

April 17, 2017

Board President London Breed
and Members of the Board of Supervisors
c/o Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place
San Francisco, California 94102

Re: Appeal of CEQA Exemption Determination
953 Treat Avenue (APN 3639/028)
Planning Department Case 2015-006510CUA/VAR

Honorable Board President Breed and Supervisors,

In support of this appeal, I assert that, in my professional opinion, the 1887 residence at 953 Treat Avenue qualifies as an historic resource subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). (CEQA Guidelines section 15300.2 subdivision (f).)

With regard to my professional qualifications, I am a San Francisco-based Architectural Historian and Preservation Planner in private practice, having nearly twenty years of professional experience since completing a Masters degree in Historic Preservation of Architecture. I have authored 100s of historic resource evaluations, including National Register nominations, historic structure reports, master planning studies, preservation plans and surveys. I meet *The Secretary of the Interior's Professional Qualifications Standards* in History, Historic Preservation Planning and Architectural History.

The basis for and import of this appeal goes beyond the current project. The Planning Department's treatment 953 Treat Avenue as exempt from environmental review is illustrative of how the status of older, potentially historic San Francisco properties is debated. It seems apparent that the question of historic status is influenced by the advocacy of project applicants rather than the actual status of the site as a qualified resource. Historic status is a matter of research and identification and it must be considered in project design and adaptive reuse, not as a response to proposed development.

In 2010 the City recognized that 953 Treat Avenue is eligible for historic status, assigning a status code of 3CS [appears eligible for the California Register as an individual property through survey evaluation]. The project applicant, seeking demolition, has now submitted another opinion discounting that status without adequate supporting facts.

By granting this appeal and affirming the historic status of 953 Treat Avenue, based on the evidence presented below and in the project file, the Board of Supervisors can assure that the Planning Department more carefully identifies the historic status of the

Katherine T. Petrin | Architectural Historian & Preservation Planner
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City's resources on their merits without irrelevant consideration of project applicants' desire for demolition. The result will be the protection and revitalization of our City's historic resources as project applicants understand the required parameters of development to retain and incorporate qualified historic structures – when appropriate and feasible. This will also result in the preservation of the City's existing housing stock.

The proposed demolition of 953 Treat Avenue highlights various issues:

- On November 30, 2010, the Planning Department determined that in 953 Treat is eligible for the California Register as an individual property through the Department's South Mission Historic Resources Survey. [**Attachment 1**]
- In conflict with the Planning Department's prior survey findings, the Department issued a Categorical Exemption Determination on March 25, 2016 in connection with a pending project to demolish 953 Treat, finding it not historic and therefore not requiring any environmental review.
- A historic building should not be evaluated multiple times resulting in differing findings, especially in light of a pending development project. Historic status determination should not be a response to proposed development.
- As a small residence on a large lot, 953 Treat can be retained and incorporated into a re-designed project providing an equivalent amount of housing. In fact, a 2007 proposal to re-develop the lot was approved [but not built] that would have retained the historic house and added four new units of housing and PDR uses. As the 2007 approved project illustrates, a feasible and viable preservation alternative exists that supports meaningful preservation planning while adding new housing on an infill lot. [**Attachments 4-6**]
- This appeal is not an attempt to thwart development; it is an attempt to rectify a potentially missed opportunity on the part of the City to foster meaningful preservation planning (and retention of existing housing), while providing new housing units.
- **The big question is why tear down a 130-year old cottage, vernacular worker housing, that barely survived the 1906 earthquake and fire (under uniquely San Francisco circumstances) when instead it could be made part of a new infill development that would satisfy *multiple* City goals by building an equivalent amount of housing AND respecting preservation policies.**

The follow paragraphs support the points made above.

