorporates many of the following comments; however, Chapter 5 should have similar statements to form the necessary linkage between culture and history.

The idea of an LGBTQ+ cultural district is a welcome component to the Uptown Plan. By emphasizing signage, interpretative element, colors and graphics, the Cultural District appears to be engaging in “rainbow washing”. However a cultural component should not overshadow specifically designated LGBTQ+ historic sites and potential LGBTQ+ historic sites in the Uptown Plan area. Designated and potential designated historic sites can be the linkages and the glue that ties past to present to future and form the anchors and threads of interpretive elements that link memory and progress as a cultural district develops overtime.

There is no specific language in Chapter 5 that emphasizes the importance of identifying designated historic LGBTQ+ sites (only one) and potentially significant historic LGBTQ+ sites (many). They appear to be identified in Chapter 11: Historic Preservation but a statement must be included in Chapter 5. (Contained in Chapter 11 but should also duplicate in Chapter 5)

The LGBTQ+ Cultural District must have as a goal the preservation, maintenance and promotion of local LGBTQ+ history. Preserving historical assets such as buildings, traditions, events, etc. can be found in other cities LGBTQ+ cultural districts. The same should be true for Hillcrest and San Diego.

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## 5.0 LGBTQ+ Cultural Districts

This section should specifically state in "Key Objectives of the LGBTQ+ Cultural District" that designated historic LGBTQ+ sites should be preserved and incorporated in any new development. Additionally this section should specifically state that identifying potential LGBTQ+ historic sites will add additional LGBTQ+ history and memory as the cultural district ages and develops.

The "Key Objectives of the LGBTQ+ Cultural District" should acknowledge, in addition to entertainment and commercial business establishments, the importance of social service agencies and community based organizations as a significant part of LGBTQ+ culture and history.

## 5.2 History + Culture

On LC-139 in addition to the photo of the first center location in Golden Hill, we recommend adding a photo of the LGBTQ+ Center when it moved from Golden Hill to Hillcrest at Fifth Avenue. The Center/Gayzette/Albert Bell Building is Hillcrest's only specifically City of San Diego dedicated historic site. Although slated for development this was ground zero for AIDS and the LGBTQ+ town center as AIDS decimated the gay community. On page LC-149, the Walking Corridor and Sites Map Site #9 name should reflect the officially historically designated site name. The former location of Obelisk Bookstore at 1029 University, while listed in Appendix E, should be included. Likewise Albert Bell's final residence at 3815 Vermont Street should be located on the map.

## 5.3 Outreach + Stories

"Community Identified Issues" should include the Trans and API community along with Black, BIPOC and Indigenous. This section should specifically state that designated historic LGBTQ+ sites should be preserved and incorporated in any new development. Many of the sites served as meeting places and fundraising locations for overlooked and frequently marginalized LGBTQ+ peoples.

## 5.3 Interpretive Elements

The Project supports the incorporation of interpretive elements and recommends the avoidance of standard plaques and landmarks. At the same time, The Project stresses the avoidance of "rainbow washing" in artwork, buildings, streetscapes, signage, etc. Plaques and installations are secondary to actual physical sites.

Adaptive reuse, rehabilitation, repurposing are options that can integrate old and new. Additionally these sections should specifically state that identifying potential LGBTQ+ historic sites can add additional history and memory as the cultural district ages and develops. Avoid "rainbow washing" and highlight cultural and historic sites. The architecture of the LGBTQ+ sites is coincidental to what happened there and who was

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involved. The Stonewall Inn in New York, a National Monument, is designated for its event. The building as it exists now is not the same as it was when the Stonewall riots occurred in 1969.

These interpretive elements should utilize a family of components that truly links the district and provides the excitement of the pedestrian and visitor to move from history to entertainment to just celebrating culture of LGBTQ+ Hillcrest. Designated LGBTQ+ historic sites and potential LGBTQ+ historic sites can be used as landmarks that truly tell the story of the community. Locating these interpretative elements at historic sites (both designated and potential) set up a “true rainbow” of linkages and nodes that can become community focal points.

The Cultural District should have a strong financial backed maintenance program to avoid these elements from becoming worn, deteriorated, and graffitied as well as a time line for implementation. If individual businesses are expected to provide these components, we foresee a long “waiting period.”

## 5.5 Walking Corridor + Site

The Project offers the following be incorporated:

- # 9 Albert Bell's Residence at 3780-3786 Fifth Avenue should use the official historic designated name: The Center/Gayzette/Albert Bell Building.
- The San Diego AIDS Project was located at 3777 Fourth Avenue (across the alley from # 9 and should be identified.
- The AIDS epidemic in the 1980s established AIDS services at Vauclain Point at the north edge of Front Street (the former site of a SD County facility and later the SD Hospice). That area along with #16 UCSD Owen Clinic has a long history related to AIDS and Hillcrest.
- The Obelisk Bookstore at 1037 University was a landmark bookstore for the LGBTQ+ community.
- The SAGE of California Center at 3138 Fifth Avenue was an important location and drop-in center for lesbians and gay men when it opened in 1999.
- Albert Bell's final residence at 3815 Vermont Street should be located on the map.
- Contact Lambda Archives for the location of an electrolysis business on University Avenue that served the Trans community.

The Project will gladly work with city staff to refine and provide additional sites for consideration and inclusion.

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## 5.6 POLICY

As previously stated in 5.3, incorporate in CD-2 the Trans, Black, BIPOC, API, Indigenous LGBTQ+ community stories into the LGBTQ+ Cultural District.

As discussed in the comments previously, this section should include and specifically state a policy that designated historic LGBTQ+ sites should be preserved and incorporated in any new development. Additionally, these sections should specifically state that identifying potential LGBTQ+ historic sites can add additional history and memory as the cultural district ages and develops.

## Chapter 11: Historic Preservation

On HP-230 “No resources reflecting the fifth and final theme of development (1970-present) are currently listed on the City’s Register” is incorrect as The Center/Gayzette/Albert Bell Building at 3780 Fifth Avenue is a designated resource.

