

## HISTORIC WINTERSBURG

Mayor Erik Peterson  
City Council Members  
City of Huntington Beach

### RE: Item 19-530: Dissolution of the Ad Hoc Historic Wintersburg Committee

On behalf of the volunteers who have dedicated time and expertise to the historic preservation efforts and community education and outreach regarding Historic Wintersburg, we thank the City Council for the original support in 2012 which created the committee.

There is no objection to the dissolution of the City task force, as the original circumstances which led to the creation of the task force changed. We continue with our local and national partners.

As a historical effort, we believe it is important to comment on the staff report of April 23, 2019, as well as recent communications to the City Council and correct the public record.

First, it should be noted that this property was known by State and local government as being historically significant decades before the task force was formed.

### 1983

The Historic Wintersburg property was first noted as historically important through a cultural resources survey report conducted for Caltrans by Scientific Resource Surveys, Inc., for the potential widening and reconstruction of Warner Avenue. The determination was that at that time, three properties were considered eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, including the Furuta farm and Wintersburg Japanese Mission (Historic Wintersburg). The report noted, "*The Furuta house may be the only remaining Japanese residential structure in Orange County which predates the passage of the Alien Land Act of 1913.*"

No previous historic property surveys have been completed for the Wintersburg-Ocean View areas in the City of Huntington Beach. Further, there is a consistent lack of published material relating to the origins and local history of Wintersburg-Ocean View. Therefore, research was directed toward a synthesis of information gleaned from:

1. Maps
2. Church documents
3. Oral informants
4. Secondary sources dealing with Agriculture and Japanese immigrants in Orange County ca. 1900
5. Field survey

#### POTENTIAL NATIONAL REGISTER PROPERTIES (Sites within the APEI)

The SRS survey documented the existence of three (3) properties within the APEI which exhibit potential for inclusion in The National Register of Historic Places. Following a section regarding historical background, a request for determination of eligibility has been completed for each property and is attached. Information pertinent to each property has been included in this section.

## SUPPLEMENTAL COMMUNICATION

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Meeting Date: 5.6.19

Agenda Item No.: 15 (19-530)

## 1986

**Historic Building Survey:** The Orange County Japanese American Council, with the Bowers Museum, conducted a countywide survey and included the Furuta farm and Wintersburg Japanese Mission structures on their "Historic Building Survey" of the remaining, significant historic structures representing Japanese American history in Orange County. The City of Huntington Beach had this survey in the City archives when the property was evaluated for rezoning and demolition in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

**Local Historic Landmark:** Also in 1986, the Furuta farm and Wintersburg Japanese Mission structures were designated as a "Local Historic Landmark" and included as such in the City of Huntington Beach General Plan.

## 2012

The July 16, 2012 City Council minutes reflect the unanimous vote to form an ad hoc committee

A motion was made by Boardman, second Hansen to form an ad hoc committee that includes three Councilmembers (Shaw, Harper and Boardman) and interested individuals to participate in the study of preserving and relocating the historical buildings designated to be demolished on Nichols Street at Warner Avenue. The motion carried by the following roll call vote:

|       |  |
|-------|--|
| AYES: | Shaw, Harper, Dwyer, Hansen, Carchio, Bohr, and Boardman |
| NOES: | None   |

While the original expectation was for 18 months, the life of the task force was extended due to multiple postponements regarding Planning Commission and City Council public hearings regarding the draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) by the owner of the property, Rainbow Environmental Services, and, later, due to the unexpected change in ownership of the property. These extensions and the continued work of the task force were conducted with the full knowledge and regular briefings of City Council liaisons. Task force volunteers prepared agendas and minutes, to minimize impacts to City staff.

As part of the original mission, sixteen (16) potential sites in Huntington Beach and ten (10) potential sites outside Huntington Beach were evaluated during public meetings of the task force for potential relocation of the structures.

The task force was a co-exhibitor with the Smithsonian Institution twice at Heritage Museum of Orange County, featured multiple times at the Japanese American National Museum, and has achieved national and international recognition and interest in Huntington Beach and Orange County history.

## 2013

**National Park Service inspection:** The task force engaged the National Park Service to inspect the Historic Wintersburg property. The NPS determined in writing that the Historic Wintersburg property was potentially eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under "Criterion A, Japanese American Settlement of the American West".

**EIR certification / litigation:** After the City Council's certification of the draft EIR in November 2013, litigation was filed by the Ocean View School District which legally halted action on the Historic Wintersburg property, *including demolition, relocation of structures, or grading* until 2016.



## 2014

**New owner:** Prior to the settlement of litigation in November 2016, Republic Services purchased Rainbow Environmental in October 2014, including all facilities and properties, and including the Historic Wintersburg property.

**America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places :** Also in 2014, Historic Wintersburg was nationally recognized as one of "America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places" by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, along with Frank Lloyd Wright's Spring House (Florida), the Palisades (New Jersey), Mokuauikua Church (Hawaii) and the Cincinnati Music Hall (Ohio),

<https://savingplaces.org/collections/11-most-endangered-2014#.XM9Vw6R7mM8> A press conference was held at Huntington Beach City Hall in the City Council chambers.

