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MEMORANDUM

February 6, 2025

TO: Esteemed members of the Historical Commission
City of Los Altos

Sean Gallegos
Staff Liaison to Historical Commission

FROM: Jane M. Packard, PhD
Volunteer Chair, Orchard Commons Committee, Los Altos History Museum

RE: Public Hearing- Agenda item H24-0003 and DR24-0002

The purpose of this comment is to provide additional information relevant to the Historical Alteration Permit and Design Review for a new library courtyard, based on my personal perspective. The Los Altos History Museum is responsible for maintenance services in the Civic Center Apricot Orchard, under contract from the City of Los Altos (July 2023-June 2026). The information provided below addresses the historical integrity of this landmark as related to (a) the orchard irrigation system, (b) protection of one row of tree replacement sites, and (c) alteration of the spatial character linking the eastern and western portions of the orchard. In the narrative, references will be made to the specific pages (L-1.0 through L-7.1) and content of the document titled "Los Altos Library Courtyard" (project plans).

Orchard Irrigation System

The existing orchard irrigation system is an integral component of historical integrity of the orchard, as it is necessary to maintain the grid spacing and the health of the apricot trees in that grid. The orchard irrigation system is not marked on the basemap on page L-1.0 of the project plans. The following options would address this oversight.

OPTION A. Add to the basemap (L-1.0, L-5.0) the existing irrigation lines for three rows of trees north of the library walkway and 3 trees west of the library entrance. Three irrigation boxes with flush valves mark the ends of these lines. Also add the irrigation line and boxes that serve the trees 4,5,6 as designated on L-1.1.

OPTION B. Add an item to the list of "Preservation & Protection" on L-1.0, with wording such as: "UNDERGROUND ORCHARD IRRIGATION LINE- PROTECT IN PLACE".

OPTION C. Add a note on L-1.0 to protect the three apricot trees at the NW corner of the project (designated as 4,5,6 on L-1.1)

OPTION D. Add a note on L-1.0 to protect the two irrigation structures and white posts at the north edge of the access road that crosses the walkway between the Library and City Hall.

OPTION E. Add an item to the list of "Preservation & Protection" on L-1.0 with wording such as "ABOVE GROUND HISTORIC IRRIGATION STRUCTURE- PROTECT IN PLACE OR COORDINATE WITH MUSEUM REPRESENTATIVE"

OPTION F. Add a note on L-1.0 to protect the backflow structure and orchard irrigation boxes drawn northeast of the water meter on the walkway between the Library and City Hall, with wording such as "ORCHARD IRRIGATION- PROTECT IN PLACE"

Justification: Disruption of the irrigation line closest to the library walkway will disrupt the flow of water to the other rows of trees in that section of the orchard. The irrigation box at the end of the line will need to be moved as indicated. This should be done in coordination with a representative of the Los Altos History Museum. If accidental damage occurs to the line during the construction process, the contractor should be liable even if the damage occurs outside the planned construction fence as drawn on L-1.0. During construction, the fence may be moved to accommodate heavy equipment on an ad-hoc basis. If the orchard irrigation system is not clearly marked on the basemap, workers will have no reference regarding their flexibility in moving the fence. This comment is based on experiences during the construction project at the Los Altos Youth Center. With regard to OPTIONS D and E, the irrigation structure is "historic material" that documents how the orchard was irrigated during the previous decade. Although this historic material is omitted from the CEQA analysis, let it be entered into the Public Record. This would comply with Standard #2 (see Standards Compliance Review). With regard to OPTION F, the irrigation system for the orchard rows along San Antonio is controlled by nodes in the designated irrigation boxes. Accidental damage to that irrigation system would jeopardize the health of trees in the western section of the orchard.