In conclusion, Chapter 5 LGBTQ+ Cultural and Chapter 11: Historic Preservation should work together for the preservation and designation of LGBTQ+ historic sites. By acknowledging, preserving and incorporating the LGBTQ+ history of Hillcrest past, only then can Hillcrest truly engage with the LGBTQ+ present and future. The San Diego Historic Site Projects looks forward to working with City Planning in its evolution of the Hillcrest Focused Plan Amendment.

*Charles S. Kaminski*

Charles Kaminski, Historian, Architect, Preservationist  
San Diego LGBTQ Historic Sites Project  
PO Box 2729  
La Jolla, CA 92038  
858-956-9141



325 W. Washington Street, Suite 2, #221  
San Diego, CA 92103  
619-497-1193  
[www.MissionHillsHeritage.org](http://www.MissionHillsHeritage.org)

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*--A community organization dedicated to preserving the character, charm and historical resources of the Mission Hills neighborhood.*

May 22, 2024

Historical Resources Board  
City of San Diego  
1222 First Avenue, MS 501  
San Diego, CA 92101  
c/o Suzanne Segur, HRB Liaison  
Email: [ssegur@sandiego.gov](mailto:ssegur@sandiego.gov)

Re: HRB Hearing Date: May 23, 2024  
Item #1 – Hillcrest Focused Plan Amendment Historic Preservation Component

Dear Chair Hutter and Board Members:

Mission Hills Heritage urges the HRB to NOT recommend adoption of the Supplemental Development Regulations (SDRs).

The proposed SDRs for the proposed Hillcrest Historic District create a set of blanket rules applicable to every building within the district. So long as a proposed project meets the basic threshold standards of the SDRs, no review for a site development permit is required even if the building is a contributing historic resource. In fact, it is unclear from the SDR in what context a site development permit would be required. Notably absent from the Staff Report is any analysis of how the SDRs are consistent with current law, including the Secretary of the Interior Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties, and whether and how the SDRs could affect historic properties.

MHH objects to the SDRs in their entirety. First, historic buildings and the proposed projects affecting them should be considered on a building-by-building basis, as no building is exactly the same, consistent with the application of the Secretary of the Interior Standards, which are to be applied to "each project." Title 36 CFR Section 68.3. The creation of a blanket rule, allowing

modifications by-right, for this historic business district puts our historic resources at risk of loss and sets a dangerous precedent for other historic districts facing development pressures.

Secondarily, the SDRs only require a 10-foot step back on Robinson and University Avenues and a 20-foot step back on Fourth and Fifth Avenues for new additions. These minimal step backs are likely to destroy historic spatial relationships and historical integrity, contrary to Title 36 CFR Section 68.3(b)(9), and this standard likewise sets a threatening precedent for other historic districts. If the HRB recommends adoption of the SDRs, it should recommend adoption subject to amendment of SDR-C.4(2) to increase the step backs. Specifically, on 4th, 5th, and University Avenues, a 20-foot step back should be required for development up to 75 feet and a 50-foot step back for development 75 feet and above.

Sincerely,

Mission Hills Heritage

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kirk Burgamy". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "K".

Kirk Burgamy, President

# UPTOWN PLANNERS

Friday, May 10, 2024

Shannon Corr  
City of San Diego Planning Department  
202 C Street, MS 413  
San Diego, CA 92101

RE: Hillcrest Focused Plan Amendment Response

Hello Shannon

Please find attached the motion passed by Uptown Planners at its May 7, 2024, meeting regarding the Hillcrest Focused Plan Amendment. The motion passed with 10 in favor, 1 opposed and 3 abstentions. The motion disapproves the Plan Amendment and states the rationale.

I am also attaching certain requests for consideration.

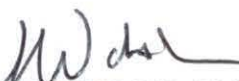
Please thank Coby Tomlins, Phil Trom and Shelby Buso of the Planning Department for attending the meeting and for responding to the numerous, and varied, questions and comments.

We look forward to working with you revising the plan.

Please contact me with any questions which you may have.

Sincerely,

UPTOWN PLANNERS, A CPG

  
JAMES R. WALSH, CHAIR

Copy: Mayor Todd Gloria  
Coby Tomlins

Councilmember Stephen Whitburn  
San Diego Planning Commission



## MOTION

The Chair of Uptown Planners should advise the Planning Department, the City Council, and the Mayor that our CPG cannot approve the current draft of the Planning Department's proposed "Plan Hillcrest Focused Amendment" to the Uptown Community Plan.

Uptown Planners favors responsible development and supports the ostensible goals of Plan Hillcrest, especially celebrating the legacy of our LGBTQ+ community. However, the board is withholding approval of the proposed amendment itself, which would affect all of Uptown, because of significant community concerns about major and potentially transformative elements of the proposal. Our CPG's concerns (summarized below) have been repeatedly raised to the Planning Department without adequate response. The document attached titled "Plan Hillcrest Requests" provides the history of our attempted constructive engagement and details our specific requests.

The board also directs its Operations & Outreach Committee to take steps to engage the community about the concerns summarized below and to work with the board Chair in preparing materials, if/as appropriate, for presentations of the board's position at meetings of the Planning Commission, City Council, and possibly other local groups.

## SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANT CONCERNS

**Mobility:** The proposed one-way couplet on Robinson & University, along with the plan for a combined bus lane/emergency vehicle lane on Washington Street and reduced vehicle lanes and parking on these three sole east-west through streets, would increase congestion in an already congested area. The negative effects would extend beyond Hillcrest businesses and residents to businesses and residents throughout Uptown, as well as to traffic on Highway 163. Neither SANDAG public transportation plans nor the city's own Mobility Technical Report support the effectiveness of these radical changes in either the short-term or the long-term. In fact, the Mobility Technical Report shows that existing high traffic streets and intersections already earn failing grades, with no projected improvements.

**Density:** Adding to concerns about increased congestion is the proposed extended size of the area in which high-density building would be allowed. Changes in zoning would lead to buildings up to over twice the maximum height already allowed. This could result in tens of thousands more Uptown residents than our current community plan already provides for, growth which would far exceed what current SANDAG predictions justify.

