



BRUNZELL
HISTORICAL

November 5, 2021

Client:

Cornerstone Properties
1435 N. McDowell Boulevard, Suite 110
Petaluma, CA 94954

Contact:

Pauline Block
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Subject: Downtown Station project at 34 6th Street, Santa Rosa, Sonoma County, California, Assessment of compatibility with historic district.

Attn: Pauline Block,

This letter comprises the assessment of the Downtown Station project at 34 6th Street, Santa Rosa, Sonoma County, California for compatibility with the Railroad Square Preservation District.

Project Description

The proposed project at 34 6th Street is located in a former railyard on the western edge of Downtown Santa Rosa. The project location is within the Railroad Square Preservation District, near its northern boundary; the West End Preservation District is across the street to the north. The proposed project on the currently vacant 5.4-acre parcel would be constructed to the west of the railroad tracks and east of a historic cannery building. The project consists of a six-story residential/mixed-use building with an outdoor community pool and open gathering space for residents and neighbors.

Railroad Square Preservation District

The Railroad Square Preservation District is bounded by 6th Street to the north, the U.S. 101 Freeway to the east, 3rd Street to the south, and Santa Rosa Creek to the west. Developed during the railroad era, its period of significance is 1888 to 1923. The district reflects the history of rail travel and transport in the railroad tracks running through it as well as the buildings near the tracks, including the railroad depot, hotels, warehouse/industrial structures, and commercial buildings. Brick warehouses along the tracks were built between 1888 and 1915, basalt masonry buildings between 1904 and 1915, and brick commercial buildings were constructed after 1911. Many masonry buildings in Santa Rosa were destroyed in the 1906 and 1969 earthquakes, rendering those that remain in the Railroad Square Preservation District especially significant. Unlike other historic districts in Santa Rosa, district contributors are commercial or industrial rather than residential or institutional. The district was listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) in 1979, and adopted as a local preservation district in 1990.¹

Although the Railroad Square Preservation District appears to retain the concentration of contributing resources required for continued eligibility as a historic district, it has seen substantial alterations since its documentation for NRHP nomination in 1977. Some of the most notable changes have been performed in the immediate vicinity of the proposed project: the c2006 partial demolition of the brick warehouses of the

¹ "Historic Combining District," Santa Rosa City Code (Santa Rosa, California), Accessed October 18, 2021, https://qcode.us/codes/santarosa/?view=desktop&topic=20-2-20_28-20_28_040.

California Packing Corporation at Third Street/Santa Rosa Creek (which is southwest of the project site) and the c1990 demolition of the wooden PMT Trucking (Santa Rosa Woolen Mills) building on the subject property. Both were considered major focal points of the historic district when it was nominated. Several of the surviving focal points of the district are in the vicinity of the proposed project: the brick warehouse that has been converted into the Sixth Street Playhouse, the Depot, the Western Hotel, and Hotel La Rose.²

Character-defining Features

The district exhibits original elements of its historic fabric dating from the period of significance. Its character-defining features include:

- Brick warehouses and commercial buildings
- Basalt stone masonry buildings
- Railroad-related buildings
- One- to four-story massing
- Zero-setback building placement
- Diverse building/structure type including railroad-related, hotel, storefront commercial, and warehouse/industrial

West End Preservation District

The West End Preservation District is bounded by 9th Street to the north, Dutton Street to the west, 6th Street to the south, and the railroad tracks to the east. It was developed as a working-class residential neighborhood during its period of significance, the 1870s through the 1840s. District contributors are mostly small houses that represent a wide range of historic architectural styles. The district is also significant for its association with Santa Rosa's ethnic communities. The De Turk Round Barn near its northwest border is the district's most notable landmark. The West End Preservation District was adopted as a local preservation district in 1996.

Character-defining Features

The district exhibits original elements of its historic fabric dating from the period of significance. Its character-defining features include:

- Vernacular, Italianate, and Queen Anne nineteenth century residences
- Twentieth century Bungalows and Colonial Revival cottages
- One- to two-story massing
- A small number of commercial, agricultural, and institutional buildings

Design Guidelines

The City of Santa Rosa's Cultural Heritage Board created design guidelines for historic districts, which were codified in the document entitled "Processing Review Procedures for Owners of Historic Properties," and adopted in 2001. Proposed changes to historic properties are reviewed by the City's Cultural Heritage Board, Design Review Board, or Department of Community Development staff to ensure that the historic character of a building and its neighborhood is maintained. Section G of the document provides design guidelines for new construction within preservation districts. The document states that new construction in preservation districts can achieve City of Santa Rosa goals, including bringing new residents to historic neighborhoods by increasing available housing stock. The document provides the following specific guidelines for infill construction in preservation districts:

1. *Height: The height of new construction in a preservation district should be compatible with adjacent structures.*
The proposed project is six stories, which is taller than but compatible with adjacent structures. Although its massing and scale could potentially overwhelm a low-slung single-story historic

² Railroad Square District, NRHP Nomination, Dan Peterson, May 1977.

