

ROLAND-NAWI ASSOCIATES

Preservation Consultants



REPORT: HISTORICAL EVALUATION OF DRESBACH-HUNT-BOYER TANKHOUSE AND ASSESSMENT OF POTENTIAL IMPACT OF PROPOSED MISHKA'S CAFÉ BUILDING ON HISTORIC RESOURCES CITY OF DAVIS JUNE 7, 2006

Pursuant to the request of the Community Planning Department of the City of Davis, Roland-Nawi Associates: Preservation Consultants, has prepared an evaluation of the significance of the tankhouse associated with the Dresbach-Hunt-Boyer House in downtown Davis. In addition, the evaluation report considers the proposal to build a combination café and office building on the tankhouse site, assesses potential impacts on historic area resources and considers potential alternatives to the proposed project to be analyzed that could reduce potential impacts.

METHODOLOGY:

Roland-Nawi Associates reviewed historical materials related to the Dresbach-Hunt-Boyer House. This included general information on the history of Davis, previous historic evaluations and nominations, including the National Register Nomination (1976) and the draft Central Davis Historic Conservation District Historical Resources Survey (2003). Literature related to the history, evolution, and function of tankhouse structures, particularly in the Central Valley, was consulted. The Community Planning Department provided extensive background material including information regarding earlier projects that affected the tankhouse and its surrounding setting. Sanborn Maps and aerial photographs were reviewed. Information and historic photographs on file at the Hattie Weber Museum also were reviewed. The city also provided a copy of the 2000 structural evaluation of the tankhouse completed by Marr, Shaffer and Miyamoto, Structural Engineers.

The proposed project description was provided by the city. This included staff reports and architectural drawings.

DESCRIPTION:

The domestic tankhouse was a structure unique to California that was developed to store water in a climate characterized by winter rainfall and summer drought. Water had to be pumped from wells to be made available during the dry season. In its simplest form the structure is a large wooden tank elevated on a platform. Enclosure of the frame and tank provided the advantages of structural strength and prevented weathering of the structural

system.¹ Over a period of time several enclosure types developed, some with strong regional associations. The tankhouse was usually associated with a windmill which raised the water from the well to the storage tank. Tankhouses were predominantly for domestic use and were usually located close to the house. These structures were common and widely dispersed through Yolo, Sacramento, San Joaquin, Napa, and Sonoma counties from the 1870s through the 1930s.

The Dresbach-Hunt-Boyer tankhouse was constructed between 1874, when the house was built, and 1888 when it appears on the city's first Sanborn Map. It is what is generally classified as a "taper tower" type tankhouse—a form with vertical walls that taper gradually inward from the base to the top. These towers usually have a hip roof, but in this particular example the roof is flat.² The roof has overhanging and bracketed eaves and plain fascia. The roof treatment is similar to that used on the house. There is a window opening, now boarded, on the west side of the tower and an entry door is located on the front elevation. The cladding is channel rustic or drop siding, again similar to that of the house. A wooden trefoil is applied in the center of the upper wall on the west and north faces of the tower.

The Dresbach property occupied nearly a quarter of the block in 1888.³ The tankhouse was originally located at the rear of the Dresbach-Hunt-Boyer lot behind the house and at some distance from the outhouse. The tower remained in this location until 1979 when it was moved to accommodate the construction of a shop and office complex behind the house. It was relocated to the east side of the house closer to 2nd Street and adjacent to the Varsity Theater which was built in 1950. At the time it was moved approximately 18 inches were cut off of the bottom of the structure due to dry rot. At the same time a stairway was constructed to allow access at the second story level. The non-historic stair has since been removed.

The brick patio that is located on the north side of the structure was laid from bricks associated with the tankhouse and discovered when it was moved. The bricks date from the 1880s and may have been part of a well or foundation structure.

CRITERIA OF SIGNIFICANCE:

An historical property is significant under California law if it is eligible for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources (Public Resources Code § 5024.1). A property is eligible for listing, either individually, or as a contributing element in a historic district, if it meets one or more of the criteria set forth in the Public Resources Code and the California Code of Regulations (CCR Title 14, chapter 11.5, § 4850 et seq). Criteria for listing include 1) association with events that have made a significant contribution to broad patterns of

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¹ Terhorst, Brian, "Changing Forms of Sonoma County Tankhouses," unpublished paper, 1989.