**Infrastructure:** Added density, in turn, would require improvements to infrastructure for safety services, public utilities, recreation centers, green spaces, and other basic community needs that are not being proposed or adequately considered. Uptown already has a deficit of parks and other public facilities. The proposal also would not adequately protect historic resources, including those related to LGBTQ+ history. All of these problems would negatively affect the well-being of everyone in Uptown, especially its most vulnerable citizens.

**Gentrification:** The proposal's reduced mobility, increased permitted density, and failure to require sufficient infrastructure could gentrify Uptown into another (and less desirable) downtown. This not only would not materially address the city's housing affordability crisis but quite possibly might worsen it due to the loss of naturally occurring affordable housing and increased land values. Increased land values also could impact existing local businesses, with new, expensive mixed-use construction driving up rents. Finally, despite Uptown's sizeable population of the unhoused and housing insecure, the proposal includes no provisions to subsidize or even encourage substantial development of truly affordable housing.



**PLAN HILLCREST REQUESTS BY UPTOWN PLANNERS FOR CONSIDERATION, APPROVED 5/7/24  
REGARDING THE "HILLCREST FOCUSED PLAN AMENDMENT DRAFT" RELEASED ON 3/14/24**

**BACKGROUND**

On 11/5/19, Uptown Planners was informed by the Planning Department that "recommendations for Hillcrest Focused Plan (amendments to the Community Plan) could be made through a sitting subcommittee or an ad hoc subcommittee could be created for this purpose. The effort would be completed by mid-2022. SB 2 transportation funding requires a quick timeline."

On 4/28/20, the Planning Department hosted its first webinar presenting its conception of Plan Hillcrest. Despite what was represented, the changes first proposed were never materially altered.

On 10/6/23, the Planning Department released its first Hillcrest Focused Plan Amendment Draft, which finally provided specifics, along with a notice that the deadline to submit comments on it would be 11/17/23.

On 11/15/23, Uptown Planners submitted a letter to the City approved by unanimous vote on 11/7/23. [Attachment A.] It detailed the history of this amendment process, calling attention to the perfunctory and superficial nature of the Planning Department's consideration of our input as the officially recognized community planning group and its dismissal of our requests for adequate time to review completed documents.

On 12/6/23, after having its requests for extension denied yet again, Uptown Planners voted unanimously to approve another letter to the City [Attachment B.] with specific recommendations. These are reorganized sequentially and by element and incorporated in these requests and identified by "Draft01".

On 3/14/24, the Planning Department released its second Hillcrest Focused Plan Amendment draft, along with a notice that the deadline to submit comments would be 4/29/24. Despite our requests for the same amount of additional time to review granted other community planning groups going through this same process, we were only allowed until our next regular meeting on 5/7/24.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The specific recommendations that follow identify the draft policies and goals that we have identified in our public outreach as needing revision, reinforcement or repeal. But they speak to four overall observations that summarize our community's concerns:

**1) Mobility is speculative.**

Transportation must come first, but instead it is an afterthought and dependent on outside agencies and private employers that are not obligated to accommodate the City's wishes. This amendment presupposes built environment and transit routes that the City admits may not exist until 2050 (if ever) to justify the changes it compels by 2035. The Mobility Element upends the actual priority of different modes without factual



basis, privileging the non-disabled while failing to meet, per the Plan Hillcrest Mobility Technical Report, proven level of service and vehicle parking standards by forfeiting existing access with no concern for mitigation.

**2) Density is disproportionate and inappropriate.**

The entirely new zoning designations of CC-3-10 and CC-3-11, and new introduction of RM-4-11, would increase the density allowances of Hillcrest by 100% and 137% beyond the current maximum. This would more than what is allowed in Downtown — yet they are being applied to over half the amendment area. Further, the existing 2016 Community Plan already permits over 50% more dwelling units for a 60% population increase for all of Uptown, while SANDAG projects only 0.17% population growth per year for all of the City of San Diego by 2050.

**3) Recreation, Public/Safety Facilities and Historic Preservation are deficient.**

Hillcrest is the only one of the six neighborhoods in Uptown without a park or open space of any kind, yet neither draft plans for either while seeking to double the current population. Likewise, there is no procedure for where or when to provide for additional public safety and amenities beyond what currently exists. And there is no contingency should the now, reduced-in-size proposed LGBTQ+ historic district not proceed — unlike the new, commerce-centered “cultural district” introduced in the most recent draft.

**4) Land value capture is nonexistent.**

One of the main goals of Plan Hillcrest is to “affirmatively further fair housing.” Yet the blanket upzoning proposed would instantly double existing land values with no requirements to construct new affordable or to preserve naturally occurring affordable housing — or to alleviate the knock-on effects from increased rents and purchase prices. And there are no mechanisms to claw back the automatic added land worth created to pay for the added strains on existing infrastructure or for anything else. There is zero public benefit to offset the private profit siphoned from the commons.

**REQUESTS FOR CHANGES TO THE SECOND DRAFT, RELEASED 3/14/24**

- Throughout. Eliminate or define planning specialist jargon/acronyms and double-speak, including, but not limited to, these examples: “path to narrative,” VMF, “woonerf principles” “auxiliary pedestrian facility,” “non-traditional parks,” “urban parkways,” etc. [Draft01]
- Throughout. Identify how changes to the community might affect its homeless population and associated issues with public safety, public health, impacts on tourism and local businesses, etc. [Draft01]
- Page I.: Change the name of the document to “2024 Update to the Uptown Community Plan” (reflecting that numerous and substantive changes proposed would not affect only the Hillcrest neighborhood). [Draft01]
- Page IN-2. “[A] key objective of the Urban Design Element is to protect and enhance the qualities that make these neighborhoods unique.” Fail to see any follow through in the draft plans on this.



