

SAN RAFAEL HERITAGE

P.O. BOX 150665, SAN RAFAEL, CALIFORNIA 94915



July 17, 2020

Raffi Boloyan, Planning Manager
City of San Rafael
1400 Fifth Avenue, Top Floor
San Rafael, California 94901

**Subject: Request to City of San Rafael to Grant City Landmark Status for the
1929 Northwestern Pacific Railroad Depot, 930 Tamalpais Avenue**

Dear Raffi Boloyan:

San Rafael Heritage respectfully asks that you review our request to grant local landmark status to San Rafael's NWP Depot. This request is contained in the accompanying attachment: "[Supporting Documents for San Rafael Landmark Status for the Northwestern Pacific Railroad Depot](#)". The documents were completed after several years of intensive research, study, and writing, particularly by SRH Steering Committee member Leslie Simons.

San Rafael Heritage was formed in 2015 in response to the impending threat to our historic 1929 NWP Depot. At that time, the Marin Senior Coordinating Council, who owns the building and operates its Whistlestop senior program there, was considering its demolition and replacement with a building that would include senior housing.

In our concern about the Depot and other heritage buildings, we realized the loss of the preservation guidance given by the former Cultural Affairs Commission to the City Council was profound. The only protection left for important historic sites that enrich our city was tasked to the already busy Community Development Department.

We were also concerned about the lack of up-to-date knowledge and evaluation of San Rafael's existing historic resources. Although the City of San Rafael is currently compiling a new list of *downtown's* historic resources, the city's San Rafael Historical/Architectural Survey, last updated in 1986, is sadly out of date and very incomplete. And if the Depot, one of our most important surviving structures, can be threatened, other historic treasures are also under threat. That is why SR Heritage was formed.

An important task that we set ourselves was to acquire local landmark status for the best of our built heritage. Our first goal was to achieve this status for the Depot. To aid us in our understanding of the Depot's historic role, we hired two registered architectural historians to create peer reviews. Both historians examined the report on the building's historic status by JRP Historical Consulting, which had been commissioned by Whistlestop. They concluded that the JRP report is full of misconceptions and procedural

errors and contains repeated erroneous statements that the building has no historic significance.

Contrary to the JRP report, our documentation reveals evidence that the building's period of historic significance as an active railroad facility extends from 1929 to 1971, and that Whistlestop's 1980's architect worked successfully to make alterations compatible with, but differentiated from, the original style and presence of a historic Mission/Spanish Revival railroad depot.

Furthermore, the selection of this site in 1879 as the San Rafael passenger depot and the construction of the Union Station in 1885 establish the importance of this *site* at 930 Tamalpais and its period of significance beginning in 1879. The concept of relocating the depot would effectively remove both "Location" and "Setting" as Aspects of Integrity. It will take the building away from the tracks and its historic connection to the original 1879 site upon which it currently sits. *The fact that this is the second depot on this site does not negate the Depot's historic connection to the site itself.*

Another concept repeated in the JRP Evaluation is the requirement to conform to the California Environmental Quality Act. CEQA, California Public Resources Code, Division 13, Article 5, Section 15060 (c) states: "An activity is not subject to CEQA if: (2) The activity will not result in a direct or reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment". Since there is no physical change to the environment from the designation of a structure as a landmark, there is no possibility of a significant effect on the environment from this action.

We have been aided in our efforts by the professional advice and review of Diana J. Painter, Owner/Principal Architectural Historian, Painter Preservation. Her letter of April 20, 2020 is attached.

We submit this request with three vital goals in mind, which we hope you will recognize:

- 1) Letting citizens understand San Rafael's history through the existence and imaginative use of historic buildings enriches their lives and gives more meaning, pride, and sense of community to their lives here.
- 2) Preserving a building like our iconic railroad depot, especially in its location at an *existing* major transportation hub next to tracks that are again in daily use, gives the entrance to our city an immediate visual identity. Restoring more of its original beauty for perhaps a mixed public/private use will enhance its economic and social role.
- 3) If the City of San Rafael grants local landmark status to the Depot, prospective buyers will recognize the building's value as a re-purposed historic site in a welcoming transportation center, rather than something to be destroyed and replaced by a mundane structure.

Our Steering Committee thanks Mayor Phillips for his July 13, 2020 verbal support of waiving the usual planning fees, due to our not-for-profit status and our civic purpose.

We submit this request for your careful consideration in the confidence that all who review it will understand our purpose, which is to enrich San Rafael's sense of community, sense of pride, and understanding of its own history. We hope the City of San Rafael will take steps to preserve this important historic depot for present and future San Rafael citizens.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Cynthia Landecker". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "C".

Cynthia Landecker
President Emerita, San Rafael Heritage

cc Paul Jensen, Director of Community Development
Gary Phillips, Mayor of San Rafael

A print copy of the landmark application will be sent to all recipients when the current pandemic crisis eases.