Survey Findings and Other Evaluations of 953 Treat Avenue

In 2010, as part of the Planning Department's South Mission Historic Resources Survey, 953 Treat was identified and evaluated, receiving status code: 3CS [appears eligible for the California Register as an individual property through survey evaluation]. **[Attachment 1]**

The South Mission Survey was conducted by Planning Department staff, which retained the firm Page & Turnbull as consultants. Page & Turnbull inspected 953 Treat and noted that the building was in "good condition."¹ **[Attachment 8]**

In 2015, the new owner of 953 Treat retained Page & Turnbull as preservation consultant to assess the property's historic significance and complete a Historic Resource Evaluation (HRE). In conflict with the prior survey findings, the HRE concluded that the residence does not qualify as a historic resource for purposes of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).²

On March 25, 2016, the Planning Department concurred with the Page & Turnbull report and issued a CEQA Categorical Exemption Determination finding that no historic resource is present on the site either as an individual resource or as a contributor to a district.

On February 16, 2017, the Planning Commission approved a Conditional Use Authorization for the demolition project.

The 3CS status code [appears eligible for the California Register as an individual property through survey evaluation] appeared on the San Francisco Planning Department Property Information Database until February 17, 2017, the day after the Planning Commission voted to approve the project, at which time it was removed from the website.

953 Treat Avenue, a Historic Resource

In my professional opinion, the residence at 953 Treat Avenue is a historic resource eligible for the California Register. **[Attachment 2]** Constructed in the Italianate style in 1887, the 130-year old structure is a good example of vernacular worker housing and is significant for its association with John Center, pioneer, builder and businessman. Center owned the building at 953 Treat during the 1906 earthquake and fires. He constructed the water system that saved this building and hundreds of others in the area from the post-earthquake fires. **[Attachment 3]** These events and the significance of John Center and the John Center Water Works are documented in *City Within a City: a Historic*

¹ Primary Record, 953 Treat Avenue, by Page & Turnbull, dated April 3, 2008.

² *Historic Resource Evaluation, 953 Treat Avenue, San Francisco, California* by Page & Turnbull, dated 27 April 2015.

Context Statement for San Francisco's Mission District, prepared by the Planning Department.³

Historic Significance

San Francisco Water Department records indicate the building was constructed in 1887. The building is associated with John Center (1816-1908), a pioneering figure “who was later dubbed the ‘father of the Mission.’” Center was instrumental in the construction of the plank road and streetcar lines. He was a major landowner and subdivided large expanses of land to facilitate new streets and housing.⁴ More importantly, though not noted in the Page & Turnbull *Historic Resource Evaluation*, he designed and built the John Center Water Works, a fact that is directly relevant to the survival of the subject building in 1906.

John Center Corporation owned 953 Treat from 1894-1924, during which time the building survived the 1906 earthquake and the fire that destroyed much of the northern Mission district. The post-earthquake fire destroyed much of the South of Market District before moving into the northeast Mission. The fire was halted at 20th Street just a few blocks north of 953 Treat.⁵ The fire was extinguished because of the Center’s supply of water. A few months after the disaster, an article in the *San Francisco Chronicle* titled, “Owe their Homes to One Man’s Foresight, Hundreds of Buildings in the Mission Saved from Fire by John Center’s Private Water System,” stated:⁶

John Center now in his 90th year, came to San Francisco in 1849 and settled on the land which he and his many houses occupy... He constructed his own water system as early as 1851 and improved the original system as time advanced and the demand increased. It includes artesian wells, a large subterranean reservoir, two frame tanks with a capacity of 80,000 gallons each, fire hydrants and connections.... [After 27 hours of fighting the fire] Center saved every house he owns, not a shingle of one of his houses burned while the damage from the earthquake was trifling... This saved all the property east of Howard (now South Van Ness) and south of 14th Street.⁷

John Center died in 1908. His obituary reiterated his contribution in saving hundreds of buildings in the Mission District from the post-earthquake fires, stating:

³ *City Within a City: a Historic Context Statement for San Francisco’s Mission District*, prepared by the City and County of San Francisco Planning Department, dated November 2007. pps. 47, 59.

⁴ Page & Turnbull HRE, dated 27 April 2015, p. 22.

⁵ Page & Turnbull HRE, dated 27 April 2015, p. 23.