- Page IN-6. The gratuitous insertion of the words ‘high density’ to describe the existing mixed-use buildings is biased toward incompatible new development and should be removed.
- Page IN-7. “Hillcrest is the crossroads of Uptown, with major streets intersecting in Hillcrest’s core.” The Mobility Element needs to realistically account for this.
- Page IN-11. “The [Uptown] community is estimated to have a future population of 109,800 people and 52,800 dwelling units at the build-out of the Community Plan.” There is no citation or objective basis for these figures, which instead represent the preconceived objectives of the Plan Hillcrest funding, and therefore they need to be corrected to reflect actual SANDAG projections.
- Page IN-14. The statement, “By increasing transportation choices, a reduction in overall vehicle miles traveled can be achieved.” There is no substantiation or evidence provided to support this claim — and is directly contradicted by the retraction of “VMT-efficient areas” made on Page PF-162.
- Page IN-14. Restore the stricken out “General Plan Guiding Principles.”

#### **Land Use Element**

- Throughout. Lower the density included in the plan overall, and base population planning projections on current SANDAG projections, identifying those in the plan, and also addressing demographic assumptions. [Draft01]
- Throughout. Plan for possible effects upon the community of potential changes to major properties affecting land use, including DMV’s possible move, SDUSD’s repurposing of its Normal Street administration building, closure of the University Heights Library, expansion and rebuilding plans of both UCSD and Scripps. [Draft01]
- Throughout. Include a plan for augmentation and maintenance of infrastructure, including public utilities (water, sewer, lighting, road surfacing, etc.), police/fire facilities, libraries, etc. [Draft01]
- Page LU-24. Create a table (comparable to Table 2.2) showing projected land use in 2050. [Draft01]
- Page LU-25, the gratuitous insertion of the word “very” to describe the existing density is biased toward incompatible new development and should be removed.
- Pages LU-27 through LU-37 and throughout. Update and/or expand maps to improve legibility and level of detail. Also revise legends and color markings to be clear, accurate, and complete, with no extraneous elements. [Draft01]
- Page LU-29, LU-38 and throughout. Remove the newly introduced zone RM-4-11. The maximum density for should be RM-4-10 introduced in the 2016 Plan, an existing zoning designation that already is “very high density.” The Floor to Area Ratio should be no higher than 3.6, with building heights capped at 11 stories with Dwelling Units per Acre capped at 109. This maximum density zoning should not be in the Hillcrest core but only allowed on major transit corridors

within a half-mile walk on existing sidewalks from a public transit stop, such as Park Blvd and El Cajon Blvd.

- Page LU-29, LU-40 and throughout. Remove the newly created zones CC-3-10 and CC-3-11. The maximum density for should be CC-3-9, an existing zoning designation that already is "very high density." The Floor to Area Ratio should be no higher than 8, with building heights capped at 11 stories with Dwelling Units per Acre capped at 109. This maximum density zoning should not be in the Hillcrest core but only allowed on major transit corridors within a half-mile walk on existing sidewalks from a public transit stop, such as Park Blvd and El Cajon Blvd. [Draft01]
- Page LU-43. The gratuitous insertion of the word "very" to describe the existing density is biased toward incompatible new development and should be removed.
- Page LU-45. Include a plan for development of non-entertainment and specialty retail businesses that would be required to support increased population density, including additional grocery shopping. [Draft01]
- Pages LU-48 through LU-51. The gratuitous replacement of the words "community" and "neighborhood" with "urban" to describe existing conditions is biased toward incompatible new development and should be removed.

#### **Mobility Element**

- Page MO-55. Restore the phrase "for vehicular traffic" to the end of the sentence "Adequate capacity and improved regional access..."
- Page MO-65. Address ways of encouraging bicycle usage (especially for commuting) in addition to installation of dedicated bicycle lanes (lockers; charging for electric bikes; safety education and signage; employer, business, and residential bike accommodations, etc.). [Draft01]
- Pages MO-66 through MO-71 and throughout. In all cases where proposed public transit routes and transit facilities have not been implemented, zoning and other changes proposed in those areas may not be implemented.
- Pages MO-66 through MO-71 and throughout. Remove the proposal to create a commuter rail line through Florence Canyon, which is designated Open Space, and also the proposal for a skyway. [Draft01]
- Page MO-71. Remove Policies MO-3.16 and MO-3.17 as prioritizing the non-disabled, precluding commercial deliveries, and impeding public safety.
- Page MO-71 and throughout. Eliminate the plan to designate any portion of either Robinson Avenue or University Avenue as one-way and provide specificity about location and nature of proposed traffic calming elements. [Draft01]
- Page MO-82. Reinstate policies MO-7.13 and MO-7.14 ("Provide on-street parking on all streets to support adjacent uses and enhance pedestrian safety."). [Draft01]



## **Urban Design Element**

- Throughout. Address the accessibility of public amenities, including new streetscaping, and how accessibility would be impacted during development and with restricted parking. [Draft01]
- Page UD-85 and throughout. The gratuitous replacement of the words “community” and “neighborhood” with “urban” to describe existing conditions is biased toward incompatible new development and should be removed.
- Page UD-97. Include drinking fountains and public restrooms in the Streetscape policies.
- Pages UD-101 and UD-102. The redefinition of avenues as “major connectors,” and the inclusion of University Ave and Robinson Ave in the previously identified list of the four north-south avenues, is a semantic sleight of hand that obscures the unsupported claim that one-way traffic flow automatically increases volume. As such, the original 2016 Community Plan language should be restored.
- Page UD-111. Strengthen the language to “retain and utilize” mature and healthy street trees and strike “when feasible” in UD-3.62.
- Page UD-119. The addition of promenades is used specifically to validate the elimination of a public park/greenway for Hillcrest originally proposed in the 1988 Community Plan. As Hillcrest is the only Uptown neighborhood without a park, we object to defining this away from consideration and reject the argument that a public park/greenway for this space would be incompatible with current uses.
- Page UD-129. Reinstate policy UD-4.79 (“Design to conform to the predominant scale of the neighborhood and/or particular block and be sensitive to adjacent uses.”). [Draft01]
- Pages UD-129 through UD-132. Reinstate the 2016 Community Plan language and figures regarding development transitions and transition plane guidelines.

