

September 6, 2007

**Historic Landmarks Advisory Commission
Hearing of September 10, 2007**

**To: Eileen Wyckoff, Chair
S.B. County Historic Landmarks Commission**

**Re: Discussion Item #8
(To be read into the minutes by Deborah Schwartz)**

BOTANIC GARDEN MEADOW TERRACE PROJECT

The County of Santa Barbara designated the Botanic Garden a historic landmark with the intention to protect this cultural landscape in the event that the Garden's upcoming development and expansion project might compromise signature historic features of this community resource. Incorporating language identifying 1) seven specific features or structures, and prohibiting these features from demolition partially or entirely unless express consent in writing is first had from HLAC; and 2) based on the language of the Resolution, the Board of Supervisors designated as a Landmark the entirety of parcel numbers 23-340-13, 23-340-14 and 23-340-15. As the Meadow Terrace project is within the identified protected parcels, HLAC Bi-Laws give the Commission the authority to review projects affecting the landmark. In addition, HLAC has the authority to enforce the resolution if an applicant proposes a project that "may affect" a designated historic landmark, even if the project, in the end, is found in conformity with the resolution. It became clear, at a public August 22, 2007 site visit that the Meadow section of the Botanic Garden was undergoing a major landscaping change requiring a Substantial Conformity Determination in the very middle of the landmark. As HLAC is within its mandate to take action to inform appropriate offices of a failure to clear this project through the Commission, I respectfully request that the project be red tagged for violating County Code. Section 18-A-8 charges the Commission with the responsibility for the enforcement of this chapter. It is my opinion that the Meadow Terrace project is not in compliance with Resolution 2003-059. Furthermore, it is within the HLAC's prerogative to determine that a given project does not fit within the exemptions listed in the resolution. The owner can decide that their project is exempt, but the Commission can disagree and take appropriate action, and this is why the Commission must take action to stop construction on this project in this location.

Section 2.B.i of SB County Historic Landmark Resolution 2003-059 1) describes the historic use of the SBBG, 2) it describes the Landmark's "historic landscape design concept" and 3) it prohibits changes to the Landmark that substantially deviate from the "historic landscape design concept" or "historic use" of the Landmark without the express consent of the Historic Landmarks Advisory Commission. The unique feature of the Meadow, since its inception has been a native California plant display garden, created in a natural setting with a minimum of man made objects or buildings. At the time of the 2003 landmark designation, plant communities within the Meadow with boundaries of native ceanothus railings, were linked by dirt trails and provided experiences of serenity, sweeping views and native plant displays in a natural landscape.

The Botanic Garden's imposing 4,025 sq. ft. Meadow Terrace Project contains non-native materials, bulldozed natural landscape contours and introduces a large, contrived urban hardscape into a tranquil meadow. This is a severe departure from the original design, creates serious and contentious public concern and should have appeared at the Historic Landmarks Advisory Commission for discretionary review. The wording of the Resolution requiring a determination of the application of that exemption of "substantial deviation" implies a discretionary review by the appropriate decision makers, not the applicant's discretion of whether to apply a SCD.

In light of the Garden's understandable desire for a location to hold their private parties, corporate events and fund raisers, I recommend the following alternative to the location of the Meadow Terrace Project. Relocate the 4,000 sq. ft. exhibit/events terrace project to the patio and greenhouse area between the Luth Maria Riggs Library, and the Mission Creek gorge. A relocation of the Garden's green houses currently used for plant sales would open and expand an existing paved area with access to electricity, water, and the possibilities of protection from weather, sewer and kitchen facilities – all those amenities necessary for fundraising activities, weddings, lectures or special exhibits/projects.

The above alternative location would maintain the tradition of tranquility as one walks through the Meadow just as the Chumash, Spanish, Mexican, European and American settlers have walked this landscape before us. We are moved by the fact that the Botanic Garden was created as a respite from the urbanization that was inevitable in Mission Canyon, and we are obliged to protect this design concept in this identified location.

I encourage my fellow members of HLAC to recommend removal of the newly installed, manmade stone wall structure and Oklahoma flagstone flooring that distracts from the original "historic design concept" of the SBBG Meadow and to support the project's relocation to a site that the Garden designers and the County Planning Commission deem accessible and efficient for the Garden's fundraising purposes. If my vote is needed, please accept my proxy to relocate the current construction away from the Meadow, and restore the Meadow's characteristic "system of trails through and around plant communities, displays, exhibits and structures," (often referred to as the historic design concept), with the possibility of the replacement of a large oak tree or native tree in the location of the felled oak. There is an "historic landscape design concept" factor that is the responsibility of HLAC to determine and that is, "Does the new terrace project fit within the perspective of what was meant by 'historic landscape design concept.'" This project is not exempt under Section 2.B.ii and it clearly is one that may affect the historic landmark. It is no accident that everyone, including the SB Botanic Garden capitalizes the word "Meadow", as this ageless Garden feature has become a significant icon to Santa Barbara County and to California's Cultural Landscapes. Great care should be taken in a determination that this project is one that is not an affront to an appropriate project review process and a departure from the Resolution's historic landscape design concept.

Sincerely,

Sue Adams
Historic Landmarks Advisory Commissioner

cc:

David Ward, Deputy Director of Planning and Development
Anne Almy, Supervising Planner
Alex Tuttle, Planner
Kevin Ready, Senior Deputy County Counsel
Mary Pat Barry, Deputy County Counsel
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Members of Historic Landmarks Advisory Commission
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