



Painter Preservation
HISTORIC PRESERVATION & URBAN DESIGN

April 20, 2020

City of San Rafael
1400 Fifth Avenue, Room 203
San Rafael, California 94901

Subject: Recommendation for listing the Northwestern Pacific Railroad Depot as a local historic landmark

To whom it may concern:

I am writing to recommend that the City of San Rafael consider the listing the 1929 Northwestern Pacific Railroad Depot at 930 Tamalpais Avenue in the local San Rafael historic register as a local landmark. San Rafael Heritage has done an excellent job of documenting and researching this important building and has also uncovered a number of oversights in the previous evaluation of the building prepared by JRP Historical Consulting, L.L.C. in 2012. In reviewing this earlier document, which found the Depot ineligible for listing in the California Register of Historical Places, I also found that this document contained a number of conceptual errors, did not follow best practices in historic preservation, and would likely be legally indefensible if challenged.

The careful documentation of the building's history, its correct placement in a historic context, discussion of the changes reflected in the building over time, and meticulous recording of its appearance today all lead to this nomination of the building as a San Rafael city landmark, which I support. I believe that the Northwestern Pacific Railroad Depot is eligible for listing under California Register Criterion 1, for its strong association with important historical events in San Rafael and beyond ("is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad pattern of California's history and cultural heritage"). This criterion corresponds most closely to the City of San Rafael Municipal Code criteria for designation (a), for its historical and cultural importance.

The Northwestern Pacific Railroad (and the railroads that preceded it) opened up San Rafael, Marin and Sonoma counties for settlement. It made San Rafael, in particular, the suburban commuter city that it became, in contrast to its history as a destination resort and place of weekend and summer homes. It was closely associated with A.W. Foster, who became president of the newly re-organized railroad (and later its manager), and who was one of the fathers and benefactors of San Rafael. The access provided by the railroad helped create the wealth that made San Rafael the city that it became and is today. There is no question of the importance of this building and site, which has been occupied by the railroad since 1879, to San Rafael and the region's history.

The station is undoubtedly significant for its design, as it represents a popular style for train stations and specifically, for the train stations in Marin County. This corresponds to California Register Criterion 3 ("embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, region, or method of construction, or represents the work of an important creative individual, or possesses high artistic values"). This relates to City of San Rafael Municipal Code criteria for designation (b), for its distinctive architectural style, as well as (b)(5) as the work of an architect of merit. The Mission Revival style was promoted for uses like this

because it was felt that the style reflected the California's history and was, for that reason as well, desirable for a tourism-oriented use. The fact that other buildings in the system are no longer extant increases the importance of this building.

There is no doubt as to the importance of the architect of the stations, as documented in the Department of Park and Recreation 523 forms submitted with this nomination. However, I would not recommend nominating the building under Criterion 3, as the building has been altered in the last 40 years (beyond the alterations undertaken by the railroad itself during the building's Period of Significance). A building nominated for its association with events can have slightly less integrity than a building that is nominated for its design or as the work of a master. I believe that the building retains sufficient integrity to be nominated under Criterion 1, but would hesitate to nominate it under Criterion 3, although the discussion of the style and the architect should definitely be a part of the nomination package. (Note that a building or resource need only be nominated under one criterion; it is not necessary for a building to qualify under all California Criteria for Eligibility).

In addition to qualifying under one or more of the Criteria for Eligibility, a building or resource must retain integrity in order to be eligible for listing in the California Register. Integrity is a function of a resource's location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association. A building or resource must maintain most of the aspects of integrity in order to be considered a historic resource; that is, at least four out of the seven aspects. As explained in the nomination, the Depot retains the aspects of location, setting, workmanship, feeling, and association. I would also make the argument that the Depot retains the aspect of materials. In summary, the Depot is significant for its association with local history and retains sufficient integrity to the Period of Significance to convey the reasons for its significance. The existence of a historic train depot, in the location in which it operated historically, is relatively rare. It is even a rarer opportunity to have a historic depot serve a new rail system. It would be a mistake to lose this opportunity to tell the story of rail transportation and opening of San Rafael and the region by not recognizing the importance of this building.

Evaluator Qualifications. I am a qualified architectural historian whose credentials meet the Secretary of the Interior's Professional Qualification Standards in the area of Architectural History (36 CFR Part 61) by virtue of holding a PhD in Architecture and a Master's Degree in urban design/Urban Planning. I have 35 years of professional experience in historic preservation and urban design. I founded my firm of Painter Preservation in Petaluma in 2002 and have served as its Principal Architectural Historian since that time. I am listed on the rosters of consultants on file with the states of California, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Alaska, Montana, Nevada and Wyoming and work throughout the west with a special focus on California. My most recent project in San Rafael was the drafting of a historic context statement for the City of San Rafael on the tourism and transportation history of the city entitled, "Vacation San Rafael, Promoting San Rafael, Its Hotels, Motels, and Summer Estates."

Sincerely,



Diana J. Painter, PhD
Owner/Principal Architectural Historian