## **LGBTQ+ Cultural Element**

- Page LC-150. Include in Policy 5.6 language to establish a core LGBTQ+ historic district, and center it as essential to the LGBTQ+ cultural district.
- Page LC-150. The only organization identified by name as being involved in the formation of an LGBTQ+ cultural district is the Hillcrest Business Association — which is not an LGBTQ+ organization. The term “business groups” already used is sufficient and respects that there are other, specifically LGBTQ+ focused business groups, such as the San Diego Equality Business Alliance.

## **Economic Prosperity Element**

- Throughout. Identify ways to encourage economic prosperity and small business development, including how to support continuance of existing commercial businesses during growth and change. [Draft01]
- Page EP-157. Add realistic parking requirements so sufficient free and low-cost parking will be available both to patrons of local businesses and to residents



(existing and new), including planning for a public parking garage in or near the Hillcrest core. [Draft01]

### **Public Facilities, Services, and Safety Element**

- Page PF-165. Include a plan for funding Capital Improvement Projects now that DIFs do not need to be spent where collected, identifying how, when “engaging the community,” Uptown Planners will have a specific, substantial, supportive, and collaborative [role] in determining CIPs for Uptown. [Draft01]
- Page PF-170. Strike the words “to the Teachers Training Annex at the San Diego Unified School District’s Education Center should the property become available” from PF-1.8, to recognize that the relocation of the University Heights Branch Library is necessary by itself and is not dependent on this option.

### **Recreation Element**

- Page RE-175 and throughout. Eliminate controversial and/or political language that gratuitously promotes current City administration policies, such as claiming that the revised Parks Plan will “benefit” Uptown. [Draft01]
- Page RE-186. The change to a meaningless “-7,581 recreation value points” to classify park deficiencies in place of the concrete “park deficit of 94.17 acres” needs to be reversed. And given that there are 380 total acres being considered under the plan amendment, this situation merits higher priority.
- Page RE-190. Plan for parks and other substantially-sized public spaces (outside of existing canyons), including playgrounds, potential joint use opportunities with SDUSD properties/facilities, recreational center, playing fields, etc. [Draft01]
- Page RE-193. Do more than “evaluate utilization of paper streets as future park and open space opportunities,” by proactively designating these City assets as recreational “infill,” to redress the park deficit and halt the piecemeal vacation of these parcels for private development.

### **Conservation Element**

- Page CE-197. Restore the deleted language, “Adaptive reuse of older structures is not only energy efficient, but also helps maintain the community’s neighborhood character.”
- Page CE-199. Include a policy that recognizes the embodied carbon from construction activities and not just the operational carbon of completed structures in evaluating sustainable development practices.
- Page CE-199. Prioritize the maintenance and/or production of affordable housing, including on-site requirements, along with middle income and family housing. [Draft01]
- Page CE-199. Identify the percentage of Hillcrest and of District that currently is concrete and also the projected percentage of both that would be concrete in 2050, based upon the Planning Department’s proposal. [Draft01]

- Page CE-207. Include a plan for increasing tree canopy and protecting existing mature trees. [Draft01]

#### **Noise Element**

- Page NE-211. Address how noise ordinance exemptions and new noise noticing will be monitored and enforced. [Draft01]

#### **Historic Preservation Element**

- Pages HP-233 through HP-235. Identify ways to avoid gentrification and changes to historical diversity because of class-based redlining and building of residences not affordable for populations that currently or potentially live and work in Hillcrest. [Draft01]
- Pages HP-233 and HP-234. Prioritize maintenance and/or production of single family or duplex starter homes and individual property ownership, maximizing opportunities for members of historically underserved or marginalized groups to have the opportunity to establish generational wealth. [Draft01]
- Pages HP-233 and HP-234. Address opportunities for adaptive reuse of existing building stock (both commercial and residential) and the preservation of existing SROs and Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing. [Draft01]
- Pages HP-236 through HP-274. Complete the inventory of historic properties in the plan area, identifying the buildings deemed significant and identify plans for preservation (as distinct from “stories” and “recognition”). [Draft01]

#### **Implementation Element**

- Pages IM-278 through IM-280. With regard to planned transportation improvements, distinguish between commitments and general proposals. [Draft01]
- Pages IM-278 through IM-280. Explicitly require property owners to accept full ownership, responsibility, and liability for sidewalks adjacent to their properties, including public amenities provided in exchange for waivers, such as landscaping, fixtures (benches, sculptures, murals, lighting, etc.), and so on. [Draft01]
- Pages IM-282 through IM-301. Provide missing general regulations and supplemental development regulations. Also include details of environmental review/CEQA issues. [Draft01]
- Pages IM-282 through IM-301. Include in the Supplemental Development Regulations mechanisms to capture land value to pay for impacts to infrastructure, public facilities, services, safety, and affordable housing.

#### **PROCESS REQUESTS APPROVED ON 12/5/23, AND PLANNING DEPARTMENT’S RESPONSE:**

- ASAP: Publish all comments on the current draft received by the Planning Department in writing, along with detailed notes of all comments received orally at meetings, workshops, Q&A sessions, etc., identifying sources and volume. Also



publish a summary of feedback, discussing and responding to all major points of criticism, requested changes, and/or additions. [NOT DONE.]

