

Hardison House Development August 15, 2016

Date: August 4, 2016

To: City Council, Santa Paula

From: Sheryl Hamlin (sherylhamlin@gmail.com)

What is the path a historic rural city with a trove of California history takes in transforming itself from the category 'charming with potential' to the category 'mediocre southern California suburb'? Let us consider some recent planning action.

- Mr. Herren of Williams Homes testified at the Planning Commission meeting on May 26, 2016 (<http://citizensjournal.us/santa-paula-planning-commission-approves-santa-clarita-style-tract-development-for-historic-hardison-house/>) that he was told two and a half years ago by the Santa Paula planning staff a Planned Development (PD) would be permitted. The planning staff does NOT have the authority to grant PD status to developers. Such designation is a function of the Planning Commission and City Council. *Who is setting priorities for the Planning staff?*
- At the above mentioned Planning Commission, the commission took a break and there was discussion in the hall ostensibly between the staff and the applicant. The break was noted in this report: <http://citizensjournal.us/santa-paula-planning-commission-approves-santa-clarita-style-tract-development-for-historic-hardison-house/> After the break, Mr. Herren spoke of a "middle ground". At which point, Chris Williamson, contract planner, proposed a new design with five fewer homes. Undoubtedly, this 5 unit reduction was discussed during the break. Were any of the commissioners involved in this discussion? Mr. Herren jumped to accept this five unit reduction, indicating he came to the meeting prepared to accept a bigger reduction. And, without having seen a new site plan with the reduced number of units, the Planning Commission approved the project! How can the Planning Commission approve an INCOMPLETE project?
- At an event held at a ranch in Wheeler Canyon earlier this year, I asked the owners if they felt it possible to move and renovate either of their two barns for \$250,000, one of which is 50 years old and the other is 100 years old. They just rolled their eyes. Williams Homes said their budget for barn moving and renovation is \$250,000. Has anyone seen the bid? What happens if the barn disintegrates upon relocation? *Who is setting priorities for the Planning staff?*
- Why are no meetings of the Historic Preservation Committee ever called? As Jana Minsk, Planning Director, explained in her budget presentation to council for the FY 2015-2016 budget, this group is under the purview of her department.

At video time 4:16:02 of the Regular City Council meeting of May 4, 2015 budget session ([video here](#)), Planning Director Minsk presented the following organizational hierarchy. Note positions of historic preservation: Historic Preservation Commission (aka Planning Commission) and Design Assistance Committee.

Hardison House Development August 15, 2016



During her presentation to council, Minsk said one of the goals of the department was to achieve “compatible use”. She also said “I will admit the Design Assistance Committee has not met in a long time because there have been no historic applications” (4:18:23 on the video). The Historic Preservation Committee should be a Brown Act Commission, just like the Planning Commission, with regularly scheduled meetings, agendas, minutes and members chosen from the public whose charter is to review work done to any property over a certain age, to review historic designations and to suggest others for historic designation.

Why would an application for any work on a property such as the Hardison Ranch with its age and involvement in the history of the community and the county NOT HAVE TRIGGERED preservation meetings AUTOMATICALLY by the Planning Director? How is the “compatibility” goal fulfilled with the Williams Homes project? *Who is setting priorities for the Planning staff?*

- The National Trust for Historic Preservation maintains a list of historic properties for sale which can be viewed here: <http://historicrealestate.preservationnation.org/> When the local realtor was having problems selling the house why was no suggestion made to the owner(s) or realtor about the use of this service? Is there anyone versed in historic properties on the planning staff? Why, in a supposed historic city, would there not be someone with historic credentials on staff? *Who is setting priorities for the Planning staff?*
- Recently the Limoneira-Lewis group was awarded a planning award by the California American Planning Association. Note the Central Coast member of this Planning Association is Chris Williamson, now a contract planner with the city of Santa Paula working on the Hardison project. With no LEED, no transit planning, no solar, no recycled water, no multi-generational consideration of housing and a site plan that actually did not fit the number of homes represented, why would this circa 1960 tract plan ever be considered for an award?

