



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

Report to the Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: September 11, 2025

REPORT NO. HRB 25-034

HEARING DATE: September 25, 2025

SUBJECT: **ITEM #1 – COLLEGE COMMUNITY PLAN UPDATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMPONENT**

APPLICANT: City of San Diego

LOCATION: College Community Plan Area, Council District 9

DESCRIPTION: Review and consider for the purpose of making a recommendation to the City Council the final drafts of the College Community Plan Area Historic Context Statement, the Cultural Resources Constraints and Sensitivity Analysis for the College Community Plan Update, and the College Community Plan's Historic Preservation Element.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Recommend the City Council adoption of the College Community Plan Area Historic Context Statement, the Cultural Resources Constraints and Sensitivity Analysis for the College Community Plan Update, and the College Community Plan's Historic Preservation Element.

BACKGROUND

In 2020, the City Planning Department began a comprehensive update to the College Area Community Plan, which was last updated in 1987. The College Community Plan Update (CPU) establishes an updated vision and objectives that align with the SANDAG Regional Plan, and the City's General Plan, the Climate Action Plan, the Parks Master Plan, and Climate Resilient SD.

The consulting firm Helix Environmental Planning and their historic preservation sub-consultant Page & Turnbull were contracted to assist in the preparation of the community plan update's technical reports related to historic and cultural resources, which include a Cultural Resources Constraints and Sensitivity Analysis (Cultural Resources Analysis) addressing archaeological and Tribal Cultural resources, and a Historic Context Statement that addresses built environment resources. These documents were used to provide background on the development of the community; shape the plan's policies related to the identification and preservation of archaeological, tribal cultural and historical resources; and provide context as well as serve as required technical studies for the development of an Addendum to the Blueprint SD Initiative Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR).

The Cultural Resources Analysis, the Historic Context Statement, and the draft policies of the Historic Preservation Element of the draft College Community Plan (Community Plan) were presented to the Historical Resources Board as an Information Item in March 2025. Information presented included an overview of the CPU process, summaries of the Cultural Resources Analysis and the Historic Context Statement, and the Historic Preservation Element of the draft Community Plan. The staff memo and video from the HRB meeting are included as Attachments 1 and 2, respectively. Comments received from board members and the public are summarized below and addressed in the analysis section of this report.

No public comment was received during noticing for the March HRB hearing. No public testimony was received at the March HRB hearing.

Comments from board members focused primarily on archaeological and tribal cultural resources, as follows:

- Appreciation of changes to the narrative to better reflect tribal values.
- Question as to why are there no tribal or cultural themes in the historic context statement.
- The need to use tribal cultural resource and tribal cultural site terms correctly and consistently between documents, staff reports and other presentations.
- Request to re-evaluate sites which have previously been disturbed and are considered to not have any potential archaeological value to ensure that they are also not tribal cultural resources.

Prior public comment related to historic preservation during the CPU process included three online form comments submitted after the release of the first draft of the plan, in which one commentor expressed the importance of historic preservation within the plan, one commentor expressed not wanting to see demolition of buildings, and a third comment, which identified Campus Plaza and the business district as potential locations of historic resources.

Since the March meeting, staff has revised the Cultural Resources Analysis report to reflect updated information regarding tribal noticing and consultation and reviewed the Historic Context Statement and attachments for consistency in tribal cultural terms. Similarly, staff added in language to the Historic Context Statement about the identified themes and reviewed the mitigation policies for tribal cultural resources. As stated during the March 2025 HRB meeting, the Historic Context Statement does not address tribal or tribal cultural resource themes because a Historic Context Statement serves a very specific purpose to assist in the identification and evaluation of built environment resources within the community planning area.

ANALYSIS

Historic Context Statement

A draft historic context statement (Attachment 4) was prepared by Page & Turnbull and presents an overview of the history of the community, with a specific emphasis on describing the historic themes and patterns that have contributed to the community's physical development. It presents the history of the community's built environment from its earliest modern development to the present in order

to support and guide the identification and evaluation of historic properties throughout the community, as well as to inform future planning decisions.