⁶ “Owe Their Homes to One Man’s Foresight, Hundreds of Buildings in the Mission Saved from Fire by John Center’s Private Water System” in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, 5 July 1906, p. 12.

⁷ *Ibid.*

One of Center's most important acts was the boring of wells on his property at Sixteenth and Shotwell streets in 1881. Cut off from the supply of the Spring Water Company, the Mission was absolutely without fire protection and Center prepared for the fire which he feared would come, although it was not until 25 years later that his foresight was proved correct and the wells he had dug proved of inestimable benefit not alone in saving his property but also of those around him.⁸

A Contributor to the Historic Character of the Streetscape

Built in 1887 as a wood framed, single-family residence in the Italianate style, it is a 1-story over raised basement structure. Character-defining features include a wood porch, a bracketed cornice, sash windows with hoods, primary entrance door below a bracketed door hood, and a high false-front parapet at the roofline.⁹

The Urban Design Element of the City's General Plan advocates for visual diversity among buildings and streetscapes and states that "the relationships of building forms to one another and to other elements of the city pattern should be moderated so that the effects will be complementary and harmonious" meaning that buildings of differing type, scale, and character side by side is desirable. This is another reason to retain 953 Treat Avenue and incorporate it into the proposed project.

Integrity

As was typical for modest 19th century vernacular residences, 953 Treat was subject to alterations, most unrecorded and unpermitted. After initial construction in 1887, the building incurred a series of small projecting volumes. No permits are extant. By 1914 the structure was fully built out. Alterations carried out at an early date would be considered historic in their own right and do not detract from overall integrity. 953 Treat retains a high degree of original material and its original character-defining architectural features.

The survey form, a Primary Record (DPR form), completed in 2008 for the South Mission Historic Resources Survey, noted that the residence remained in good condition. 953 Treat retains a sufficient degree of integrity, which as defined by the standards of the National Register of Historic Places, allows a property to convey its significance and authenticity.

Eligibility for California Register of Historical Resources

Based on my background and experience, it is my professional opinion that the 1887 residence qualifies for individual listing in the California Register of Historical Resources. Significant as a survivor of the 1906 earthquake and due to its association with John Center and the John Center Water Works, 953 Treat qualifies for listing, as an individual

⁸ "Father of Mission, John Center, Dies" in the *San Francisco Call*, 20 July 1908, Vol. 104, p.1.

⁹ Primary Record, 953 Treat Avenue, by Page & Turnbull, dated April 3, 2008.

resource, on the California Register of Historical Resources at the local level under Criteria 1 and 2.

A Great Preservation Alternative

953 Treat Avenue is a small-scale residence measuring 738 sq ft (according to Planning Department records). It sits on an irregular-shaped lot that measures 4,275 square feet (or 3,750 sq ft according to Planning Department records).

Because of the amount of open space on the lot, the proposed project could be easily redesigned so that the existing structure 953 Treat could be incorporated into the currently-proposed residential condominium project.

As stated above, a 2007 proposal to re-develop the lot would have retained historic residence. The project, which was approved in 2008, was for "minor improvements" to the single family dwelling at 953 Treat and construction of PDR use, a new warehouse building, with four residential units above. [Attachments 4-6] Because of national economic conditions, the project was not built. As the 2007 approved project illustrates, a feasible and viable preservation alternative exists that supports meaningful preservation planning while adding new housing on an infill lot.

The proposed demolition of this historic 130-year old cottage requires environmental review under CEQA, unless a feasible adaptive reuse of the structure is designed into the new construction project.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Katherine T. Petrin
Architectural Historian

CC:

Office of District Supervisor Hillary Ronen
Susan Brandt-Hawley, Brandt-Hawley Law Group
Mike Buhler, San Francisco Heritage
F. Joseph Butler, AIA

Attachment 1

San Francisco Property Information Map
Public Access to Useful Property Information & Resources at the Click of a Mouse

Map Help | Your Feedback
Tell us what you think of this map.
Link Disclaimer Download Data

Step 1: Search or Click on the Map
Search Examples: 400 Van Ness Ave 0787/001
Mission and Van Ness 2015-005040PRJ
Ferry Building

