



DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
<http://history.ucsd.edu/>

MAIN OFFICE: (858) 534-1996
 FAX: (858) 534-7283
history@ucsd.edu

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Dear HRB Boardmembers and Staff:

I write as a member of the Historical Resources Board, and a professional historian. On 23 October 2025, the HRB twice voted to reject *Preservation and Progress Package A*. Shortly after our meeting, The HRB Chair and two board members who had voted in favor of the package, attended the Planning Commission meeting. At that meeting, the HRB Chair mis-characterized opposition to Package A as “indecisive,” and “not strong.” I oppose the changes in *Preservation and Progress Package A* in the strongest terms, and find the changes support neither preservation, nor progress for our city. I think the changes harm historic preservation, citizen engagement, and democratic governance.

I joined the board majority to vote against Package A for two central, decisive, reasons. First, *Preservation and Progress Package A* allows the City Council to overturn HRB designations at will. Seizing power from citizen review boards in favor of elected leaders serves to limit the power of citizens to participate in the democratic process. If the Mayor and City Council wish to govern without the participation of citizen review boards and citizen groups, the Council should have the courage and honesty to vote to abolish them openly, rather than to quietly undermine the power of expert citizen review. When the mayor or council can overturn the judgments of an expert citizen review board at will, the existence of such boards is a farce.

Second, Package A limits citizen rights of appeal of HRB non-designations. HRB staff originally proposed to extend non-designation appeal rights to any “interested person.” The HRB Policy Subcommittee proposed preserve rights of appeal for non-designations exclusively for property owners, which violates principles of equity and citizen engagement. The institution of differential rights for citizens has a long and sordid history in the United States. For more than half a century, voting rights in the United States only applied to free white male owners of real property. From that lamentable low point, rights of participation gradually progressed. The HRB and the City of San Diego should collectively work to enhance citizen rights, not limit rights of citizens to appeal or to access their governing procedures. The original proposal to extend rights of appeal to any citizen as an *interested person*, was correct. Now, however, the package eliminates appeal rights for non-designations for everyone. The City Council and Mayor are thus empowered to overturn any HRB designation for any reason, and ordinary citizens are unable to appeal any decision to not designate a historical resource.

As a Board member, I argued against Package A during the October meeting, voted with the majority against it, and yet Package A advanced with no changes except the elimination of all citizen appeal rights. It is unclear to me why anyone should volunteer to serve on the HRB, or indeed why it should exist at all under such circumstances. As a historian who has studied, written, and lectured internationally about politics for three decades, I find the processes I have witnessed on the HRB undemocratic. I hope the record, and future presentations, note the HRB voted to reject *Preservation and Progress Package A*.

Yours sincerely,
 Michael Provence
 Historical Resources Board Member
 Professor of History