The periods and themes identified cover a variety of related topics and associated property types. Consistent with the purpose and intent of a historic context statement, themes were only developed if extant properties directly associated with the theme and located within the College Area community boundary were identified. The College Area community's formative development history is encapsulated by the following development periods and themes, including association with San Diego State University and a suburban residential and business expansion boom.

- Agricultural Development (1881-1931)
- Early Residential Development (1886-1945)
- Commercial Development (1881-1974)
- Development Created by the College (1931-1974)
- Postwar Residential Development (1945-1974)
- Civic and Institutional Development (1931-1974)

The six themes in this Historic Context Statement reflect the broad and varied development pattern of the College Area CPA. The presence of San Diego State University, starting in 1931, was one of the factors, along with greater national and local events. As a result, a wide variety of historic resources may be present, from former agricultural properties toward the east end of the plan area related to the San Diego Flume Company and its "La Mesa Colony" from the late 19th century, to individual architect-design homes in several postwar subdivisions as well as formulaic designs common in postwar tract housing.

Virtually all extant properties in the community were constructed within the later four development periods and are representative of historical themes and property types associated with suburban development of residential, commercial, industrial, civic/institutional, and recreational uses.

The College Area Historic Context Statement does not include a focused discussion related to local designation Criterion B: Is identified with persons or events significant in local, state or national history. Historic Context Statements prepared at the community plan level are intended to discuss the broad themes that shaped the community's physical development in order to identify and evaluate potential resources for their historic significance.

No formal reconnaissance or intensive level survey was scoped for the College Community Plan Update due to budget constraints. Page & Turnbull staff conducted a windshield field survey of the College Area CPA in June 2021 to understand the area's built resources. Prior to the field work, staff identified specific locations to visit based on the research conducted, recommendations from City planning staff, and where potential resources related to the themes may exist. These included areas with clusters of older building stock, including residences in the La Mesa Colony area, the 1920s subdivisions on the north side of El Cajon Boulevard, and the Bell-Lloyd Investment Company's College Park tract, as well as the postwar residential developments in the northwest corner of the CPA. Areas with similar building stock, such as tract housing or townhome developments, were also identified as locations to visit to understand their character. The known subdivision tracts were outlined in Google Maps and used in the field to note where changes occurred.

The field survey team drove or walked through most of the plan area, including along the north side of El Cajon Boulevard. City planning staff connected the survey team with a resident in Alvarado Estates who facilitated access to the gated community. The San Diego State University campus was not visited as part of the field survey as the City does not have land use jurisdiction over State educational properties but does note that a portion of the campus is documented in a National Register of Historic Places listing.

A Historic Context Statement Study List was drafted based upon information uncovered in the Historic Context Statement research and windshield survey of a portion of the community, along with relevant public comment about historic places. The Study List provides examples of some of the property types identified in the community and can represent a starting point for future investigation.

Based on the work for the College Area Historic Context Statement, recommendations were drafted by Page & Turnbull to continue preservation efforts related to the properties and themes identified. These recommendations include:

1. Conduct further study of specific College Area identified subdivisions, developers, builders and architects.
2. Conduct further study of specific identified College Area property types.
3. Complete a survey of the entire College community planning area.
4. Consider policies for Early Commercial Properties along El Cajon Boulevard.
5. Develop Tools to Identify Resources from Pre-American Periods

These recommendations included in the Historic Context Statement were used to inform the Historic Preservation Element of the Community Plan update.

College Area Community Plan Cultural Resources Constraints and Sensitivity Analysis

As part of the College Area Community Plan update, a Cultural Resources Constraints and Sensitivity Analysis (CRCSA report, Attachment 2) was conducted by Helix Environmental Planning. Cultural resources are the tangible or intangible remains or traces left by prehistoric or historic peoples who inhabited an area. Cultural resources investigations are prepared by professional archaeologists as part of the CEQA analysis. CEQA also requires evaluation of potential impacts to cultural resources that have value to California Native American tribes. The report provides a discussion of the natural environmental and cultural settings within the planning area; defines archaeological and tribal cultural resources; summarizes the results of archival research and outreach to the Native American Heritage Commission (NAHC) and local tribal representatives; analyzes the cultural sensitivity levels; and provides recommendations to best address archaeological and tribal cultural resources.

