

July 5, 2022

Ms Shannon Mulderig
Planning Department
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Ms. Muldering:

On behalf of the community of Hillcrest, the undersigned coalition of organizations are opposing the contiguous Historic District currently proposed as part of the Plan Hillcrest effort and, instead, would like to offer a variety of solutions that would better serve to meet the goals of your planning effort. **A plan that preserves buildings while the residential and business uses that created our neighborhood are left to struggle or fail is no plan at all.** While Historic Districts are well-intentioned and aim to preserve the history of a neighborhood, they **often end up exacerbating existing issues of gentrification and “pricing out” marginalized communities** - including the very community this Historic District purports to protect.

We have **no doubt that the Historic District as proposed would irrevocably harm the LGBT community and the affordability of Hillcrest for both businesses and residents.** Further, the Hillcrest neighborhood and its rich LGBT history **requires a more creative solution to preserve the history of the neighborhood and community and ensure its longevity as a hub for LGBT culture and business in San Diego.**

Our organizations recommend that **Plan Hillcrest preserve the historical uses of our neighborhood rather than simply historical buildings** through the following efforts:

- Use zoning and other planning tools to create protections for a diversity of housing options and make recommendations for how diverse income and lifestyle populations can be encouraged to move to the neighborhood.
- Create protections for business types that have been an integral part of the community such as implementing the Hillcrest Entertainment District or an LGBTQ Cultural District. Entertainment districts and cultural districts have been successful tools for promoting local heritage, protecting vulnerable populations, and supporting the success of existing businesses and cultural hubs.
- Abandon plans for the contiguous “historic district” as currently proposed and instead state which buildings will be included on the multi property listing and how they relate to the history of the LGBT community.

The way history is told and who is telling that history is as important as the history itself. Plan Hillcrest should undertake the following steps to ensure that the history of the neighborhood is appropriately described through future interpretive efforts:

- **Ensure that history is described beyond a cisgender and patriarchal narrative by creating guidelines for future interpretive devices.** Future interpretive efforts should include the use of cultural and historical consultants so history is told by professionals rather than history hobbyists.

- **Create a comprehensive plan for an LGBTQ+ Hillcrest historical interpretive program** including highlighting important locations, buildings, and social events. Include a clear outline as to how the interpretive program will tell stories from multiple voices from within the community. Include a plan for including oral histories and options for digital description and interactivity.
- Include a series of “narratives paths” that describe important events in LGBTQ+ history and how they impacted the San Diego community; and issues such as the AIDS epidemic, DADT, Marriage and Prop 8, the evolution of Pride celebrations. Consider a digital tour or scavenger hunt with QR codes placed around the community that expose local folks who can tell the stories.

The LGBT community is about people and their struggles and celebrations. **If we spend too much energy on preservation of the buildings we repeat the biased and patriarchal storytelling methods of the past and run the real risk of making the community unattractive and unaffordable to the very people who breathe life into the community.** We need to attract more people, old and young who can afford to live here and inject energy into the existing and new businesses. Without a vibrant social and recreational scene, Hillcrest will suffer the same fate as neighborhoods like Dupont Circle in DC which was once the epicenter of LGBTQ+ life in the city but excessive restriction and exorbitant housing prices drove the community and its businesses to other more affordable and welcoming areas.

We look forward to working with you and celebrating this historic element that we can all support.

Yours sincerely,

Jen LaBarbera 

Paul Smith (he/his/him),
Board President,
Hillcrest Business
Association

Jen LaBarbera (she/they),
Director of Education &
Advocacy,
San Diego Pride

Nicole Verdés,
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