953 treat [SEARCH](#)

[Measure Distance](#) [Street View](#) [Map Legend](#) [Clear Map](#)

Step 2: Review Property Information
Click tabs below to view property or parcel information

Property Zoning Preservation **Planning Apps** Building Permits Other Permits Complaints Appeals BBNS

Individual or District: Both
Further Information: [View](#)
Planning App. No.: 2005.0429E
Date: 10/14/2005
Decision: No Historic Resource Present
Individual or District:
Further Information: [View](#) [View](#)

HISTORIC SURVEYS: [MAP](#)

Parcel: 3639028
Survey Name: [South Mission Historic Resource Survey](#)
Evaluation Date: 11/30/2010
Survey Rating: 3CS
Rating Description: Appears eligible for CR as an individual property through survey evaluation.

[View DPR Survey Form for Parcel 3639028](#)

SOUTH MISSION HISTORIC RESOURCE SURVEY: [MAP](#)

Parcel: 3639/028
Address: 953 TREAT AV
Resource Attribute 1: HP2. Single Family Property
Resource Attribute 2:
Year Built: 1891
Year Built Source: SF Assessor
Architectural Style: Italianate
CHRSC: 7N
Resource Type: Individual (potential)
Resource Eligibility: not determined: requires intensive research
Historic District:
Survey Form/Photo: [Click to view Form](#)
[View South Mission Historic Resource Survey Website](#)

953 Treat, evaluated by the Planning Department in 2010 through survey as 3CS (an eligible historic resource).

Attachment 2



953 Treat, an Italianate vernacular worker's cottage, built 1887, a historic resource, proposed for demolition

Attachment 3

SAN

OWE THEIR HOMES TO ONE MAN'S FORESIGHT

Hundreds of Buildings in the Mission Saved From Fire by John Center's Private Water System.

One section of San Francisco which escaped the fire has hardly been mentioned outside. The news has been spread abroad that the greater portion of San Francisco has been destroyed by the fire of April 18th to 20th, including the entire business and manufacturing section, and the major part of the residence section. The parts which escaped destruction were enumerated, and included the Western Addition west of Franklin street, Pacific Heights, Presidio Heights, the residence section about Golden Gate Park, that portion of Hayes valley west of Octavia street, and part of the Mission beyond Twentieth street. Hundreds of houses, homes and shops east of Howard and south of Fourteenth street escaped the fire, and are as good to-day as they were before the earthquake, because the slight damage caused by the earthquake has been repaired and every trace of injury obliterated.

It has been the cause of much wonder since the fire how that particular section escaped the ravages of the flames, which swept all else in their path west of Howard street and north of Fourteenth street. Built entirely of wood, the houses stand very close together, and numerous narrow streets subdivide the thickly built squares between the main thoroughfares. Yet it escaped, and the foresight and forethought of John Center saved it.

John Center, now in his ninetyeth year, came to San Francisco in 1849, and settled on the land which he and his many houses occupy on Sixteenth, Seventeenth, Folsom, Harrison and Alabama streets. He constructed his own water system as early as 1851, and improved the original system as time advanced and the demand in-

creased. It includes artesian wells, a large subterranean reservoir, two frame tanks with a capacity of 20,000 gallons each, fire hydrants and connections. In this system the artesian wells flow into the underground cistern, from which the water is pumped into the tanks by a steam pump with a capacity of 20,000 gallons an hour.

Those who assisted in fighting the fire and succeeded in checking it and saving all of Center's property within a radius of three blocks square, including Sixteenth, Seventeenth, Folsom, Harrison, Alabama and the intervening streets, tell how that section of the city was saved from the flames.

When the fire crossed Fourteenth street the dwellers of that section put up a persistent and stubborn fight to stay its progress. With two streams of water from the John Center system four engines were supplied, and the fire checked on Fourteenth street and again on Howard street. When checked in one direction, however, the flames came back from another, and on Thursday morning returned by way of Sixteenth street.