San Diego County's cultural setting encompasses three prehistoric periods of human occupation and an ethno-historic period reflecting the events, traditions, and beliefs of local Native American groups following European contact. During the Mission era, the Luiseño occupied the northern portion of the county, while the Diegueño (Kumeyaay) inhabited the southern region, including present-day Clairemont. The Kumeyaay have lived in San Diego County continuously to the present day, maintaining a rich cultural heritage expressed through oral traditions, songs, and stories. Their cosmology centers on the creation of their people in the sea alongside the earth's formation, with

spiritual beliefs tied to sacred landscapes. Traditionally, the Kumeyaay were loosely patrilineal and organized into clans, each associated with a specific locality. Settlements often located near springs, river valleys, or coastal estuaries featured tule shelters and central dance grounds.

Kumeyaay lifeways followed seasonal subsistence cycles, traveling east-west between the coast and desert in pursuit of plant foods, supplemented by hunting and shellfish gathering. Winter camps were in the foothills near the Colorado Desert, spring in the mountains, and summer in inland valleys, with movement along corridors such as Rose Canyon, the San Diego River valley, and Los Peñasquitos Canyon. Archaeological evidence shows the Kumeyaay used the College area for resource gathering and travel, with canyons such as Alvarado Canyon providing fresh water and pathways between inland and coastal settlements.

The analysis in the CRCSA report included a review of existing documentation, outreach to the Native American Heritage Commission (NAHC), and consultation with local tribal representatives. Approximately 49 percent of the planning area has previously been studied for cultural resources, with about half of those studies including pedestrian surveys. The remaining, largely unsurveyed areas are generally located within undeveloped canyons or older residential neighborhoods developed prior to the implementation of CEQA.

A total of 58 cultural resources have been previously recorded within the planning area. Of these, 51 are associated with the built environment, such as buildings and structures, while seven are archaeological in nature. These archaeological resources include two prehistoric sites, one historic site, several isolated artifact finds, and a segment of the historic Old Highway 395, which has been deemed eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. Three other sites have been evaluated and found ineligible, while the remaining three have not been evaluated and are recommended for avoidance and monitoring during future construction.

The cultural sensitivity analysis categorizes the planning area into two cultural resource sensitivity levels rated as either low or moderate based on the results of the archival research, the NAHC Sacred Lands File record search, regional environmental factors, and historic and modern development (Attachment 3). The analysis also incorporates relevant aspects of the existing cultural resources sensitivity analysis contained within the Complete Communities Program EIR and the analysis prepared for the Blueprint SD Initiative PEIR. Low sensitivity areas are typically previously developed mesa tops that have been significantly graded, where soil composition and the absence of known resources suggest a low likelihood of buried materials. Moderate sensitivity areas are generally found within canyons or drainages, particularly where Holocene alluvial deposits are present. These areas are less disturbed and may still contain intact cultural deposits. Notably, no areas within the planning area were identified as having high sensitivity.

Based on the analysis, the report offers several recommendations. Future discretionary development projects should include site-specific cultural resource assessments to determine the presence or absence of archaeological or tribal cultural materials. Projects located within moderate sensitivity areas or on undeveloped land should be reviewed by a qualified archaeologist, and any potentially significant resources should be evaluated for historical significance. If warranted, these resources may be referred to the City's Historical Resources Board for potential designation. To minimize impacts, mitigation measures are also proposed. These include conducting field surveys in undeveloped areas, implementing archaeological monitoring programs during construction in

moderate sensitivity zones, and following strict cease-work protocols if resources are encountered. Monitoring must involve both qualified archaeologists and Native American representatives, with treatment and recovery plans approved by City staff. Participation by local tribes is emphasized as essential throughout all phases of investigation to ensure that cultural knowledge and spiritual values are respected and integrated into project planning. This culturally informed approach aims to balance development goals with the preservation of archaeological and tribal cultural heritage, contributing to a more inclusive and respectful planning process in the College Area.

Of the 7 previously recorded archaeological resources within the planning area, four of them have been previously evaluated for listing to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), California Register of Historic Resources (CRHR), or City's Register. Three were determined ineligible for listing and one, the remnants of Old Highway 395, was determined eligible. Another three sites were not evaluated and are recommended for avoidance and monitoring during any construction activity per the proposed mitigation measures.