- Before publication of next draft (or any additional public presentations): Complete and publicly report all feasibility research on proposals in the current draft, including studies of impacts on traffic (including potential impacts on emergency vehicles and evacuation plans), parking (and potential "circling"), tree canopy and impacts on canyons, possible creation of environmental hotspots and pollution (due to large building AC/heating), environmental costs of demolition and building, infrastructure and maintenance needs, etc. Also provide an inventory of all of the potentially historic resources throughout the proposed Plan Hillcrest area, as well as other potential historic resources in Uptown related to LGBTQ+ history. [NOT DONE.]
- Before publication of next draft: Add consecutive pagination. Also, confirm by use of digital comparison tools AND multiple staff proofreaders that the next draft, presented as an annotated version of the 2016 Uptown Community Plan, clearly indicates ALL changes. Similarly double-check and confirm the contents of a Summary of Changes that should be published simultaneously. [PARTIALLY DONE.]
- Immediately upon online publication and distribution of next draft: Make available complete printed & bound copies of both documents described above: 2x: at Knox Library for review on site; 14x for own use by Uptown Planners board members; 25x for own use by media and interested neighborhood groups, individuals. Provide additional printed & bound copies timely if/as needed, based upon demand. [DONE.]
- After publication of next draft and before any presentations to Planning Commission or City Council: Provide minimum 12 weeks public comment time, with staff available at least weekly for working collaborative editing sessions with members of Plan Hillcrest Committee. [NOT DONE.]
- During public comment period on next draft: Hold public meetings designed for city staff to receive feedback from relevant agencies, departments and committees, including but not limited to Parks Advisory Committee, Historic Resources Board, Community Forest Advisory Board, Uptown Community Parking District. [NOT DONE.]
- During public comment period on next draft: Request formal feedback on implementation impacts of the proposed plan from sections of the Advisory Division of the Attorney General's office: Environment & Land Use, Infrastructure, Neighborhood Services, Public Services & Public Safety. [NOT DONE.]
- ASAP: Provide details on funding and expenditures to-date and projected that are related to the Plan Hillcrest proposal in the Planning Department, including fees paid to outside consultants and estimated costs of dedicated staff time. [NOT DONE.]

# UPTOWN PLANNERS

November 15, 2023

Heidi Vonblum  
Director, Planning Department  
City of San Diego

RE: **Position on Plan Hillcrest Draft Focused Plan Amendment to Uptown Community Plan**

This letter notifies you of the position that Uptown Planners took at its November 7<sup>th</sup> board meeting on the Planning Department's draft of its proposed amendment to the Uptown Community Plan, which the Planning Department has titled the "Hillcrest Focused Plan Amendment."

**Given the current timeline for approval now that we have finally been presented with a draft of the actual Hillcrest Focused Plan Amendment, we must have more time to consider what its changes mean to our entire Uptown Community Plan. If we do not receive more time to do this, and this plan is moved forward anyway, then we have no choice but to reject it and the changes that it proposes.**

Uptown Planners board members expressed strong views about this project being too consequential—for Hillcrest, Uptown, and our entire city—not to have sufficient informed public input and substantive official community group consideration about the specifics of what is a substantially altered community plan. In order to potentially affect the outcome, such reviews would need to take place before presentation to the Planning Commission and other agencies.

**To provide some factual context for the Uptown Planners position:** Over three years ago the Planning Department announced its self-generated "Plan Hillcrest" initiative to radically expand the area and nature of policies included in Uptown's approved 2016 Community Plan for the Hillcrest "core" and for recognition of Hillcrest's LGBTQ history.

What ensued were a series of Planning Department slide show presentations (most led by consultants), featuring what were described as options, and which options typically were outlined only superficially and without substantiating research. The Planning Department also engaged in sporadic collection of feedback by various methods, none of which took the form of reliable research and all of which Planning Department staff characterized to Uptown Planners as nondeterminative.

While Planning Department staff sometimes made its presentations at meetings of the Uptown Planners ad hoc Plan Hillcrest Committee, Planning Department staff always worked independently, never collaborating with the Plan Hillcrest Committee to determine whether or how to develop the various options proposed. Often the Planning Department did not even give notice to Uptown Planners of presumably public outreach events, which Planning Department staff stated were with staff-selected "smaller groups."

Then, on October 6<sup>th</sup>, the Planning Department publicly provided a comprehensive amendment of the entire Uptown Community Plan, setting its deadline for receiving comments as November 17<sup>th</sup>.



The draft that the public was given just six weeks to review included changes to every section of the approved 2016 Uptown Community Plan, expanding it in length from 224 to 280 pages (a 20% increase). Multiple detailed maps were replaced, each of which would be time-consuming to review. Strikingly, and without prior notice, despite the misleading term "focused" in the amendment title, a number of the changes proposed significantly alter aspects of the plan that affect all six of the neighborhoods in Uptown, not just Hillcrest, with potential effects even more far-reaching.

In addition, while the changes proposed to the plan supposedly all were flagged in a 24-page Summary of Changes, that document has proved to be incomplete, inaccurate, and inadequate as a guide. The draft also was provided to the public only in a PDF format that is not consecutively paginated and contains no internal links, making it difficult to navigate or to cross-reference to the Summary. Based upon multiple requests, the Planning Department recently promised a limited number of publicly available bound copies but has not yet provided them.

Importantly, the Planning Department was unavailable to brief the Plan Hillcrest Committee on the proposed plan until November 9<sup>th</sup>, which, as our CPG Liaison in the Planning Department is aware, is a date that fell after the regularly scheduled November meeting of Uptown Planners, giving the board no meaningful chance to respond.

**When Uptown Planners requested an extension of the comment deadline, that request was refused.** Being told that this is "just a first draft" is not reassuring because of the aggressive timeline the Planning Department has announced for moving the proposal forward early next year.

Please confirm your receipt of the Uptown Planners position statement provided in this letter. And please note this statement on the City of San Diego's official website:

**A community plan is developed through a partnership of the recognized Community Planning Group, the public, and City staff, working together to identify land use policies and recommendation[s] to guide future development of the community.**

This letter is copied to the Chair of the Community Planners Committee, our District 3 Councilmember, and the Mayor to advise that no such partnership has taken place in developing the proposed massive and widely impactful amendment to the Uptown Community Plan.

