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Sent: Friday, September 8, 2023 12:45 PM
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Subject: Historic Districts & the 2040 General Plan

Planning Commissioners,
Discussion of the Draft EIR for the 2040 General Plan is the sole agenda item for your September 12th meeting. Historic resource protections are an important component of the General Plan discussion. The Guest Perspective in today's Daily Journal provides background information on historic districts and their value to the community (https://www.smdailyjournal.com/opinion/guest_perspectives/historic-districts-creating-pride-building-community/article_c05f6180-4de3-11ee-929c-bbd4e88c634f.html). For your convenience, it is printed in full below. I hope you will take the time to read it prior to your meeting.

I also request that it be included in the 9/12/23 meeting agenda packet as public comment.

Thank you,
Keith Weber
San Mateo

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# THE DAILY JOURNAL

## Historic Districts: Creating pride, building community

Keith Weber  
September 8, 2023

In recent years, there has been a growing movement to demolish historic buildings in favor of new development. This is a mistake. Historic buildings are not just old buildings. They are valuable assets that contribute to the character of our city and make it a more attractive place to live, work and visit.

If you've ever visited Savannah, Boston, Sacramento, San Antonio, Santa Fe, Pasadena, Pacific Grove, or any other city or town in the United States, chances are it was the authentic character and sense of place created by the historic districts that was most memorable.

Now, all of a sudden, there's a smear campaign in San Mateo targeting historic districts — and the Baywood neighborhood specifically. It's a true shame so few are trying so hard to discredit what is so good for so many. Their self-serving, anti-historic district campaign is divisive, false and deceiving, filled with misinformation and inaccuracies.

What is true and accurate, according to the National Park Service, is National Register listing officially conveys a level of national regard and respect that is not easy to achieve. Importantly, it imposes no restrictions, regulations or demands on any property owner in the district. California Register and National Register listing does not give either the state or the federal government any additional authority over the property.

It is up to the city through its general plan and zoning to ensure these valuable historic resources are safeguarded for the future. San Mateo's current policy uses the Secretary of the Interior's Standards — the widely accepted gold standard used nationwide to help owners make design choices that preserve their buildings and protect their investment. Historic designations allow full rehabilitation and upgrades to modern technology and conveniences.

Those informed of the facts know the great value that National Register designation brings individual property owners, the neighborhood and the city too. Pasadena's Bungalow Heaven, a large neighborhood similar to Baywood, is a prime example of a vibrant and valuable historic district.

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Through the efforts of many dedicated residents who recognized the historic significance of these homes, the neighborhood became Pasadena's first historic Landmark District in 1989. Just more than 10 years after designation, Sunset magazine named Bungalow Heaven the "Best Neighborhood" in the West and, in 2008, it was listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

In 2009, Bungalow Heaven Landmark District was designated one of the 10 great places in America by the American Planning Association. "Bungalow Heaven is truly remarkable in that there are more than a thousand historic homes in the neighborhood," APA Chief Executive Officer Paul Farmer said. "Residents and the city are rightfully proud of this architectural legacy, and we applaud them for their ongoing commitment to protect and enhance their neighborhood's unique sense of place."

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As we contemplate creating a historic district, it is crucial to acknowledge that when individuals exercise their own private property rights it affects their neighbor's property rights and values as well. Zoning and building regulations are ways that society seeks to balance individual property rights with the rights of the community at large. Historic districts recognize that certain individual properties — and even whole neighborhoods — can have significant community value that current owners have the privilege and responsibility to caretake.

The existing charming character and unique sense of identity is likely why Baywood owners chose the neighborhood and bought their homes in the first place. If Baywood is not designated as a historic district, the many property owners who value its unique historic character truly risk losing the cohesiveness, harmony and sense of place the neighborhood possessed when they bought.

The designation will tell the city and residents the area is special. The goal of historic district designation is to safeguard individual property rights from misguided improvements, unnecessary demolitions and poorly designed new construction, which can ultimately drag down neighborhood quality and property values for everyone. With the state overriding local land use controls to allow higher density in single-family neighborhoods without requiring adequate parking, just whose property values need protection?

Historic neighborhoods like Bungalow Heaven are somewhat rare, but San Mateo is fortunate to have several neighborhoods that are National Register worthy as historic districts. The Baywood neighborhood is one of them. Please visit [smheritage.org](http://smheritage.org) to learn more.

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*Keith Weber is on the board of the San Mateo Heritage Alliance and has been working for the betterment of San Mateo and encouraging the preservation of the city's irreplaceable historic resources for more than 40 years. NOTE: Bungalow Heaven text excerpted with gratitude from [bungalowheaven.org](http://bungalowheaven.org).*