The report also recommends future discretionary projects conduct a site-specific assessment to determine the presence/absence of cultural resources and evaluate their historical significance per the Mitigation Framework. Generally, projects located in the areas identified with a moderate sensitivity level as well as undeveloped sites would be evaluated by a qualified archaeologist to determine historical significance and propose appropriate mitigation. Resources determined potentially significant would be required to avoid or minimize any adverse impacts to the resource. Historical sites would be referred to the Historical Resources Board for possible designation on a case-by-case basis. Draft CPU policies are intended to incorporate this recommendation (see policies numbered 3, 4 and 5 below).

Due to previous continual use and development, it is assumed that many of the cultural resources within the Planning area have been disturbed. However, it is possible that intact cultural resources are present in areas that have not been previously developed or are buried in alluvial deposits especially within the areas categorized as moderate sensitivity. Buried deposits offer a unique opportunity to broaden our understanding of the lives, culture, and lifeways of the diverse occupation of the community through time. For these reasons, future discretionary projects within the Planning area would be evaluated by a qualified archaeologist to determine the presence/absence of buried archaeological resources in accordance with the mitigation measures.

For projects on undeveloped land, site-specific cultural resource studies will be conducted in accordance with the Historic Resources Guidelines, and any resources identified during field reconnaissance will be evaluated for significance under CEQA and eligibility for the CRHR and City Register through a testing program. On previously developed land with no ground surface visibility, but within areas of moderate to high sensitivity, project-level construction monitoring may be required to minimize potential impacts. For projects involving excavation, a construction monitoring program will be implemented with a notification process and a cease-work requirement until resources can be evaluated by a qualified archaeologist and Native American representative(s), and an approved treatment or recovery plan is established by City staff.

Mitigation measures would be initiated for all significant sites, either through avoidance or data recovery. All phases of future investigations, including survey, testing, data recovery, and monitoring efforts, would require the participation of local Native American tribes. Early

consultation is an effective way to avoid unanticipated discoveries and local tribes may have knowledge of religious and cultural significance of resources in the area. In addition, Native American participation would ensure that cultural resources within the Planning area are protected and properly treated.

Historic Preservation Element

The General Plan intends that historical and cultural resources be integrated into the larger land use planning process and that historic preservation concepts and identification of historical resources in the community are part of the community plan update process.

Because community plans are intended to work in concert with the General Plan, [content and policies from the General Plan](#) are not replicated in new community plan updates. Instead, the community plan elements focus on issue areas and policies that are unique to the needs of each community. Staff has prepared a draft Historic Preservation Element for the update to the College Area Community Plan (Attachment 5). This element provides a summary of the prehistoric and historic development of the community based upon the Cultural Resource Constraints and Sensitivity Analysis and the Historic Context Statement and Survey. The specific goals of the College Historic Preservation Element are the identification and preservation of significant and important historical resources in the College Area community and provision of educational opportunities and incentives related to historical resources.

The draft policies for the College Area emphasize early Native American consultation during the development review process to ensure culturally appropriate treatment of archaeological sites and resources with cultural or religious significance. Project-specific investigations will be conducted in compliance with applicable laws to identify significant tribal cultural and archaeological resources, with a priority on avoiding adverse impacts and implementing measures to protect them from disturbance. Where avoidance is not feasible, impacts must be minimized through mitigation carried out under the supervision of a qualified archaeologist and Kumeyaay monitor, with preservation-in-place as the preferred approach. The policies also call for recognizing and potentially designating significant archaeological and tribal cultural sites, as well as identifying, evaluating, and preserving historic properties within the College Area that meet local, state, or federal criteria, with attention to those identified in the Community Planning Area Historic Context Statement. Additional historic surveys will be completed to identify potential resources, including districts and individually eligible properties. Finally, the policies promote education and interpretation of the College Area's history through accessible tools such as mobile applications, brochures, walking tours, interpretive signage, exhibits, and art, highlighting both existing and lost resources.