Best regards,

Stu McGraw  
Chair, Uptown Planners  
[Chair@uptownplannersd.org](mailto:Chair@uptownplannersd.org)  
619-630-6910

cc:  
Todd Gloria, Mayor  
Stephen Whitburn, Councilmember District 3  
Shannon Corr, Senior Planner, Planning Department  
Andrea Schlageter, Chair, Community Planners Committee



# UPTOWN PLANNERS

December 6, 2023

Coby Tomlins  
Program Manager, City Planning Department  
Community Planning & Housing Division  
City of San Diego

**RE: Initial Comments on Plan Hillcrest Draft Focused Plan Amendment to Uptown Community Plan**

Last night, at a regular meeting of our board, Uptown Planners approved the appended document:  
**Initial Comments by Uptown Planners Community Planning Group on the Planning Department's "Hillcrest Focused Plan Amendment Discussion Draft"**

Because even these initial comments, based upon only a partial review, are extensive, the board directed me to emphasize this overarching point of our collective understanding:

**Transportation analysis should be foundational in deciding upon a suitable plan for developing Hillcrest.**

In addition, to ensure understanding and careful consideration of all of our comments, the board further directed me to make this request:

**Schedule a meeting within two weeks to discuss all of our comments one-by-one.**

I was asked to meet with you and Shannon Corr. I also was asked to bring with me one or two informed board members or members of the public. The board also requested that our District 3 Councilmember, Stephen Whitburn, be included in this meeting.

As you know, City staff independently developed its draft amendment to our Community Plan, despite City policy requiring partnership with the CPG. Dismayingly late as it is in the process, Uptown Planners still expects that the City will, at last, engage in such partnership. So, I hope to hear back from you very soon.

Best regards,



Stu McGraw  
Chair, Uptown Planners  
[Chair@uptownplannerssd.org](mailto:Chair@uptownplannerssd.org)  
619-630-6910

cc:

Shannon Corr, Senior Planner, Planning Department  
Heidi Vonblum, Director, City Planning Department  
Stephen Whitburn, Councilmember District 3



September 22, 2021

Shannon Mulderig  
Senior Planner  
City of San Diego, Planning Department  
101 Ash St, San Diego, CA 92101

I write concerning the ongoing Plan Hillcrest effort undertaken by the San Diego Planning Department. On behalf of the Hillcrest Business community and our 1,300 members, we submit this letter to contribute to the discussion concern LGBT Historical Element of the plan.

We applaud your ongoing efforts concerning Plan Hillcrest. For the most part, this effort has been thoughtful and diligent; however the inclusion of the unpopular and poorly thought through Proposed Hillcrest Historic District is an error for several reasons. First, this district is unpopular amongst the community. It was originally proposed as part of the 2016 Uptown Plan process and at the time was seen to be an unpopular proposal amongst property owners, business people, and government officials. This is why it was not included as a full historic district in the final Uptown Plan. Little has changed in the proposed district since the Uptown Plan was developed and, as such, this proposal should not be included in Plan Hillcrest.

Secondly, this is not an LGBT Historic district. Despite some properties within the proposed district contributing to LGBT history (or San Diego history), there is little correlation between the boundaries of the proposed district and LGBT history. The LGBT Historic Context Statement indicates that LGBT History is drawn from across the city stating "...these resources... are largely concentrated in neighborhoods like Hillcrest, Ocean Beach, North Park, Downtown, Golden Hill, and Pacific Beach." Creating a very specific district within Hillcrest seems to do little to recognise the contribution of LGBT history throughout the city. Including a historic district in the heart of Hillcrest that has little direct correlation to LGBT history is a poor way to celebrate and remember the history of the LGBT community from across the city.

There are other ways to celebrate LGBT history that should be considered. One way to recognise this history is the creation of a Hillcrest Entertainment District. This district would designate parts of the neighborhood as an entertainment zone and encourage the continued growth of the restaurant and nightlife businesses within that zone. Nightlife businesses have always been safe spaces for the LGBT community and the continued support of these business types would be an appropriate way to recognise the contribution of LGBT businesses history in the community.



---

Permissive sidewalk cafe rules, relaxed entertainment licencing rules, and disclosures for local residential property transfers are some of the ways in which an entertainment district would support these business types.

I hope you will include this input in your planning documents. Please contact me if you have questions concerning this letter.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ben Nicholls". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Benjamin Nicholls (he/him/his)  
Executive Director

Copy:

Mayor Todd Gloria

Councilmember Stephen Whitburn

Tom Mullaney, Chair Uptown Planners

Roy Dahl

# City Council to Finally Consider a Hillcrest Historic District

by [Source](#) on October 25, 2021 · [3 comments](#)

in [Civil Rights](#), [San Diego](#)



**By Mat**

**Wahlstrom**

This Wednesday, 10/27, at 2:00 PM, the San Diego City Council Rules Committee will hold its first ever hearing on implementing the Hillcrest historic district. Should it clear this first hurdle, it could go either to the full council for a vote or be on the ballot in the June 7, 2022 election.

The implementation of a historic district for Hillcrest is important for all San Diegans.

Although originally proposed in 1981 and recommended in the 1988 Uptown Plan, a Hillcrest historic district has never been docketed by the council for consideration.

Flash forward to June 2015, and the draft Uptown update of the 1988 Plan clearly defined both the area of the proposed district and its scope, including a LGBT component that recognized our community as part of the arc of Hillcrest's

development since 1885.

These were all identified by the city's own Planning Department during the years of public outreach and research it made in preparation for the update — including the boundaries: “Washington Street to the north, 6th Avenue to the east, Pennsylvania Avenue to the south, and 1st Avenue to the west.”

The June 2015 draft also called to “Provide interim protection of all potential historic districts identified in the adopted Uptown Historic Resources Survey,” a thoroughgoing 918-page document.

So what happened?

In response, a group of landowners and developers called the Uptown Gateway Council paid the Atlantis Group, the notorious land use shop, to spend hundreds of hours lobbying city staff and councilmembers, before and after finally revealing themselves in December 2015 (on the last day for public comment on the draft plan).

They succeeded. The July 2016 plan issued by the city put a special Gateway district in place of the proposed historic district.

There was massive protest against this, and resulted in the Save Our Heritage Organization placing the Hillcrest commercial core on its most endangered list for the first time.

(And there were [several articles](#) at the time about this, if you're interested in all the skullduggery.)

The result was that by the final vote in November 2016, the city punted, leaving this area as a literal hole in the 2016 Plan to be resolved at a later date. And while this left preservationists and the rest of the community up in the air, the lobbyists never left the ground.

Which brings us to the Plan Hillcrest scheme.

