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memorandum

date	May 7, 2019
to	Tyra Hays
cc	
from	Elizabeth Boyd
subject	Options for a historic district on Buck Avenue, between Cernon and Chandler streets

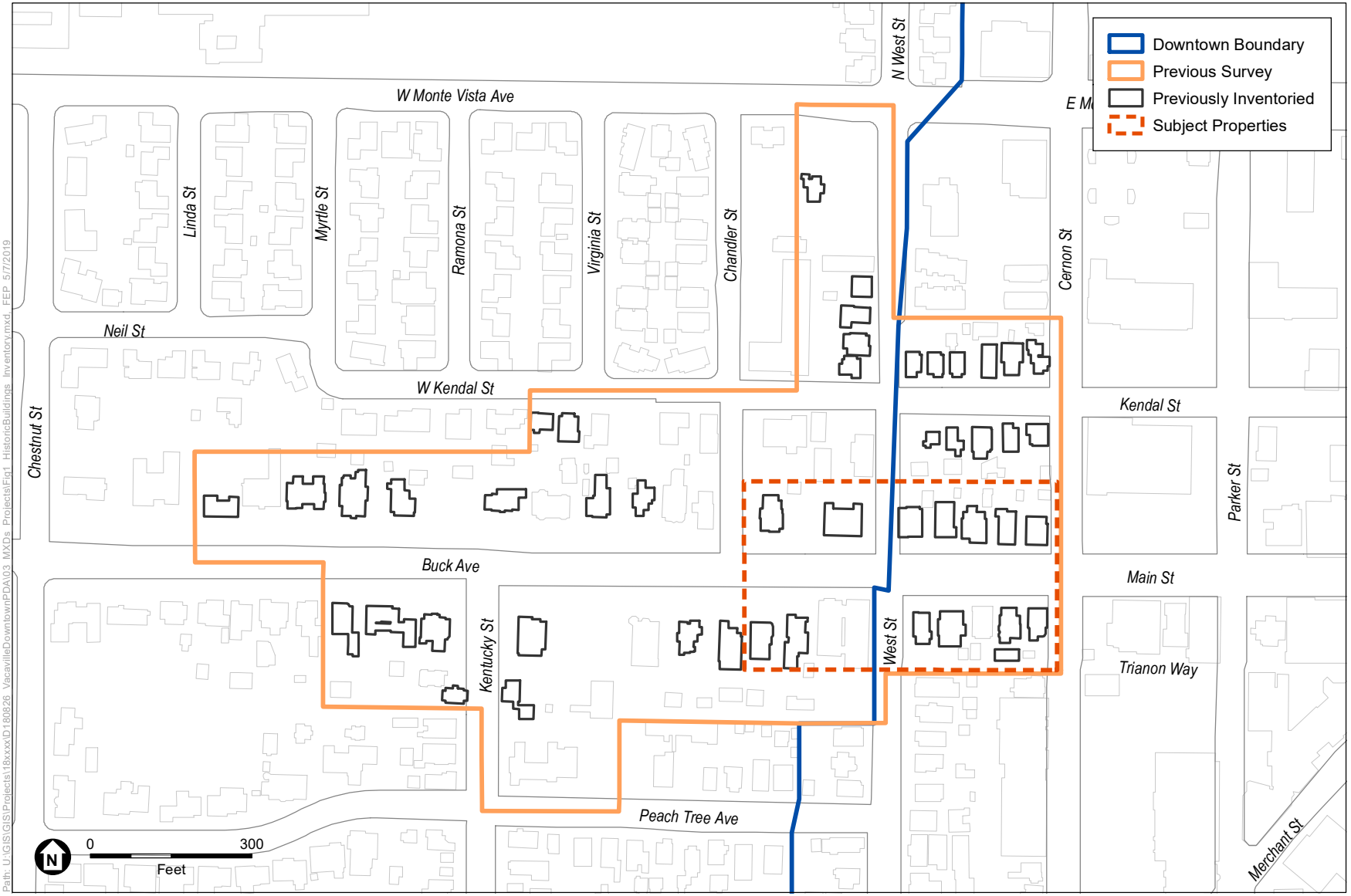
The City of Vacaville (City) has requested that ESA prepare a memo to discuss the pros and cons of establishing a historic district for the properties on Buck Avenue, between Cernon and Chandler streets (Figure 1). The following provides a summary of a previous survey effort, a brief description and history of the area, the applicable regulations, the pros and cons of establishing a historic district, a discussion of conservation districts including a comparison of historic and conservation districts, and recommendations/next steps.