² Noble, Allen, Wood, Brick and Stone: the North American Settlement Landscape, Vol II, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1984.

³ Sanborn map, 1888.

local or regional history; 2) association with the lives of persons important to local, California or national history; 3) embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or region; 4) had potential to yield information important to prehistory or history (CCR § 4852 (b), CEQA Guidelines § 15064.5(a)(3). In addition to meeting one or more of the criteria for listing, the property must retain its integrity; that is its ability to convey its historic significance. Integrity is defined by the National Park Service as consisting of seven elements including location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association. The Public Resource Code § 21084.1 and the CEQA Guidelines §15064.5 (D)(4) give lead agencies the authority to evaluate the significance of an historical resource even if that resource is not listed in the California Register, or listed in a location register of historical resources.

The tankhouse is a listed historic resource and is a significant historical resource for purposes of CEQA.

The Dresbach-Hunt-Boyer House is listed in the National Register of Historic Places (1976). It also is listed in the California Register of Historical Resources. It is a California Point of Historic Interest. The National Register nomination for the house was prepared prior to the tankhouse being moved to its present location. The property description in the nomination notes the tankhouse as a part of the property but does not specifically evaluate its significance. However, at this early date in the history of the Register, contributing elements of properties were not always clearly defined. It is reasonable to assume that it is included as a part of the listed property. The tankhouse also is noted in the California Point of Historic Interest nomination form.

The Dresbach-Hunt-Boyer house is locally recognized as a Landmark under the city preservation ordinance. It has been described and evaluated in all of the City's historic resource surveys, most recently in 2003. In 1998 the city Historical Resources Management Commission re-evaluated the significance of the tankhouse in its moved location. The Commission concluded that it retained eligibility.

“ the pumphouse continues to retain significant historical value, both in its degree of integrity and the fact that its new location is appropriate for an auxiliary structure; therefore it appears to meet the majority of criteria for retention as a contributor to the National Register of Historic Places.”⁴

This conclusion would be consistent with CEQA which requires that a preponderance of evidence is necessary to demonstrate that a surveyed or listed resource is not significant and with the California Register regulations regarding moved buildings and structure. These regulations make special provision for retaining eligibility when moving a building is the only alternative to demolition (California Code of Regulations, Title 14, chapter 11.5, section 4852 (d)(1).

Quite aside from its association with the listed Dresbach-Hunt-Boyer House, the tankhouse is one of the few surviving examples of this once common type of rural

⁴ City of Davis, Staff Report to Historical Resources Management Commission, August 5, 2005.

structure. The 2003 draft Historic Resources Survey noted that until the 1950s, the City of Davis remained semi-rural in density and ambiance. :

In 1900 no residential block had been completely built out. This in part reflected the practice of multiple adjacent lot ownership by one individual... [the city's semi-rural appearance] was enhanced by the fact that a large number of properties had barns, sheds and, frequently, windmills or tank houses to supply water.⁵

If one includes the large municipal water tank on D Street, north of 6th, there were twenty-three tankhouses within the city boundaries in 1921. Only two of these remain, one of which is the Dresbach-Hunt-Boyer tankhouse. The other is located on 2nd Street near University Avenue and has been substantially altered by conversion to living quarters. Approximately 30 such structures remain in the Yolo and Solano County area.⁶

Brick Patio

The area immediately around the tankhouse consists of a brick patio. The bricks utilized in this patio are of 19th century origin. When the tankhouse was moved from its original location behind the house a large cache of bricks was found. These may have been the material from which an original cistern was constructed. The bricks were used to create a patio area around the relocated tankhouse which was converted into a coffee shop. Although the bricks are a historic material, they lack context and integrity to be considered significant historical resources. They have been moved from their original location and used to create a landscape element unrelated to their original use and one which is not historically authentic to the period of the house or the tankhouse. They are not a historical resource eligible for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources.