Again the fire was checked at Howard street, after the flames had been fought incessantly for twenty-seven hours. Center saved every house he owns; not a shingle of one of his houses burned, while the damage from the earthquake was trifling, and amounted to only broken chimneys, cracked plaster and wrenched brick foundations. This, of course, saved all the property east of Howard street and south of Fourteenth street.

On Friday morning, April 20th, there remained six feet of water in the tanks, enough to have maintained two streams for fifteen more hours, or to have fed one stream indefinitely from the large subterranean reservoir.

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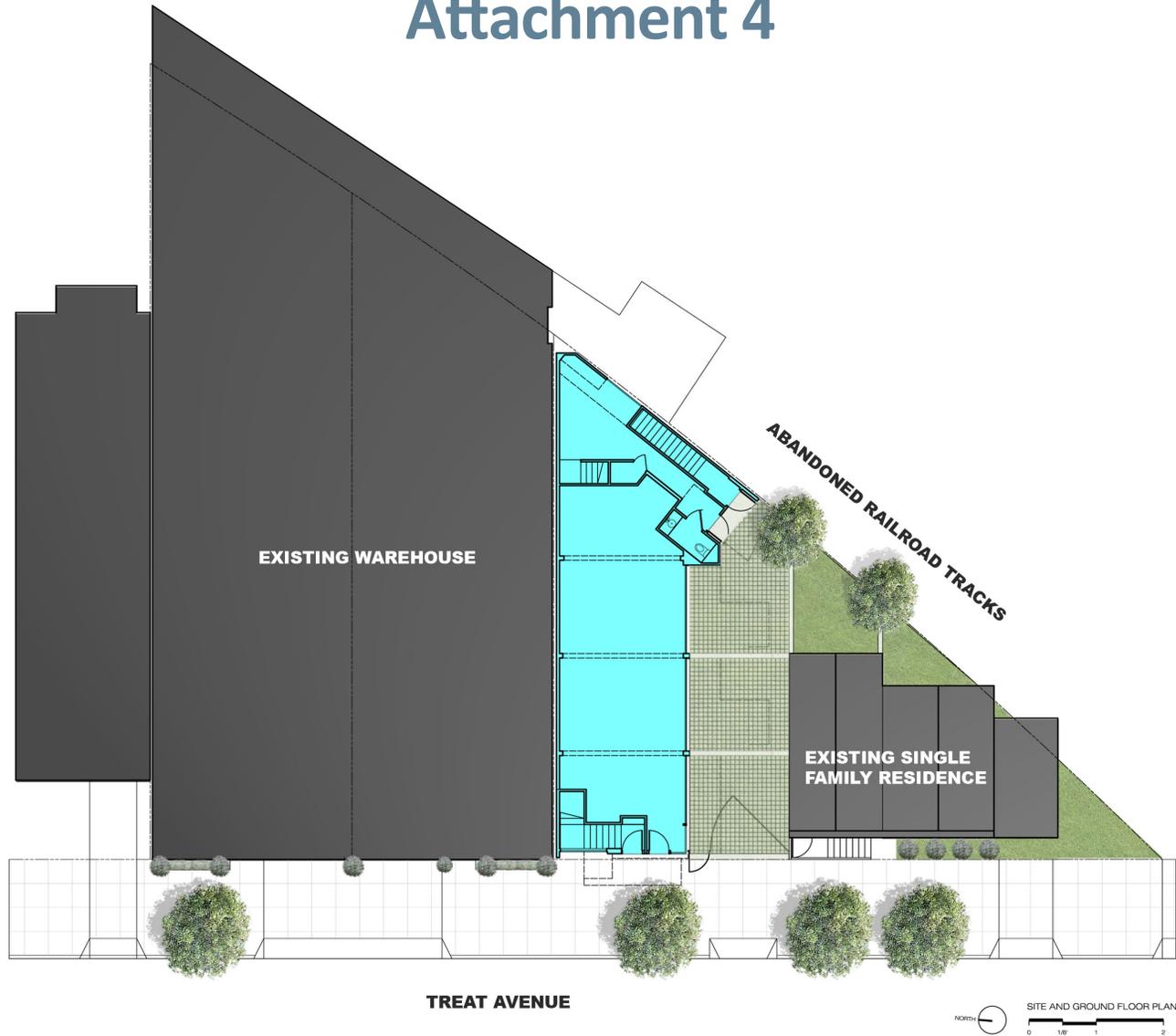
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WHEN DETECTED