Environmental Analysis of Historical Resources

In 2024 the City amended the General Plan under the Blueprint SD initiative to create an equitable and sustainable framework for growth to support current and future San Diegans and support San Diego's priority to develop homes near public transportation and job centers. The amendments aligned the General Plan with the City's adopted [Climate Action Plan](#) and established new goals and policies that support the City's objectives for climate action, fair housing, and equity. The environmental impacts of Blueprint SD were addressed in the [Final Program Environmental Impact](#)

[Report for the Blueprint SD Initiative, Hillcrest Focused Plan Amendment, and University Community Plan Update \(SCH No. 2021070359\) \(Blueprint PEIR\)](#), which was certified by the City Council with adoption of Blueprint SD.

The Blueprint PEIR includes an analysis of potentially significant impacts to cultural resources (prehistoric, historic archaeological, tribal cultural and built environment historical resources), which is detailed in Section 4.4, Cultural Resources and Section 4.15, Tribal Cultural Resources. A mitigation framework is provided in the PEIR to reduce these impacts. All development projects with the potential to affect cultural resources, such as designated historical resources, historical buildings, districts, landscapes, objects, and structures, important archaeological sites, Tribal Cultural Resources, and traditional cultural properties are subject to site-specific review in accordance with the Historical Resources Regulations and the Historical Resources Guidelines of the Land Development Manual. Further, a specific mitigation measure (MM-HIST-1) would be required of all development projects that could directly affect historic resources and another measure (MM-HIST 2) for discretionary projects impacting archaeological and tribal cultural resources.

The General Plan and Community Plan policies call for identification and preservation of historical, archaeological, and tribal cultural resources, the SDMC regulations implement those policies through regulation and protection of designated and potential historical resources, and the PEIR mitigation measures provide mitigation to reduce impacts to historic, archaeological and tribal cultural resources. Despite the policies, regulations, and mitigation in place to protect cultural resources (historical, archaeological and tribal cultural resources), it is not possible to ensure the successful preservation of all cultural resources within the project area at a programmatic level. Therefore, the PEIR concludes that potential impacts to historical, archaeological, and tribal cultural resources from implementation of Blueprint SD would remain significant and unavoidable. Impacts to human remains were identified as less than significant with the application of state and local regulations.

The College Area Community Plan Update establishes an updated vision and land use and policy strategy to guide future growth and development within the College Area community. The proposed Community Plan Update aligns with the City's amended General Plan (Blueprint SD) land use and policy framework and the City of Villages land use strategy as well as the City's Climate Action Plan. The Environmental Review Section of the City Planning Department reviewed the College Area Community Plan Update and determined that the adoption of the College Area Community Plan Update would not result in new or more severe significant impacts over and above those disclosed in the previously certified Blueprint PEIR, certified by the City Council on July 23, 2024 (Resolution No. R315701). This determination was documented in a [July 2025 memo](#). Therefore, pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Sections 15162, 15164, and 15168, an addendum to the Blueprint PEIR is the appropriate environmental document. The addendum for the College Area Community Plan Update will be finalized prior to the City Council hearing and does not require review by HRB.

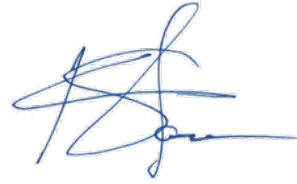
CONCLUSION

The information provided in the Historic Context Statement and Cultural Resources Constraints Analysis have been incorporated into the planning process for the College Area CPU and are reflected in the goals and policies of the Community Plan's Historic Preservation Element. Based upon our analysis, staff believes that documents that comprise the College Area Community Plan

Update Historic Preservation Component achieve General Plan historic preservation goals for this community and recommend HRB recommend City Council adoption as described above.



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Attachments:

1. [Memo for Information Item to HRB on College Area Community Plan Update Historic Preservation Component](#)
2. Link to [Digital Recording of HRB Meeting of March 27, 2025](#) (Item 1 begins at 1:48:40)
3. [Cultural Resources Constraints and Sensitivity Analysis for the College Area Community Plan Update](#)
4. [College Area Historic Context Statement](#) (December 2024)
5. [Historic Preservation Element of the College CPU](#)