residence, Railroad Square district contributors were constructed for commercial and industrial uses, and are both taller and larger in scale than the buildings found in residential historic districts. The Sixth Street Playhouse, a brick warehouse/industrial building that has been converted to a performance space, will be its closest neighbor. Although technically a one-story building, it features a stepped parapet on its main façade, which, along with its large footprint, makes it an imposing presence along 6th Street such that it will not be overwhelmed by the scale of the new building. Other Railroad Square Preservation District contributors also exhibit more substantial massing and scale than historic residential buildings and are located across the railroad tracks from the proposed project. Historic residences that are contributors to the West End Preservation District are even more distant from the proposed project; the closest are across the street and roughly a block to the west, and thus, its height will have only a minimal impact on them. Furthermore, there is a substantial teen center building within the West End Preservation District as well as several large contemporary multi-story buildings at the eastern edge of the Railroad Square Preservation District. For these reasons, the height of the proposed project is compatible with both preservation districts.

2. *Proportion: new construction should match adjacent structures in proportions of width to height.*

This guideline is apparently intended to encourage new construction in historic residential neighborhoods to match the vertical orientation of Victorian-era residential buildings. It does not apply to the Railroad Square Preservation District, a heterogenous neighborhood that includes a historic park, railroad tracks, a four-and-a-half story hotel, storefront commercial buildings that share side walls, and large-footprint warehouse/industrial buildings. District contributors do not exhibit a typical proportion; warehouse buildings are horizontally oriented because of their large footprints while hotels are taller and narrower. Storefront commercial blocks are completely built out with zero setback, and individual buildings' specific proportions are not clearly demarcated. Non-building district contributors do not exhibit proportion. Proportion can be applied to the West End Preservation District, which is primarily one-and two-story residential. However, the proposed project is not within this district, nor is it adjacent to any district contributors. Furthermore, contemporary intrusions into the district such as the teen club across the street to the north of the subject property do not conform to typical residential proportions and have not destroyed the integrity of the district. For these reasons, the proportion of the proposed project is compatible with both preservation districts.

3. *Rhythm: the existing historic streetscape is defined by the rhythm (the relationship of windows, doors, porches, and other elements) of individual structures, and new construction should maintain the rhythm of window and door openings on the main façade.*

As with Guideline 2 above, Guideline 3 was apparently developed to protect historic-era residential neighborhoods. It does not apply to the Railroad Square Preservation District, which exhibits radically different fenestration and entryway design in its contributing warehouses, hotels, and storefront commercial buildings. Rhythm can be applied to the West End Preservation District, which is primarily one-and two-story residential. However, the proposed project is not within this district, nor is it adjacent to any district contributors. For these reasons, the rhythm of the proposed project is compatible with both preservation districts.

4. *Setbacks: setbacks should be consistent with adjacent structures and should not vary more than ten percent with adjacent structures.*

The proposed project will feature a minimal setback very similar to the setback of the Sixth Street Playhouse to its west. Other district contributors are not adjacent to the proposed project. For this reason, the setback of the proposed project is compatible with both preservation districts.

5. *Materials and Texture: the majority of residential structures within Santa Rosa's preservation districts are of wood or stucco construction and new construction should be compatible with adjacent buildings on the block.*

Primary materials for the proposed project will be stucco, glass, and steel. The project will not copy specific features of adjacent historic buildings in order to avoid creating a false sense of history or a cartoonish historicism. Imitation materials will be avoided. Ground-floor materials on the west elevation will respond to the adjacent historic brick warehouse; brick cladding, metal handrails, and steel awnings will be utilized. For these reasons, the materials and texture of the proposed project are compatible with the preservation districts.

6. *Roof Shapes: roofs for new construction should be compatible with adjacent structures.*

The low-pitch roof of the adjacent historic brick warehouse is not visible from street level; the building exhibits the appearance of a flat roof. Nearby hotel buildings also are flat-roofed, while other buildings within the Railroad Square Preservation District have other roof forms. The proposed building will have a flat roof, a form that is compatible with the adjacent structure.

7. *Architectural Details and Decorative Features: details and decoration of historic buildings vary tremendously with different styles, periods and types. Successful infill buildings take cues from historic images and reintroduce and reinterpret designs of traditional decorative elements.*

The proposed project will use materials such as brick cladding and steel awnings in order to respond to the adjacent brick warehouse. Continuous residential stoops on the west elevation will respond to the loading docks of the historic warehouses. On the north elevation, the windows and Juliet balconies will provide residential motifs. The project design will avoid inappropriate application of historicist ornament onto the essentially contemporary design of the building. For these reasons, the architectural details and decorative features of the proposed project are compatible with the preservation districts.

Conformance to Secretary of Interior's Standards

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties provide guidelines for the preservation and rehabilitation of historic resources. Adherence to these standards is widely accepted as a method of avoiding significant adverse effects to historic buildings while allowing their continued use. The Secretary of Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation state:

1. *A property will be used as it was historically or be given a new use that requires minimal change to its distinctive materials, features, spaces and spatial relationships.*

Standard 1 was developed to provide guidance for rehabilitation and restoration of historic buildings. It does not discuss infill construction and therefore does not apply to the proposed project.

