



# City of Sunnyvale

## Agenda Item

19-0446

Agenda Date: 6/5/2019

### REPORT TO HERITAGE PRESERVATION COMMISSION

#### **SUBJECT**

Updates to the Design Guidelines for the Murphy Station Heritage Landmark District: Forward a Recommendation to the City Council to Adopt a Resolution Updating the Design Guidelines for the Murphy Station Heritage Landmark District, and Find that the Action is Exempt from CEQA Pursuant to CEQA Guideline Sections 15308 and 15061(b)(3). (Study Issue)

#### **BACKGROUND**

The 100 block of South Murphy Avenue is bounded by Washington Avenue, W. Evelyn Avenue, S. Sunnyvale Avenue, and S. Frances Street, and is a part of the City's Downtown Specific Plan (Block 2 - described as the Murphy Station Heritage Landmark District). As Sunnyvale's historic commercial core, this district developed along Evelyn Avenue and the railroad tracks at the intersection of Murphy Avenue (originally called Main Street) and characterized the heart of the fledgling City. Preservation of this district began in 1979 with the first inventory of historic resources conducted by the City of Sunnyvale.

In 1980, the City prepared the first design guidelines for the buildings on the 100 block of South Murphy Avenue, including store fronts on Evelyn Avenue and Washington Avenue, which was the remaining section of the old Sunnyvale downtown. At the time the guidelines were adopted, Murphy Avenue was in poor condition and many of the buildings had been renovated over the years with cheap materials that were not consistent with the architecture of the structures or their surroundings. The original design guidelines document included a development plan, which proposed significant public improvements to the street, as well as design guidelines to foster thoughtful and appropriate renovations to the existing structures. Following the adoption of the design guidelines in 1981, the City Council designated the area the Murphy Station Heritage Landmark District (District). A map of the District can be found in Attachment 4. After the design guidelines were adopted and the District was designated, the City invested more than \$2.2 million in public improvements and offered low interest loans to the property owners to make private improvements.

In the 1994 guidelines, it states that "31 of the 36 buildings within the ... District had been renovated or newly constructed" and the 1980 guideline document had been used as it was intended, but needed an update to maintain its usefulness. Note that the total number of buildings within the District is currently 31, as several pairs of adjacent buildings were merged with each other over the last 25 years. The current version of the Murphy Avenue Design Guidelines was adopted in 1994 and contains a mix of information from the original guidelines as well as updated design guidelines for renovations of the existing buildings. A link to the existing design guideline document has been provided in Attachment 5. While it is useful as a planning tool for property owners within the District, it is often described as being too vague or general to provide applicants, staff, the public or the Heritage Preservation Commission (HPC), the information necessary to make decisions on Resource or Landmark Alteration Permits (RAPs or LAPs). Therefore, in 2014, the HPC proposed a study issue

19-0446

Agenda Date: 6/5/2019

to update the design guidelines for the District (Attachment 2), and the City Council ranked the study issue highly in 2016.

The City Council is scheduled to consider this item on July 16, 2019.

## **EXISTING POLICY**

### **General Plan**

#### *Community Character Chapter*

**Goal CC-5** - To enhance, preserve and protect Sunnyvale's heritage including natural features, the built environment and significant artifacts.

Policy CC-5.1 - Preserve existing landmarks and cultural resources and their environmental settings.

Policy CC-5.2 - Enhance the visual character of the City by preserving diverse as well as harmonious architectural styles, reflecting various phases of the City's historical development and the cultural traditions of past and present residents.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW**

The action being considered is categorically exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA") pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15308 as it is an action taken for the protection of the environment where the regulatory process involves procedures for the protection of the environment. Projects that are subject to the new guidelines will be evaluated pursuant to CEQA on an individual basis, and the purpose of the Design Guidelines is to ensure that such projects do not have a significant effect on heritage resources. In addition, the adoption of updated Design Guidelines falls within the general exception in Section 15061(b)(3) of the CEQA Guidelines because it can be seen with certainty that the project has no potential for resulting in either a direct physical change in the environment, or a reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment.

