

San Diego LGBTQ Historic Sites Project

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**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 interpretive 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.

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