



Japanese American Historical Society of San Diego

City of San Diego

Historical Resources Board

Report No.: HRB 20-024

Agenda hearing May 28, 2020

Item #6 1398 Lieta Street Project Site Development Permit

You have been asked to recommend to the Planning Commission that it adopt the recommendations for mitigation measures related to a designated historical resource located at the above address. On behalf of the Japanese American Historical Society of San Diego, I would like ask that this item not be placed on the consent agenda. I further request that you consider the following comments and recommendations to some of the findings and suggested mitigation measures contained in the Report you are considering.

The details of the mitigation measures appear on page 2 of a document titled “Draft Site Development Permit Findings for Substantial Alteration” submitted by Marie Burke Lia Attorney for the project applicants in August 2019, as follows: “The project will include a Historical Resource Storyboard at the southeast corner of the building facing east toward the incoming vehicular traffic. The Storyboard will contain a concise but thorough description of the history of the site. In addition, etched glass panels will be placed on the fencing above the slope on Morena Boulevard. The etching will depict the property’s historic use as a farm as it relates to the designation. A preliminary design for the etching will be included on the plans.”

Review of the site drawings submitted with the PMND reveals that a significant change has occurred. Although the findings above clearly indicate that the Historic Resource Storyboard will be located facing east and visible to oncoming traffic, as depicted in the Landscape Development Plan Planting Plan updated on 10/16/2016. However, the remainder of the site plans submitted with this proposal, updated through 9/12/2019 now have this important mitigation feature located on the opposite side of the driveway, facing south at approximately the corner of the project, and not visible to oncoming traffic at all.

JAHSSD Recommendation #1: The Storyboard should be returned to its originally proposed location facing east and toward incoming vehicular traffic.

While the findings above discuss a “concise and thorough description of the site” as a requirement for the Storyboard, there is no indication of the dimensions or construction methods required for this panel. Neither is there any requirement for review of the content of the Storyboard for historical accuracy. Page 18 of the proposed Mitigated Negative Declaration makes city staff responsible for the content of the Storyboard.

JAHSSD Recommendation #2: More concise instructions regarding the size and content and construction materials of the Storyboard should be developed. The proposed content should be reviewed for accuracy by a historian of local Japanese American life or an archivist who can confirm the details of the Sogo's operation and ownership of the farm before the City staff approves the content.

There are similar objections and concerns which JAHSSD wishes to communicate concerning the etched glass panels which are the second major mitigation feature of this plan. There are two major issues: the design of the panels, and landscape which surrounds them.

The findings quoted above make clear that the goal of the mitigation features is to communicate the nature of the land use that preceded construction of the townhomes. While a detailed depiction of a head of lettuce repeated in rows across the fence might be suitable for a viewer to understand if they were walking on a sidewalk adjacent to the etched panels, the stated location of the panels "above the slope of Morena Boulevard" creates a problem for this design. Viewers must look up and over the slope, and then try to figure out what the etchings depict without the assistance of any historical narrative.

Recommendation #3: Develop a simpler, larger, and more iconic image that would be more readily interpreted as farm crops by the casual observer. Strawberries or corn, for example. Or, create an image that suggests an aerial view of the layout of a typical truck garden laid out by Japanese farmers.

The 2016 landscaping plan included in the supporting material for the PMND shows a line of 7 king palms to be planted along and behind the etched panels. If the "row of lettuce" etching design is not changed, the trunks of these palms will be dark shadows behind the glass image, further obscuring the message of this property having been a farm site. There are two types of king palms and both have a crown from which leaves 6-12 feet long grow. When the 15 foot king palms required by the Landscaping Plan are planted they may overhang the glass panels of the fence for several years, obscuring the content. (Note that the 2019 site plan referred to above has the etched panels now located closer to Morena Boulevard, which could eliminate the overhang problem, but it is still necessary to clarify the location of the etched glass wall.

Recommendation #4: Clarify which location will house the glass panels. (2016 vs 2019.) Select a different landscape plant; leave the area behind the glass panels open so the etched image is not obscured by vegetation; make the background of the panel design opaque.

While a recent modification to the PMND on page 5 makes clear that the funding and implementation of the Storyboard is the owner/permittee's responsibility in perpetuity, there is no language regarding responsibility for the long-term maintenance of the etched glass panels in the document.

Recommendation #5: Amend the document to clarify responsibility for the maintenance of the etched glass panels in perpetuity.

The Historical Resources Board may be commended for its 2018 action to designate this small plot of farmland as a reflection of the City's Japanese American history. I hope that action on the above recommendations will make the commemoration of the Sogo family's involvement with this land more meaningful and accessible to both future townhouse dwellers and City residents. Thank you for helping to preserve the history of the early Japanese in San Diego.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light gray rectangular background. The signature reads "Yuri Kaneda DDS" in a cursive script.

Yuri Kaneda DDS, President , Japanese American Historical Society of San Diego.