Protection for One Row of Tree Replacement Sites

The historical integrity of the orchard is defined by the rows of trees planted in a grid pattern (see Staff Report pg 7, paragraph 1). One of the rows is not marked on the basemap of L-1.0. Although only one tree is still living in this row, there are 16 locations for replacement of trees that were living in 2022 (see Figure 22 in Standards Compliance Review). Since August 2023, those locations have been marked by stakes and the corresponding irrigation valves have been marked by orange flags. Apparently, these tree replacement sites were overlooked in the field reports that are the basis for the documents summarized in the Staff Report and preparation of

the basemap L-1.1. The tree sites marked on L-1.1 in the inset east of the landmark boundary are inaccurate. There are 6 existing trees in each of the northern two rows and 5 tree replacement sites should be added to the southern row with the one existing tree.

OPTION G. Add symbols representing 16 protected tree replacement sites in the orchard row along the library walkway on L-1.1, L-2.0, L2.1, L-2.2, L-4.0, L-5.0.

OPTION H. Correct the inaccuracies in the tree sites east of the landmark boundary.

OPTION I. Add lines to the tree table on L-1.1 describing the 11 tree replacement sites inside the orchard boundary as well as the 5 tree replacement sites on the row extending east of the boundary toward the museum, in order to clarify that the status is protected for the entire 3 rows of trees and tree replacement sites.

Justification: As the Staff Report states, standard agricultural practice has been replacement of trees that died within the grid pattern. Just because a tree is not currently growing in a site on the grid, does not mean the site is outside the spatial configuration that provides the historical integrity of the orchard. Damage to the soil at the 16 tree replacement sites could preclude successful growth at those sites when the replacement trees are replanted. Damage might be direct or indirect related to the specified schedule of washing to reduce air contamination due to particulate matter. The Staff Report confirms that the patio will remove 7 tree replacement sites from the grid and presents a convincing argument that it is not the number of tree sites, rather the spatial configuration of the grid that defines the historical integrity. However, the Staff Report overlooks whether failure to protect an entire row of trees within the grid would affect the historical integrity. This particular row is impactful because it lines the walkway to the Smith House, which is registered as a California Point of Historical Interest with the orchard as providing context. Without explicit detailing of the need for protection of the trees along the entire three rows north of the Library, there will be no information for the contractor that would preclude use of the land as a staging area. This would apply to both the land inside the landmark boundary and to the east of the landmark boundary where there are existing trees (between the Youth Center and the Library walkway). The contractor should be liable for damage to the soil as well as the trees and irrigation lines along the entire three rows of the tree grid. Standard #6 states that "Replacement of missing features shall be substantiated by documentary, physical or pictorial evidence." There is sufficient pictorial evidence for 3 rows of trees in this location in the HRI#15 (Figure 8), Standards Compliance Review (Figures 2, 14, 15), and Staff Report (Figures 1, 3).

Spatial Character: East/West Link

The concrete footprint of the patio entrance extends into the access road that connects the eastern and western portions of the orchard. This access road is essential for routine orchard maintenance so it is good that the specifications are for vehicular concrete. The construction fence extends into the area that was previously planted with rows of trees between the City Hall

enclosed patio and the Library. This use of space as a construction staging area alters the fundamental feature of the orchard previously consisting of a continuous grid of trees connecting the eastern and western portions of the orchard.

OPTION J. Mitigation for loss of tree sites on the orchard grid could be offset by providing resources to rehabilitate tree sites that were formerly on the grid and are now empty in this section connecting the eastern and western portions of the tree grid.

Justification: Standard #2 states in part “alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided”. Connection of the eastern and western portions of the orchard grid is a feature that characterizes the historical integrity of this property. This land between the City Hall enclosed patio and the library has not been rehabilitated due to the impacts of previous use as a construction staging area. It is a reasonable location for a staging area at the present time. However, after completion of the construction it will remain empty and detract from the historic character of the property unless rehabilitated. Considering that the construction will impact the number of trees on the grid and the connectivity between the eastern and western portions of the grid, the substantial cumulative impacts could be offset by arranging for mitigation to rehabilitate the tree grid in this section. For the record, there is sufficient pictorial evidence for rows of trees in this location in the HRI#15 (Figures 3, 4, 5, 7), Standards Compliance Review (Figures 2, 14, 15), and Staff Report (Figures 1, 2, 3).