## **DISCUSSION**

The earlier versions of design guidelines consisted of general principles that attempted to address a District that varies greatly in architectural style with a holistic approach. This approach provided sufficient direction in certain circumstances, but also created some instances where situations specific to a building were not addressed, or the guidelines did not provide enough direction on updates to the rear or side elevations. In addition, due to the lack of detail in the existing guidelines, less attention has been spent by staff, and the HPC, on the rear and side elevations in past reviews of LAPs and RAPs. This lack of detail has resulted in instances where the front elevation of a building looks well maintained, but the rear and side elevations have not been held to the same standard.

When selecting a consultant to provide support to staff in the update of the District guidelines, staff was intrigued with the proposal submitted by the firm *architecture + history, llc*, which suggested an innovative idea of creating building-specific design guidelines, a concept that will better assist future LAP and RAP decisions. Staff presented the idea to the HPC at a Study Session in 2017 and the HPC quickly showed receptiveness and support for the idea, and how it should help streamline future decisions on LAPs and RAPs.

## **Design Guidelines for the Murphy Station Heritage Landmark District**

The draft design guidelines for the District (Attachment 3) are comprised of a brief foreword, a map of

---

the District, acknowledgements, an introduction, general design guidelines for all buildings within the District, building specific design guidelines, and design guidelines for new construction (additions or new buildings).

### ***Foreword, Map, Acknowledgements, and Introduction***

The guidelines begin with general information on the District, including an updated map showing the primary, secondary and tertiary contributors to the District. The primary contributors are those buildings that were built before 1940 that are largely original, while secondary contributors are those on S. Murphy Avenue that were built after 1940 or those that may be partially original but have been heavily modified, and the tertiary contributors are those within the District but not located on S. Murphy Avenue (and built after 1940). The background information, and most of the historical photos, were largely provided by the Sunnyvale Heritage Park Museum whose staff assisted the City in this process.

### ***General Design Guidelines for the Murphy Station Heritage Landmark District***

The guidelines provide general direction in the following areas:

- Appropriate building materials for use within the District;
- Awnings;
- Use of color on historic buildings;
- Windows and window displays;
- Lighting;
- Signage;
- Treatment of the two pedestrian breezeways leading from S. Murphy Avenue to the public parking lots on S. Frances Street and S. Sunnyvale Avenue;
- Rear facades of the buildings; and,
- Usage of the rear areas of the buildings/lots.

This section is intended to expand the themes of the 1994 guidelines, while also adding new guidelines that can be used to generally describe appropriate compatible updates to the District. More focus has been made to promote updates to the rear elevations of the buildings, and to encourage the activation of the space in the rear of some of the buildings to create more vibrancy adjacent to the public parking lots. In addition, a new section “rear areas - uses” has been added to address a common issue of trash cans/dumpsters conflicting with outdoor seating areas/walkways/public parking in the rear of the buildings.

### ***Building Specific Guidelines***

This section contains design guidelines for each of the 31 individual properties within the District. It contains information based on the tenant and conditions of the buildings as of December 2018.

Each individual building page contains consistent information, including:

- Summary Information:
  - Year the building(s) were built/modified, contribution type, assessor’s parcel number, 2018 tenant, and architectural style (if applicable);
- Past Alterations:
  - A summary of major alterations that have been made to the building(s) and a description of the most recent RAP or LAP;

- Building Specific Character-Defining Features:
  - The items that make the building compatible with the District, or the specific architectural type of the building;
- Building Specific Guidelines; and
- Recommendations for Priority Improvements:
  - Items that should be modified when feasible to make the building(s) more compatible with the heritage preservation intent of the District. This section also contains information on non-permitted or prohibited items that staff found when studying the District.