In 1979, the City undertook a historic resources inventory of 46 properties on Buck Avenue/Main Street. The subject properties on Buck Avenue, between Cernon and Chandler streets, were part of that historic resource inventory. Thirteen of the fifteen extant buildings were recorded on Department of Parks and Recreation Historic Resources Inventory forms (Table 1). The two properties not inventoried include the Epiphany Church at 300 West Street and the burned remains of a former residence at 112 Main Street.

The 1979 survey report contained the following description of Buck Avenue:

> *One of the most pleasant features of central Vacaville during the Spring and Summer seasons is the arcade of trees which line the sides of Buck Avenue. The trees on each side of the street form a tunnel for the travellors [sic] down Buck Avenue. The site of this greenery overhead supplies much to the established feeling along this historic row of houses. Buck Avenue is lined by houses dating back to 1890, and continues to be one of the most popular "tourist" routes through town. The trees provide cool shade during the hot summer months for pedestrians and car travellors [sic] alike. Some of the palm trees along this route were planted at the time the houses were built, in the 1990's, and still grace the avenue with their presence.*

The report went on to summarize the history of the area, including the development of Buck Avenue in the 1890's related to the affluence of the fruit growers in the area began to grow with the development of the railroad. The residential development reflected many types of architectural styles as owners tried to recapture the character of the hometown the owner had left behind. The report states that, "The individuality of each structure remains unique, combining to form a distinctive whole."



SOURCE: City of Vacaville, 2019

Vacaville Downtown Specific Plan

Figure 1

Buck Avenue Residential Area

ESA

TABLE 1
SUBJECT PROPERTIES – BUCK AVENUE, BETWEEN CERNON STREET AND CHANDLER STREET

Address	Style	Year Constructed
118 Buck Avenue	Queen Anne	1891
100 Buck Avenue	Italian Villa	1922
119 Buck Avenue	Queen Anne	c. 1900
113 Buck Avenue	Vernacular	c. 1935
101 Main Street	Vernacular Victorian	1896
107 Main Street	Vernacular	1912
113 Main Street	Craftsman	1915
119 Main Street	Colonial Revival	1906
125 Main Street	Vernacular	1910
100 Main Street	Mission	1913
106 Main Street	California "Bungaloid"[1]	1922
118 Main Street	Queen Anne	1900
124 Main Street	Shingle/Eastlake	1890

Notes:
1. A later version of the California Bungalow that does not necessarily contain all of the originally defined features.

The area of Buck Avenue between Cernon and Chandler streets remains in essentially the same condition as the time of the historic resource inventory. Buck Avenue is lined by mature trees which provide a good amount of shade to the neighborhood. Residences are set-back from the street, and are well maintained. One residence has been constructed since the 1979 survey at 112 Main Street, the location of the previously noted fire-damaged residence. This construction (circa 1980) is compatible with the surrounding residences; set-back from the street, similar massing and style of construction, and is consistent with the feeling of the neighborhood.

According to City municipal code, Chapter 14.09.105 Overlay Districts, the HP-Historic Preservation Overlay District provides for the identification of historically significant buildings and areas and the adoption of standards to ensure the preservation of such areas. The HP district is established to achieve the following purposes:

A. To implement the policies of the General Plan regarding the preservation and adaptive reuse of historic buildings;

B. To foster awareness of and interest in the heritage of the City of Vacaville through the designation of historic buildings and districts;

C. To provide for the preservation of buildings which exhibit varied architectural styles reflecting the cultural, social, and economic phases of the City's history;

D. To enhance property values, stimulate economic activity, and provide for the stabilization of commercial and neighborhood areas.

The following is a discussion of the pros and cons of establishing a historic district for the properties on Buck Avenue, between Cernon and Chandler streets, approximately one-third of the 1979 survey area described above.

The pros and cons are enumerated in Table 2, below.