Hardison House Development August 15, 2016

One can only question the award based on the planning relationships which would certainly not be considered arm's length. The chart below labeled 'Section Directors' is taken from the website of the California Board of the American Planning Association: <https://www.apacalifornia.org/about/apa-california-board/>

SECTION DIRECTORS		
Office	Name/Phone	Address
Central 2 Years Term Expires 12/31/16	Benjamin A. Kimball 559.623.0455 (w) bkimball@tularecog.org	Tulare County Association of Governments 210 N. Church Street Visalia CA 93291
Central Coast 2 Years Term Expires 12/31/17	Christopher Williamson, AICP 213.509.1213 (w) 805.385.7417 (f) chris.williamson@oxnard.org	City of Oxnard 214 South C Street Oxnard CA 93030
Inland Empire 2 Years Term Expires 12/31/16	Christopher J. Gray, AICP 951-955-8403 (w) 951.787.7991 (f) gray@wrcog.cog.ca.us	Western Riverside Council of Governments 4080 Lemon Street, 3rd Floor, MS 1032 Riverside CA 92501-3069

Note that Chris Williamson also wrote the MND (Mitigated Negative Declaration) for the Hardison Project and responded to all citizen commentary received about this project.

And, as for Limoneira, why would Planning allow the row of historic trees shown on their web site to be removed/demolished from the property? Where are these historic trees on the new site plan?



Hardison House Development August 15, 2016

- Has the Planning Staff or the Council read of the economic benefits of historic preservation? The site “Impacts of Historic Property and District Designation” would be beneficial:
<http://www.achp.gov/economic-designation.html>

The City of Tucson made the statement shown below in 2007. The full report may be read here:

http://www.preservationnj.org/site/ExpEng/images/images/pdfs/Historic%20District%20benefits_Mabry_%206-7-07.pdf

Tucson statement:

document this effect of historic district status on property values. A study of the Speedway-Drachman National Register Historic District in Tucson showed that between 1987 and 2007 the average assessed value of homes in this district appreciated 15 percent higher than the average in a nearby neighborhood with housing stock of similar age, construction, and design (L'Orange 2007:4). A study of 25,975 single family homes sold in Phoenix in 2005, including 212 located in National Register historic districts, showed that historic designation increased the average marketable sales price of a house by 31%, or more than \$100,000 (Poppen 2007:7). A study in Mesa comparing house market value changes between 1997-2004 in the Mesa Evergreen National Register Historic District compared to those in two comparable, undesignated neighborhoods identified a +26 percent difference in the historic district (Bellavia 2007:3-4).

Next Steps

Following actions and history of the Hardison Ranch project and those who have deemed to sit in judgment of its historical worth reveals much in the answer to the question posed originally.

What is the path a historic rural city with a trove of California history takes in transforming itself from the category 'charming with potential' to the category 'mediocre southern California suburb'?

The Wall Street Journal published an article “America’s New Towns: Housing Development that Recreates Village Life” which can be read at this link: <http://www.wsj.com/articles/new-communities-designed-to-look-like-old-fashioned-small-towns-1470320477?mod=e2fb>

One of the projects mentioned in the Wall Street Journal article is Historic Senoia in Georgia. The town’s motto is “25 miles and 100 years from Atlanta”, implying that they are preserving the charm of the historic main street of Senola and building around it. Here is link: <http://www.historicsenoia.com/projectoverview.html> A look at the Senoia Main Street is reminiscent of Santa Paula’s Main Street which is shown in the next picture. The link to the project is here: <http://www.historicsenoia.com/commercial.html>

Hardison House Development August 15, 2016



Santa Paula's Hardison Ranch (or the Limoneira/Lewis project) could be the perfect setting for a project of this type, if there was an ounce of creativity in the applicant or a goal of the staff. Many other ideas come to mind for this property: small B&B, horse rescue, family home, retreat, and more. Agriburbia is not just a passing fad: <http://www.agriburbia.com/>

The desperate rush to fill in a check on the city's Housing Element cannot justify the proposed Williams Home project. The scar this project will make on the historic fabric of the city is irreparable.

Sheryl Hamlin