## 2015

**Historic designation:** The City of Huntington Beach City Council formally included the Historic and Cultural Resources update to the City's General Plan, which formally determined *all six structures* at Historic Wintersburg as "3S" California Historical Resource Status Code, "*appears eligible for National Register as an individual property through survey evaluation*" under the Context and Criterion A, "Wintersburg / Cultural History". The National Register Criterion A determines a property makes "a contribution to the major pattern of American history" (National Park Service).

The "Criterion A" designation *automatically* placed the Historic Wintersburg property on the California Register of Historical Resources. Contrary to recent communications to the City Council, there was no application "*without the Property Owners knowledge*". Properties that are formally determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places are *automatically listed* on the California Register of Historical Resources, per State law.

**PBS program:** The PBS program, "Our American Family: The Furutats"—for which the task force provided historical and technical assistance—was premiered at the Japanese American National Museum, then nationwide on PBS stations.

**Urban Land Institute technical advisory:** In June 2015, the task force raised \$35,000 to fund a third-party technical analysis by the Urban Land Institute, involving the property owner (by then, Republic Services), community members, and City Council members.

**Task force fund:** City manager Fred Wilson sent a message to the task force in July 2015, "*This is to advise you that during a recent City audit, concerns were raised regarding donation accounts the City holds for external entities.*"

A copy of the audit report with this recommendation was requested from staff and later formally requested under the California Public Records Act (CPRA) to bring the audit recommendation to the task force for discussion and explain / document the need for an outside account.

The task force did not receive a response to the CPRA until August 2016: "*Following a reasonable effort to search for and locate responsive records, the City was unable to find any. Verbal concerns were raised regarding the donation account and nothing was reduced to a writing or record.*" (Dan Ohl, August 9, 2016), and "*It is clear to me that what we sent did not relate to the subject of your request, and I also*

*spoke with Dan Ohl who indicated that he sent you a communication stating that the City had no physical records to provide. Since I have no knowledge of who at the City was involved in closing City donation accounts, all I can do is reach out to internal parties requesting that they contact you directly to discuss the circumstances that led to this course of action.” (Robin Estanislau, August 9, 2016)*

No written audit recommendation or reason was provided; it appears there was no formal audit recommendation. The task force continued to meet, with the full knowledge of City Council liaisons.

**National Treasure:** Historic Wintersburg was designated a National Treasure by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. It is Orange County’s first and only National Treasure, and there are less than 100 National Treasures in the United States. <https://savingplaces.org/places/historic-wintersburg#.XM-C96R7mM9>

## 2016

**Litigation settled:** The settlement agreement in late 2016 between the Ocean View School District and Republic Services/Rainbow, presented additional new circumstances with new and significant restrictions on the property as relates to potential development. The settlement of litigation allowed further discussions to proceed regarding the purchase of the property.

## 2017

**Willingness to sell:** The task force was informed in early 2017 by Dave Hauser, VP of Republic Services, that Republic willingly would consider selling the property for preservation. The task force engaged another national partnership—in addition to the National Trust for Historic Preservation—with the Trust for Public Land, to negotiate and fund the purchase of the Historic Wintersburg property for preservation as a public heritage park.

**Five-year update:** The task force provided a joint presentation with the Trust for Public Land at the regular meeting of the Huntington Beach City Council in July 2017 and answered questions regarding the process for purchase negotiations, funding and preservation planning.

The task force respected the City’s directive that no City funds be used for the purchase; a national funding partner was engaged. To clear up misinformation, the task force does not hold these funds, as that is not how the funding works.

## 2018

**Meeting with mayor:** The task force, City Council liaisons and National Trust for Historic Preservation met with then Mayor Mike Posey. He directed no City resources be used for the task force. The task force respected the directive and continued its efforts regarding property negotiations, special events and community education via sub committees.

**Special meeting of Historic Resources Board:** In February 2018, a noticed public meeting was held by the City’s Historic Resources Board providing an update and discussion on Historic Wintersburg. The HRB voted to send a letter to the City Council asking for its support for its preservation.

**Negotiations with Republic Services:** Rick Normand, VP of Republic Services (replacing Dave Hauser), informed the task force they would willingly consider selling the property for preservation at meetings

held with the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Trust for Public Land and Ocean View School District (OVSD), which has first right of refusal and has permanent restrictions on the property.

## **2019**

There have been further discussions with Republic Services regarding the negotiations and purchase of the Historic Wintersburg property, led by national partners. The task force and the National Trust for Historic Preservation have offered expert assistance to Republic Services to provide property clean up and temporary stabilization of the historic structures—at no cost to Republic—while property negotiations continue.

Going forward, it is important to note the Historic Wintersburg property and its six structures were determined by national and state agencies—as well as the City of Huntington Beach—as eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. The listing on the California Register of Historical Resources means that *any* proposal for the property or its structures requires environmental review for cultural resources under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

Regards,  
Mary Adams Urashima  
Historic Wintersburg