Ostensibly about closing this hole in the 2016 Plan, it has instead reopened almost the whole of Hillcrest. A six-figure state grant (read: public money) is being used to redo the community's input on everything from density to zoning in favor of a preselected menu of options, all for the private enrichment of real estate speculators and their cronies.

So why is the city council finally deciding about implementing the Hillcrest historic district now?



Council Policy 000-21 “establishes procedures for the submittal of ballot proposals to the City Council, by members of the public,” in addition to elected officials and public agencies. This procedure is separate from “ballot measures that are the result of a citizens’ initiative or referendum,” and can be initiated by a single person trying to make a difference.

Yes, gentle reader, it’s due to your humble narrator.

The language of my proposal is taken directly from a resolution passed by Uptown Planners in July 2016, that called for the implementation from the 2015 draft to be concurrent with the adoption of the November 2016 Plan. (Here is the [link to](#) the single-paragraph text of it.)

The area is smaller than what the Hillcrest historic district’s opponents have alleged and what is currently being discussed, when it’s only what the city itself identified before the lobbyists and developers got involved. It provides certitude and guidelines for future planning by resolving in one stroke the contentious issue that got us into this situation in the first place.

And why would any area want to have a historic district? Because they make money for their communities! No one can seriously argue that Little Italy, or the Gaslamp, or any of the two dozen neighborhoods with city-designated historic districts are economically disadvantaged because of hosting a historic district.

For all the repeated calls to have Hillcrest emulate “Little Italy-style development,” there’s been no admission that the Little Italy historic district was established first and was instrumental in this neighborhood’s revitalization and continued success.

After having sat through over a year of Plan Hillcrest meetings, it’s become clear that its ‘historic preservation outreach’ is looking increasingly like a ploy to reach the conclusion that LGBT people and places were diffused all over San Diego, so it would make no sense to single out any particular area in Hillcrest as historically significant. (That it seeks to redo the adopted Uptown Historic Resources Survey is particularly telling.)

In other words, it’s another short sighted money grab to benefit the same Gateway players at the expense of the neighborhood — with not a little bit of the same homophobia baked in.

If developers succeed at getting paid to reopen the ‘gayborhood’ plan, there’s no stopping them doing the same to other communities of concern.

This decision is too important to be made behind the scenes. The only solution is to hold an open vote.

Please [follow this link](#) to the Rules Committee's webform, click 'agenda comment,' and type something simple like, "I support advancing Sub-item N for a vote by the council or by the public on the June ballot."

And maybe remind them that October is LGBT History Month, and that history deserves protection.

{ 3 comments... read them below or [add one](#) }



Mat Wahlstrom [October 25, 2021 at 11:24 am](#)

Some technical difficulties with the post. The link to the agenda should be in the first paragraph, <https://onbase.sandiego.gov/OnBaseAgendaOnline/Meetings/ViewMeeting?id=4631&doctype=1>

The link to the webform, which is missing, should be in the second-to-last paragraph, <https://www.sandiego.gov/form/rules-committee-public-comment-form>

[Reply](#)



Frank Gormlie [October 29, 2021 at 9:18 am](#)

Here's a report of the council meeting by Mat:

For those of you who missed it and interested, here's a link to the video of my presentation from yesterday, [https://sandiego.granicus.com/player/clip/8297?meta\\_id=850073](https://sandiego.granicus.com/player/clip/8297?meta_id=850073). (Skip to the 03:55:00 mark to bypass the five minutes of silence/technical difficulties.)

Below is the text of what I said; and attached are what the city clerk sent the council and my exhibits packet they showed on screen.

Basically, what the council decided was to pretend there's a pony somewhere under all the s\*\*t.

###

Madame Council President chair, distinguished council committee members, and city staff. My name is Mat Wahlstrom, and I am an elected representative for Hillcrest on the board of Uptown Planners.

You have all read my proposal and the background information I provided.  
(Please show Exhibit B, pg 4)

I am not here to ask you to necessarily vote yes or no on the exact language of my proposal, but to allow of its necessity.

I am here to ask you to affirm the City of San Diego's determination of the legitimacy of implementing a historic district for the Hillcrest commercial core originally called for in the 1988 Plan. That's almost forty years since LGBTQ+ people had revitalized our neighborhood, where we found shelter during the terrible storm of AIDS, and made the foundation for our efforts to gain acceptance in the wider world. (Please show Exhibit C, pg 5)

As the background information demonstrates, private interests persistently blocked our Uptown community planning group and our LGBTQ+ communities of common interest efforts to implement a Hillcrest historic district in the current 2016 Plan, and continue to do so under Plan Hillcrest. (Please show Exhibit K, pg 27)

I am here to ask you to acknowledge the reasonable distrust this has engendered in relying on the current process alone.

This process is about more than a historic district: it is about redress of a history of equity withheld and justice denied.

As Mr. Kaminski wrote in his public comment, "Historic designation can support social equity, affordable housing, work force housing, sense of place, pride in ownership and create an environment where marginalized members of our city can grow their families, businesses and future."

I understand there will be considerations to resolve, such as establishing fact versus anecdote on preservation in regards to RHNA assessments and affirmatively furthering fair housing — as well as of the benefits of a district unique for San Diego, such as destination tourism and the revenue it would generate beyond Pride Weekend once a year.

And I welcome the opportunity to openly consider what comments and advice you and others have to contribute, and to work with city staff to refine my proposal, to address any issues in good faith.

However, transparency and accountability can only be achieved if this committee affirms the City's determination to even implement a Hillcrest historic district and move this proposal forward to a second hearing.

[Reply](#)



Mat Wahlstrom [October 29, 2021 at 11:38 am](#)

Much obliged, editordude. Also, here's a [link to the exhibits](#) I referenced.

[Reply](#)

Leave a Comment

Name \*

E-mail \*

Website

☐ Want to be notified of follow-up comments by email? Click the box!

Older Article: [Surfrider: Report Tarballs on San Diego Beaches – Now Found in Ocean Beach](#)

Newer Article: [The Wicked Yards of Ocean Beach](#)