Orange Trees

There are ten orange trees in front and on the sides and rear of the tankhouse and at the rear of the Dresbach-Hunt-Boyer house. These trees were planted by John Hunt, the second owner of the house, who maintained a large garden and mixed orchard on the property.⁷ A preliminary plan for the shopping center, built in 1979, shows a number of trees including not only the citrus, but also fig, walnut, almond and pear. A remnant group of trees, primarily citrus, were retained when the shopping center was constructed; the majority around the relocated tankhouse.

The trees are mentioned in the 1976 National Register nomination and in the Point of Historical Interest application. Both of these nominations were completed before the

⁵ Roland-Nawi Associates. *Central Davis Historic Conservation District Historic Resources Survey*. City of Davis, April 2003, 16. Underscore added.

⁶ Madison, Mike. *Walking the Flatlands: the Rural Landscape of the Lower Sacramento Valley*. (Berkeley: Heyday Press, 2004), 109.

⁷ Bond, Judy. National Register Nomination for the Dresbach-Hunt-Boyer House, 1976.

office/mixed use project of 1979 and considered the house, tankhouse, and orchard in their original configuration on the property.

However, the substantial reduction of the orchard and the remnant nature of the remaining citrus severely impairs their significance as a contributing element to the Dresbach-Hunt-Boyer House. Although the citrus trees remaining on the property are associated with the house, they represent only a small fragment of the original orchard. In 1978 the Davis Historical and Landmark Commission report noted that there were “twenty eight citrus trees, a variety of other fruit trees, ornamental shrubs and a Landmark pine tree” surrounding the house.⁸ Eligibility requires that a resource not only meet one or more of the criteria of eligibility, but that it possesses integrity. The remnant orchard associated with the Dresbach-Hunt-Boyer House does not retain sufficient integrity to be listed in the California Register of Historical Resources.

It should be noted that although the trees do not meet historic criteria, they may well derive significance and have protected status under other provisions of local or county law, such as an historic tree ordinance.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

The project proposal is to build a three-story mixed use building with a café on the first floor. The building would be sited between the historic Varsity Theater and the Dresbach House. It would directly abut the west wall of the Varsity Theater and would have a small patio space on the west side with a pathway between the new building and the historic Dresbach-Hunt-Boyer House. The building would be taller than either the theater or the house. Based on the preliminary design renderings, it would be almost as tall as the marquee the theater. The building would be set at the sidewalk with no proposed set back.

POTENTIAL EFFECTS:

The standard for assessing the effects of a project on historical resources is set forth in the Public Resources Code § 21084.1: “A project that may cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of an historical resource is a project that may have a significant effect on the environment.” Substantial adverse change is defined as “demolition, destruction, relocation or alteration such that the significance of an historical resource is impaired” (PRC § 5021.1(q)).

The proposed project would require that the tankhouse either be demolished or moved to another location on or off site. The demolition of the tankhouse would be a substantial adverse impact to a historical resource. The loss of the tankhouse would also affect the Dresbach-Hunt-Boyer House by removing an auxiliary structure associated with the house

⁸ Minutes of the Davis Historical and Landmarks Commission, February 10, 1978.

from early in its history, although its removal would not result in the ineligibility of the house.

Tankhouses are a distinctive type of historic structure that were always built in conjunction with a residence house to serve domestic water needs. Although not in its original location, the tankhouse currently maintains a relationship to the Dresbach-Hunt-Boyer house. This siting continues to convey the historic interdependence between the two buildings and maintains a degree of authenticity and integrity that would be destroyed if the two buildings were physically and visually removed from one another.

Moving the tankhouse to an alternative site, would remove the tankhouse from its historic context. Placing it on a lot with another Victorian house would create false historicity. Either of these actions would result in a substantial adverse change to the significance of an historical resource.

In addition to the proposed project impacts on the tankhouse, the project would affect the historic Varsity Theater and the historic Dresbach-Hunt-Boyer House.

The proposed new construction will directly abut the west wall of the Varsity building. This wall has always been a free standing façade visible from the street and from the relatively open space where the tankhouse now stands. The new building would alter the current view of the historic building from the western approach along 2nd Street. The new building could also function to partially obscure the marquee, a major character defining feature of the Varsity. While the west wall of the theater is a blank façade, it is important that its visibility be retained at the interface with the street. It is possible that this view could be maintained through set back from the sidewalk (see proposed alternatives and mitigations below).