2. *The historic character of a property will be retained and preserved. The removal of distinctive materials or alteration of features, spaces and spatial relationships that characterize a property will be avoided.*

Standard 2 was developed to provide guidance for rehabilitation and restoration of historic buildings student; there are no extant historic buildings on the subject property to retain or preserve. This standard does not discuss infill construction and therefore does not apply to the proposed project.

3. *Each property will be recognized as a physical record of its time, place and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or elements from other historic properties, will not be undertaken.*

Conjectural features such as historicist architectural details will not be utilized in the proposed project in order to allow new building to be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. This will allow the project to avoid creating a false sense of historical development. Nor will repurposed elements of historic properties be utilized in the proposed project. Therefore, the proposed project conforms to Standard 3.

4. *Changes to a property that have acquired historic significance in their own right will be retained and preserved.*

Standard 4 was developed to provide guidance for rehabilitation and restoration of historic buildings. It does not discuss infill construction and therefore does not apply to the proposed project.

5. *Distinctive materials, features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property will be preserved.*

Standard 5 was developed to provide guidance for rehabilitation and restoration of individual historic buildings. It does not discuss infill construction and therefore does not apply to the proposed project.

6. *Deteriorated historic features will be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature will match the old in design, color, texture and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features will be substantiated by documentary and physical evidence.*

Standard 6 was developed to provide guidance for rehabilitation and restoration of historic buildings. It does not discuss infill construction and therefore does not apply to the proposed project.

7. *Chemical or physical treatments, if appropriate, will be undertaken using the gentlest means possible. Treatments that cause damage to historic materials will not be used.*

Standard 7 was developed to provide guidance for rehabilitation and restoration of historic buildings. It does not discuss infill construction and therefore does not apply to the proposed project.

8. *Archeological resources will be protected and preserved in place. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures will be undertaken.*

The proposed project will avoid disturbance of archaeological resources and will undertake appropriate mitigation measures if any archaeological resources cannot be avoided. Therefore, the proposed project conforms to Standard 8.

9. *New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction will not destroy historic materials, features, and spatial relationships that characterize the property. The new work will be differentiated from the old and will be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale and proportion, and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment.*

The proposed project will not destroy historic materials, features, or spatial relationships that characterize adjacent historic properties or historic districts. The new building will be differentiated from adjacent buildings by using a contemporary rather than a historicist architectural style. The proposed project will use materials such as brick cladding and steel awnings on the west elevation of the ground floor in order to respond to the adjacent brick warehouse. Continuous residential stoops on the west elevation will respond to the loading docks of the historic warehouses. On the north elevation, windows and Juliet balconies will provide residential motifs. The project design will avoid inappropriate application of historicist ornament onto the essentially contemporary design of the building. Size, scale, massing, and proportion are compatible with the adjacent historic building, which was originally an industrial/warehouse facility and is itself a large and imposing building. The project protects the historic integrity of the preservation districts and their environment. Therefore, the proposed project conforms to Standard 9.

10. *New additions and adjacent or related new construction will be undertaken in such a manner that, if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.*

Reversal of the proposed project will not impair the essential form and integrity of adjacent historic properties or historic districts. Therefore, the proposed project conforms to Standard 10.

Evaluator Qualifications

I meet the Secretary of Interior's Professional Qualifications for both History and Architectural History. I hold a Master's degree in Public History and have worked in multiple facets of historic preservation and cultural resource evaluation since 2007. My experience includes municipal preservation planning and working as the lead staff member of a non-profit preservation organization. Since 2012, I have worked full-time as a historical consultant, completing dozens of evaluations for CEQA and Section 106 compliance. Additionally,

I have completed local and NRHP nominations, historic context statements, and HAER recordation. The North Bay is the center of my practice, but I frequently work in the greater Sacramento area and other parts of the Bay Area, and have also completed projects in Southern California, Nevada, Oregon, New York, and Puerto Rico. In addition to my work with historic-period residential, agricultural, and commercial properties for private clients, I have prepared reports on post offices, military bases, university campuses, hospitals, church properties, national parks, and a NASA site. I am listed as a Historian and Architectural Historian on the California Office of Historic Preservation's roster of qualified consultants for every county in California.

Please contact me by phone at 707/290-2918 or e-mail at kara.brunzell@yahoo.com with any questions or comments.

Sincerely,



Kara Brunzell, M.A.
Brunzell Historical



Photograph 1: 34 6th Street site, camera facing southeast, October 13, 2021.



Photograph 2: View of 6th Street, the property at 34 6th Street and the adjacent 6th Street Playhouse, camera facing southwest, October 13, 2021.



Photograph 3: View of 34 6th Street and the adjacent 6th Street Playhouse, camera facing southwest, October 13, 2021.



Photograph 4: 6th Street Playhouse, camera facing south, October 13, 2021.



Photograph 5: 6th Street Playhouse, camera facing east, October 13, 2021.



Photograph 6: View of historic cannery ruins, camera facing northeast, October 13, 2021.



Photograph 7: View south of railroad tracks from 6th Street, October 13, 2021.



Photograph 8: Depot, camera facing west, October 13, 2021.



Photograph 9: Depot, camera facing east, October 13, 2021.