### ***Design Guidelines for New Construction***

It is unlikely that many of the buildings within the District will be removed; but if that proposal occurs, it is important to retain and improve general guidelines for new construction. These guidelines would be used in addition to the general design guidelines for the District, and in cases of additions to existing structures, in conjunction with the building specific design guidelines. This section consists of guidelines in the following areas:

- Height and Bulk;
- Building Segments;
- Continuous Street Walls;
- Stylistic Details;
- Materials; and,
- Rear Areas

The design guidelines document provides clear direction to property owners, tenants, staff, the HPC, and the City Council when reviewing LAPs and RAPs. Assessing buildings individually removes most of the “gray area” that is commonly discussed when LAPs and RAPs are reviewed under the current guidelines, and should help to streamline review and facilitate informed decisions on the buildings within this important historical District.

### **FISCAL IMPACT**

The proposed amendments to the Murphy Station Heritage Landmark District Design Guidelines would have no fiscal impact on the City.

### **PUBLIC CONTACT**

Public contact regarding this item was made through the following ways:

1. Posting the Agenda for the Heritage Preservation Commission on the City’s official notice bulletin board outside City Hall and by making the agenda and report available at the Sunnyvale Public Library and on the City’s website;
2. Publication in the *Sun* newspaper at least 10 days prior to the hearings;
3. E-mail notification of the hearing dates sent to all interested parties and neighborhood associations;
4. Notices mailed to all property owners and tenants of the properties within the Murphy Station Heritage Landmark District;
5. Two community outreach meetings held to discuss the study issue on April 26 and 27, 2017;
6. Study Session with the Heritage Preservation Commission on May 3, 2017; and
7. Heritage Preservation Commission Special Meeting (Walking Tour) held on Murphy Avenue on May 22, 2019.

**Community Outreach Meetings**

Staff mailed notices to all property owners and tenants of the businesses within the District, and hand delivered notices to tenants, for the community outreach meetings held on April 26 and 27, 2017. One property owner (101 S. Murphy Avenue) attended the meeting and asked questions about the study, but had no comments. Two other property owners called staff after the meeting to ask about the study, but also had no comments at that time.

**Heritage Preservation Commission Study Session**

At the May 3, 2017 HPC Study Session the Commission reiterated their desire for a document that is clear and concise so that it is easier for them to make decisions on RAP and LAPs for buildings within the District. They also voiced support for building specific guidelines and further emphasis on enhancing the rear elevations of the structures facing the public parking areas.

**ALTERNATIVES**

Forward a Recommendation to the City Council to:

1. Adopt a Resolution (Attachment 3 to the report) Updating the Design Guidelines for the Murphy Station Heritage Landmark District, and Find that the Action is Exempt from CEQA Pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15308 and 15061(b)(3).
2. Adopt a Resolution Updating the Design Guidelines for the Murphy Station Heritage Landmark District, and Find that the Action is Exempt from CEQA Pursuant to CEQA Guideline Section 15308 and 15061(b)(3) with modifications.
3. Take no action and maintain the existing use of the 1994 Murphy Avenue Design Guidelines.

**RECOMMENDATION**

Alternative 1: Forward a Recommendation to the City Council to Adopt a Resolution (Attachment 3 to the report) Updating the Design Guidelines for the Murphy Station Heritage Landmark District, and Find that the Action is Exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15308 and Section 15061(b)(3).

Adoption of the updated Design Guidelines for the District will provide clear direction to property owners, staff, the HPC, and the City Council on the key character defining features of each building within the District. This document is designed to provide clear direction to property owners and tenants while allowing decision makers to easily assess whether a project meets the guidelines, and continues to contribute positively to the District.

Prepared by: Amber Blizinski, Principal Planner  
Reviewed by: Andrew Miner, Assistant Director, Community Development  
Reviewed by: Trudi Ryan, Director, Community Development  
Reviewed by: Jaqui Guzmán, Deputy City Manager  
Approved by: Kent Steffens, City Manager

**ATTACHMENTS**

1. Reserved for Report to Council
2. Study Issue Paper
3. Draft Resolution and Draft Design Guidelines for the Murphy Station Heritage Landmark District
4. Map of the Murphy Station Heritage Landmark District
5. Link to the 1994 (current) Murphy Avenue Design Guidelines