The placement of a building of the proposed height and massing in the proposed location will further reduce the open space around the Dresbach-Hunt-Boyer House. Historically the house was set on a very large lot surrounded by trees and other landscaping. In the 1979 development the feeling of open space was retained on the 2nd Street and on the E Street elevations by concentrating the development to the rear of the lot. The insertion of a three-story building with its front elevation directly on the sidewalk will replace the open space on the east side of the house and will place the house in a much more urban context. Visually the streetscape would read as one of closely abutting buildings lined up side-by-side in a continuous commercial row. It will alter the historic setting and feeling which has traditionally set the Dresbach-Hunt-Boyer House apart as the city's largest and most palatial 19th-century downtown residence and as a reminder of the city's more open and semi-rural 19th-century character. The construction of an in-fill building between the Varsity and the Dresbach-Boyer-Hunt House would alter the historic relationship between the two buildings and lessen the open quality of the space around the house. However, it would not be an impact that would result in the loss of eligibility of either building.

POTENTIAL ALTERNATIVES AND MITIGATION:

Alternatives that could lessen the impact on the historic resources that should be examined in the environmental document include:

A. No project alternative.

Under a no project alternative the tankhouse would be left in its present location and would not be rehabilitated. The no project alternative would lead to further deterioration of the tankhouse and possibly to its eventual loss through neglect.

B. Rehabilitation of the tankhouse in its present location for commercial or other use

This alternative and mitigations would retain the tankhouse in its present location and rehabilitate it for use. Potential uses and their feasibility should be addressed.

C. The relocation of the tankhouse to another location on the existing property.

The only possible location for moving the structure on the existing property would be on the west side of the Dresbach-Hunt-Boyer House where there is open level ground. This would place the structure along the E Street side of the mansion property. The tankhouse currently is not sited in its original historic location. Its current location also changes its original relationship to the house where it was situated across the yard from the rear elevation. Moving the tankhouse on the property would retain approximately the same relationship that now exists between the house and the auxiliary structure. The placement of the tankhouse on the west side of the house is not more or less inauthentic than its current location.

While moving a building always impairs its historic significance, the tankhouse has already undergone this change and has been deemed to retain its significance. The California Register of Historical Resources provides that a resource that is otherwise eligible may retain its eligibility if it is moved to prevent its demolition, and if the new location is compatible with the original character and use of the historical resource. Relocating the tankhouse to the west side of the property would appear to meet these conditions.

D. Setback on the proposed new building

An alternative design which would place the new construction at a set back from the street should be considered. This would reduce the impact of the project on the Varsity Theater and on the setting of the Dresbach-Hunt-Boyer House. It also could allow the retention of more of the non-contributing citrus trees. Redesign of the interface between the new construction and the theater to avoid obstructing the visibility of the marquee should be included in this analysis.

E. Compatibility of materials and design with the immediate context.

The Downtown Historic Conservation District guidelines provide wide latitude in the design of in-fill buildings. However, the location of this project, between two downtown Landmark

buildings, makes this project particularly sensitive. The Secretary of the Interior's Standards should be employed in evaluating the appropriateness of any proposed design. Set-back and materials should be given particular attention to avoid the new building detracting from or overshadowing the adjacent historic buildings. Massing and form should not out scale the historic buildings.

FEASIBILITY

The tankhouse has been vacant for several years and is in poor condition. The structural report of 2000 raises serious questions regarding the potential for rehabilitation. The report concludes that the tankhouse has substantial structural problems and is in need of extensive repair and structural upgrade. It is questionable if the structure in its present condition could successfully be moved and/or rehabilitated. Alternatives which would move the tankhouse should include an analysis of the related stabilization and/or rehabilitation requirements and costs.

It is also recommended that a historic structure report be prepared prior to any moving or rehabilitation of the structure. The structural report prepared for the tankhouse implies that the historic siding may need to be removed in order to stabilize or replace the structural members. Since the structure has already lost elements of its integrity, it will be important to carry out any work in a manner that preserves design, historic materials, and 19th-century workmanship to the greatest degree possible. Means and methods of accomplishing this should be carefully analyzed by an historical architect/engineer with a minimum of five years experience in the field.