



City of Sunnyvale

Agenda Item

25-0025

Agenda Date: 2/13/2025

2025 COUNCIL STUDY ISSUE

NUMBER

CDD 25-04

TITLE Expanding the Role of the Heritage Preservation Commission

BACKGROUND

Lead Department: Community Development Department

Support Departments: Office of the City Manager

Office of the City Attorney

Finance Department

Sponsor(s): Councilmembers: Mehlinger, Cisneros, Din, Klein, Melton, Sell, Srinivasan

History: 1 year ago: N/A

2 years ago: N/A

Council Strategic Priority: No

(At time of sponsorship)

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

What precipitated this study?

The City Council sponsored this study issue at their regular meeting on December 10, 2024. The Study would consider if the Heritage Preservation Commission’s (HPC) duties should be expanded, similar to the Arts Commission taking an active role in promoting arts in the community. The outreach could entail collaboration with the Sunnyvale Heritage Park Museum staff, hosting events, and advising on historic plaques.

Article X of the City’s Charter establishes the HPC and specifies that it acts in an advisory capacity to the City Council in all matters pertaining to heritage resources, landmark sites, and landmark districts. Council Policy 7.2.19, Boards and Commissions, expands upon the bylaws and specific duties of the commission; this expanded list includes:

- vii. Participation in the development and promotion of museums and City archives.

The City’s General Plan Community Character Chapter outlines goals and policies to enhance, preserve, and protect Sunnyvale’s heritage, including natural features, the built environment, and significant artifacts. These include:

- **Goal CC-6** Knowledge of Sunnyvale’s Heritage,
- Policy CC-6.1 Develop and Expand Working Relationships with External Organizations
- Policy CC-6.2 Promote the Understanding of Heritage Preservation Benefits
- Policy CC-6.2a Develop a Comprehensive Outreach Program

The chapter states that programs which involve communication and other forms of outreach should be given priority, such as partnerships with other groups which can provide information and support for the City's heritage preservation activities. Moreover, a collection of oral histories from older residents should be conducted. The chapter also notes that a program of outreach and involvement with immigrant communities should be developed to reflect diverse traditions in Sunnyvale's heritage.

Chapter 19.96 of the Sunnyvale Municipal Code implements the General Plan's heritage preservation-related policies and further outlines the responsibilities of the HPC. In addition to land use responsibilities, the HPC reviews and comments on external agency matters which have a bearing upon heritage resources; promotes heritage resource public information programs; cooperates with other private and public agency interests and programs; investigates public or private fund sources to promote preservation of heritage resources; and encourages citizen participation.

What are the key elements of the study?

The study would examine how the HPC and City Council envision an expanded role for the commission and whether there is collective interest in taking on additional duties. The Ralph M. Brown Act ("Brown Act") in Government Code Section 54950 limits the types of activities that can occur with a quorum of commissioners outside of public meetings. Typically, no more than three commissioners (of a 7-member commission) can attend external City-sponsored events at the same time unless a public meeting notice is posted on the City's website and facilities. For example, the City advertised and noticed a public hearing when the HPC led a walking tour of the 100 Block of South Murphy Avenue. There are several limited exceptions to the Brown Act, such as community events not organized by the City of Sunnyvale, provided that a majority of members do not discuss among themselves business that is within the commission's subject matter jurisdiction.

The proposed study issue referenced the Arts Commission as an example of a board and commission that takes a more active role in community participation. The Arts Commission staff liaison stated that some commissioners in the past expressed an interest in more community involvement. In recent years, commissioners attended City-sponsored events such as Hands on the Arts, Art in the Park, and participated in Arts and Humanities Month. Commissioner attendance was scheduled in shifts of two (for a 5-member commission) to resolve Brown Act concerns. The commission's expanded role has evolved over the years with varying levels of interest from individual commissioners.

The Arts Commission staff liaison found a considerable increase in staff time and resources for commissioner's attendance at events, upwards of 40 hours per staff person, per event. Additional staff work has involved planning, coordination, materials purchase, and logistics management. Some of the additional duties are also irregularly scheduled, which can result in staffing capacity considerations and time spent managing commissioner and public expectations.

If the HPC and Council are interested in an expanded role, the study could include:

- Individual interviews with current and past commissioners.
- Consultation with other external historic preservation organizations, such as the Sunnyvale Heritage Park Museum on opportunities for collaboration.
- Researching peer jurisdictions for their level of involvement in historic preservation activities.
- Researching peer jurisdictions for their staff resources dedicated to historic preservation.
- Public outreach and study sessions.

- Analyzing how General Plan outreach goals can be realized.
- Development of a formal policy and/or Sunnyvale Municipal Code changes to memorialize additional duties and regular event participation.

Estimated years to complete study: 1-2 years

FISCAL IMPACT

Cost to Conduct Study

Level of staff effort required (opportunity cost):	Moderate
Funding Required for Non-Budgeted Costs:	\$30,000
Funding Source:	Will seek budget supplement - General Fund

A consultant could assist in public outreach efforts, coordination with Heritage Park Museum staff, interviews with past and current commissioners, and researching how other similarly-sized cities promote local history, including whether there is dedicated historic preservation staff.

Cost to Implement Study Results

Unknown. Study would include assessment of potential costs, including capital and operating, as well as revenue/savings.

EXPECTED CITY COUNCIL, BOARD OR COMMISSION PARTICIPATION

Council-Approved Work Plan: No
Council Study Session: Yes
Reviewed by Boards/Commissions: Heritage Preservation Commission

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Defer. This policy issue merits discussion at a future Study Issues Workshop.

The study is not related to a Council Strategic Priority. There are several existing General Plan Community Character Chapter policies to promote knowledge of Sunnyvale's heritage through expanded community outreach efforts. The Sunnyvale Municipal Code also includes related responsibilities. With this existing policy guidance, an expanded role could be achieved without initiating a new study issue. However, funding and staffing limitations should be taken into consideration if additional HPC duties are desired.

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