Significant for its association with John Center, builder of the water system that saved this building and hundreds of others in the area from the 1906 post-earthquake fires; also documented in *City Within a City: a Historic Context Statement for San Francisco's Mission District*, prepared by the Planning Department (2007)

Attachment 4



953 Treat (Existing Single Family Residence at right) is a 738 sq ft building on an approximately 4,000 sq ft lot, leaving a lot of already vacant space for development.

Attachment 5



An approved 2007-08 proposal shows historic house (at right) and new units (at left); this is not the current plan, but it is a viable preservation option.

Attachment 6



The approved 2007-08 proposal would have retained historic house (R) and added new housing units and PDR use (center); this not the current plan.

Attachment 7



This illustrates the massing of the current proposal; footprint fills site; historic house would be demolished.

Attachment 8

State of California - The Resources Agency	Primary # _____
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION	HRI # _____
PRIMARY RECORD	Trinomial _____
Other Listings _____	CHR Status Code: _____
Review Code _____	Reviewer _____ Date _____

Page 1 of 2 Resource Name or #: (Assigned by recorder) 953 TREAT AVE

P1. Other Identifier:

*P2. Location: Not for Publication Unrestricted

*a. County: San Francisco

*b. USGS Quad: San Francisco North, CA Date: 1995

c. Address: 953 TREAT AVE City: San Francisco ZIP 94110

d. UTM Zone: Easting: Northing:

e. Other Locational Data: Assessor's Parcel Number 3639 028

*P3a. Description: (Describe resource and major elements. Include design, materials, condition, alterations, size, setting, and boundaries)

953 Treat Avenue is located on an irregular-shaped lot with 4,275 square feet of frontage on the east side of Treat Avenue, between 22nd and 23rd Streets. Built in 1891, 953 Treat Avenue is a 1-story over raised basement, wood frame single family residence designed in the Italianate style. The rectangular-plan building, clad in wood shingles on the primary façade and channel drop wood siding on the secondary façades, is capped by a gable roof. The foundation is not visible. The primary façade faces west and includes 3 structural bays. There is a garage addition to the south with a shed roof, and another addition to the rear of the building with a shed roof. Typical fenestration consists of double-hung wood-sash windows with hoods. The primary entrance is located on the north façade and features a paneled wood door with a bracketed hood, accessed by a flight of wood stairs. Architectural and site features include a wood porch, a bracketed cornice, and a high false-front parapet at the roofline.

The building appears to be in good condition.

*P3b. Resource Attributes: (List attributes and codes) HP2. Single Family Property

*P4. Resources Present: Building Structure Object Site District Element of District Other

P5a. Photo



P5b. Description of Photo:

View of primary façade looking north.
3/17/2008

*P6. Date Constructed/Age:

Historic Prehistoric Both

1891 SF Assessor's Office

*P7. Owner and Address

HEINZER ERNEST R
933 TREAT AVE
933 TREAT AVE
SAN FRANCISCO CA

*P8. Recorded By:

Page & Turnbull, Inc. (GH/CD)
724 Pine Street
San Francisco, CA 94108

*P9. Date Recorded: 4/3/2008

*P10. Survey Type:

Reconnaissance

*P11. Report Citation: (Cite survey report and other sources, or enter "None")

Eastern Neighborhoods Mission Survey

*Attachments: NONE Location Map Sketch Map Continuation Sheet Building, Structure, and Object Record

Archaeological Record District Record Linear Feature Record Milling Station Record Rock Art Record

Artifact Record Photograph Record Other (list):

DPR 523 A (1/95)

*Required Information

953 Treat was surveyed as part of the Planning Department's South Mission Historic Resources Survey, 2008-11.