TABLE 2
PROS AND CONS OF ESTABLISHING A HISTORIC DISTRICT

Pros	Cons
Increased property value. Property values in local historic districts appreciate significantly faster than the market as a whole in the vast majority of cases (Forbes 2018). Moreover, recent analysis shows that historic districts are also less vulnerable to market volatility from interest rate fluctuations and economic downturns (National Trust for Historic Preservation 2015).	**Decreased property values**. Not all studies confirm a positive impact of preservation efforts. In some cases, local historic preservation ordinances have caused a loss in property appreciation. Stringent local regulations, as opposed to federal designation, can cause property values to fall in historic districts (Gilderbloom et al. 2009).
Protects the investments of owners and residents of historic properties. Vibrant commercial cores and charming neighborhoods with character attract new business. Owners know that in 30 years their property and neighborhood will have the same look and feel (National Trust for Historic Preservation 2015).	**Possible gentrification.** Appreciation of property values may displace less-affluent residents of historic districts after designation takes place.
Districts are energy-efficient and help the environment. Early homes had many energy conserving features out of necessity. Low ceilings and massive walls in cold climates; raised main floors with high ceilings and surrounding porches were features in warm climates. Masonry walls were common because they absorb heat slowly and give it off slowly (Burns 1982). A historic neighborhood is a sustainable neighborhood because it was designed before the invention of the automobile. The layout of these neighborhoods placed stores, churches, schools, jobs, and recreation in close proximity to one another (Gilderbloom et al. 2009).	**Too much regulation.** Local historic commissions may write design guidelines that are too restrictive or poorly written. A local ordinance may define exterior alterations quite broadly, such that changing of the pavement material of a driveway, cutting down any tree, or planting a significant new landscape all may be deemed exterior alterations. This can lead to property owners believing they cannot make any changes to their property. Some review boards can be very strict and veto anything that isn't as true to the original as possible, which means higher costs for materials.
Provide a sense of continuity with history. Historic districts are a tangible link to the past and a way to bring meaning to history and to people's lives. They connect people with their roots and give communities a voice in their future.	**What to preserve.** Deciding what should be preserved can be subjective. What may be significant to one person can be irrelevant to another. While there are established criterion and historic contexts, they may not reflect the values of everyone.

Sources:
Forbes 2018. *Your House Is in a Historic District: Does That Raise Or Lower Its Value?* Available: https://www.forbes.com/sites/reginacole/2018/08/20/your-house-is-in-a-historic-district-does-that-raise-or-lower-its-value/#635268e67c8c.
National Trust. 2015. *10 Benefits of Establishing a Local Historic District*. Available: https://savingplaces.org/stories/10-on-tuesday-10-benefits-of-establishing-a-local-historic-district#.XLdzbnmWxaR.
Burns, John A. 1982. *Energy Conserving Features Inherent in Older Homes*. US Department of Housing and Urban Development with the US Department of the Interior.
Gilderbloom, John I., Matthew J. Hanka, and Joshua D. Ambrosius. 2009. Historic preservation's impact on job creation, property values, and environmental sustainability. *Journal of Urbanism: International Research on Placemaking and Urban Sustainability*. Available: https://static1.squarespace.com/static/54fb6099e4b0ecb31a5ad149/t/589a0c871e5b6c9dbed59121/1486490806904/KY+-+Econ.

There is another type of district the City may want to consider, a conservation district (also known as a neighborhood conservation district). Both historic and conservation districts are geographic areas that have a concentration of thematically related resources that convey a significant story. Conservation districts provide another way to protect older residential neighborhoods that may not qualify for historic designation under a local preservation ordinance or for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places, or that simply are not ready for historic designation. Conservation district programs require a high level of neighborhood participation as they are typically initiated by residents and a majority of property owners must back the designation.

Neighborhood conservation districts are defined as residential neighborhoods "with a distinct physical character that have preservation or conservation as the primary goal" and that are "[a]ccomplished through the adoption of a zoning overlay or independent zoning district."[1] The designation is used to protect distinctive neighborhood

[1] Miller, Julia. 2004. *Protecting Older Neighborhoods Through Conservation District Programs*. Washington: National Trust for Historic Preservation. Pg. 1.

characteristics and is therefore useful in areas that contribute significantly to the overall character and identity of the town.

