

## OFFICE OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION

DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION

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DEPT. OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT  
PLANNING

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Honorable Thomas R. Mack, Mayor  
City of San Mateo  
330 W. 20th Avenue  
San Mateo CA 94403

Dear Mayor Mack:

As you probably know, the City of San Mateo has just completed a survey of its historic resources. One element of the project was a formal agreement between the City and our office designed to insure that the work met State standards.

I am pleased to inform you that the survey has met those standards. The project demonstrated a successful mix of community involvement and professional expertise. The resulting inventory compiles a great deal of information in an accessible format. It should provide a firm basis for the City's ongoing preservation efforts, including the formulation of policies for the current general plan update.

We have incorporated the results of the survey into the State Historic Resources Inventory. Entry of selected survey information into our computerized database will occur shortly.

San Mateo is fortunate to have such a large number and great diversity of historic resources. Quite a few deserve national recognition, and even more should be designated locally.

Let me call your attention especially to the historic commercial district that was delineated downtown. This area appears eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Nomination to the register is a separate process, but it can move ahead quickly if the City and property owners decide to proceed. Our guess is that only 20 or 30 hours of staff time would be needed to turn survey information into a register application.

Enclosed are two documents. One is a more detailed evaluation of the survey and the other a list of changes we've made in estimates of National Register eligibility. Please let us know if you have questions about either.

Comprehensiveness: 1) While the intent of the project was to survey the entire city, financial resources and time constraints led to a reduction of the survey area. The northeast part of the city received an intensive survey, the other parts got a thorough drive-through and substantial research. A few properties in the latter areas were documented. In addition, OHP and survey staff identified at least two huge (500+ resources) Register-eligible residential districts in the areas. 2) All existant property types were surveyed. Because of the undocumented districts, certain types were underrepresented in the inventory, viz., large houses ca. 1910-1930 and houses ca. 1930-1940. In addition, apartment buildings may need further attention, even though several appear in the inventory.

Evaluations: The project emphasized thoughtful application of the National Register criteria. In addition, survey and OHP staff had discussed evaluation issues during the project. As a result, few evaluations were changed upon OHP review. In the case of several houses, the reason for a "4" rating was unclear--with survey staff intending the rating to mean that further research was necessary and OHP reviewer concluding that the properties belonged in the "endangered species" category.

Other: Documentation was thorough. Significance statements established the importance of the properties without adding irrelevant detail. Inventory forms, even those for districts, were properly completed and easy to understand. Documenting the downtown commercial district is one of the project's major successes, especially if the City goes on to nominate the district to the National Register.

Issues: The project was the first completed under a memorandum of agreement between the OHP and a local government. The agreement envisioned a high degree of OHP involvement as a substitute for grant funds. Compared with a grant project, the survey needed only a little more attention, viz. two visits, one of which focused on delineating historic districts, and a slightly larger number of phone calls. Its unclear whether this pattern will continue in different places with different local staff and financial support. Judging from this instance, however, the memorandum of agreement must be considered a success. The project was also the first of a proposed series under the auspices of the county historical society. Two more are currently underway.

If asked to do so under the agreement, we promised to hold a workshop on the survey and its connection to other preservation programs. These include registration, local certification, tax incentives, and others. Although the project was completed without the workshop, we would still be glad to hold one.

Let me congratulate the City and its planning staff, the San Mateo County Historical Association and its staff, and the local volunteers for a job well done.

Sincerely,

Original Signed by

Kathryn Gualtieri  
State Historic Preservation Officer

Enclosures

cc: Robert M. Brown  
Kim Powleson  
Mitch Postel  
Linda Wickert

the evaluation system (based on the state's rating system), a panel of community members, selected for their expertise, met to review the individual ratings. Their comments were incorporated into the final ratings.

Geographical Focus of Survey. During the research and on-site survey phase, it became clear that San Mateo was a mature community. County Assessor's records listed 4,460 addresses of residential properties built before 1940. Because of the large number of structures, the survey focused primarily on the oldest neighborhoods, most of which are located east of El Camino Real. We had two reasons for localizing our survey. One was to concentrate efforts in neighborhoods where current zoning was not conducive to the preservation of existing structures. Most of the zoning for older neighborhoods surrounding the city's traditional central core has allowed for higher densities in recent years. The result has been a dramatic change as older, single-family dwellings are torn down and replaced with larger, multi-unit structures.

Another reason to focus on the east side of El Camino was the discovery that the older neighborhoods on the west side of town had a large number of historically interesting structures. After consulting with staff members of the Office of Historic Preservation, we determined that the most sensible approach to documenting the neighborhoods in planning areas "Baywood," "Baywood Knolls," "Aragon," and "San Mateo Park" would be as potential historic districts. Since these neighborhoods contain a large number of older buildings that relate historically and have a high degree of architectural consistency, the district approach makes more sense. This is a simpler process than documenting individual properties, yet still requires much work. We took our concerns to the City's Planning staff, who agreed that future survey projects might address the issue of documenting potential districts in the western neighborhoods of San Mateo.

Project research and on-site surveying concentrated on the traditional downtown of San Mateo, particularly along B Street and Third Avenue, and the neighborhoods of Central, East San Mateo, Hayward Park, San Mateo Heights, and North Central. Areas west of El Camino and south through Twenty-fifth and the Hillside neighborhoods were surveyed visually. In a few cases, specific structures in these areas west of El Camino Real stood out as unusual properties and were included in the survey for further research.