Conservation districts are frequently seen adjacent to traditional historic districts and act to buffer against new development. They provide a framework in which a neighborhood can evaluate new development and new construction in the neighborhood. The neighborhood conservation district may have many new buildings, yet the overall visual character of the area is retained.[2]

Both conservation and historic districts are overlay districts; however, a conservation district will typically regulate fewer features and will focus more on significant character defining features, such as lot size, building height, setbacks, streetscapes, and tree protection. Unlike historic districts, conservation districts rarely consider specific building elements, such as windows, buildings materials, colors, and decorative details. Table 3 provides a side by side comparison of the two types of districts.

TABLE 3
DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HISTORIC DISTRICT AND NEIGHBORHOOD CONSERVATION DISTRICT

	Historic District	**Neighborhood Conservation District**
Purpose	To protect areas that have important historical, cultural, architectural, social, or economic significance or character.	To protect areas that have a certain charm or importance to the community but may not be historically, cultural, or architecturally significant; or whose overall identity is challenged by incompatible additions or alterations.
Review Standards	All exterior alterations to designated historic buildings or sites in an historic district are subject to design review in accordance with the provisions of Chapter 14.09.113 of this division.	The city staff/neighborhood conservation commission shall review the design plans to determine compliance with the Neighborhood Conservation District regulations.
What is Regulated	Historical and architectural details such as construction materials, roof shapes, lighting, proportion, and appurtenant fixtures.	Restrictions such as height, setbacks, floor area limits, and parking.

Source:
Town of Chapel Hill Planning Department Housing and Neighborhood Services. Questions and Answers about Neighborhood Conservation Districts. Available: https://www.townofchapelhill.org/Home/ShowDocument?id=7264.

Neighborhood conservation districts became popular in the 1980s and are now located throughout the country including Chapel Hill, North Carolina; Annapolis, Maryland; Dallas, Texas; Davis, California; Memphis, Tennessee; Napa, California; Portland, Oregon; and Riverside, California. Local governments and neighborhood committees have enacted conservation districts "in an effort to address neighborhood development concerns—whether mansionization, the proliferation of vacant parcels and parking lots, disinvestment, or commercial encroachment."[3]

Conservation district programs are described as falling within the "historic preservation model" or the "neighborhood planning model."[4] The historic preservation model focuses on preserving the physical attributes of a neighborhood by addressing changes that could adversely affect its architectural character. Neighborhoods

2 Miller, Julia. 2004. *Protecting Older Neighborhoods Through Conservation District Programs*. Washington: National Trust for Historic Preservation. Pg. 1.

3 Miller, Julia H. 2003. "Neighborhood Conservation Districts," in *The Alliance Review*, November/December 2003: 24.

4 Miller, Julia. 2004. *Protecting Older Neighborhoods Through Conservation District Programs*. Washington: National Trust for Historic Preservation. Pg. 2.

protected under this approach often include a high concentration of older structures that share a cohesive quality through a common architectural style or building form. The neighborhood planning model also focuses on preserving a neighborhood's unique character. However, conservation goals are accomplished by examining matters typically addressed through zoning and neighborhood planning laws, such as lot coverage, setback requirements, and permitted uses. The distinctions between preservation-based and planning-based conservation districts are becoming less apparent as communities look for and develop solutions that respond to the specific needs of individual neighborhoods. Sometimes the solution results in a hybrid model.

If the City would like to move forward with establishing a historic district or either type of conservation district for the Buck Avenue area, between Cernon and Chandler streets, ESA welcomes the opportunity to discuss options and next steps.

For a traditional historic district, ESA recommends an intensive survey of the area. This would include defining the boundaries of the potential district, documenting each property, developing a historic context and character defining features for evaluation, and then identifying which properties would be contributors to the potential district.

A conservation district often begins with the drafting of an ordinance to allow for the establishment of conservation districts. Neighborhood participation, either by public meetings of forming study committees, is important during the early phases of creating a conservation district to identify interest and concerns. A survey of the Buck Avenue area would be necessary to identify which properties would be contributors to the conservation district.