



HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION AGENDA REPORT

DATE: November 10, 2020

AGENDA OF: November 17, 2020

ITEM NO:

RECOMMENDATION: To approve a recommendation to the City Council to remove all mission bells from the City of Santa Cruz

BACKGROUND

At the beginning of the twentieth century, civic boosters, developers, and automobile promoters worked together to increase tourism and settlement in California by encouraging a nostalgic and positive remembering of California's Spanish colonial past. The promoters picked a mission bell with a shepherd's staff to mark and memorialize the route of a California state highway that followed the mythical trek of El Camino Real ("Royal Road"), that connected the twenty-one California missions and four presidios (military forts), and several pueblos from Mission San Diego de Alcalá in the south to Mission San Francisco de Solano to the north, turning the missions into money-making tourist destinations.

In contrast, Amah Mutsun Tribal Band Chairman Valentin Lopez and other California Indigenous peoples view the mission bells as a colonial settler and racist symbol that glorifies the killing, dehumanization, forced labor and imprisonment of their ancestors. The bell was a potent symbol of the domination of the Catholic Church and the Spanish state over all aspects of the lives of the indigenous people who were forced to live "under the bell."

On June 21, 2019 representatives of the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band and the University of California Santa Cruz ("UCSC") administration assembled on campus to remove an existing bell. However, there are two other bells located in the City of Santa Cruz. A bell marker on Mission St at Mission Plaza Park in the Mission Hill Area Historic District was dedicated on March 8, 1999. Another mission bell marker at Soquel and Dakota streets was installed in 2006.

In September of 2019, Chairman Lopez of the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band reached out to the City to express that the mission bell markers represent an omnipresent reminder of the destruction and domination of California Indigenous people and to ask that the two mission bells on City of Santa Cruz property be removed.

In late 2019, then Vice Mayor Cummings began discussions with Chairman Lopez regarding the removal of the Mission Bells. In early 2020, Mayor Cummings along with council members Brown and Mathews had follow up discussions with Chairman Lopez regarding the removal of

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the Mission Bells, but due to COVID-19, these conversations were put on hold. During one of the protests in the summer of 2020, protesters vandalized portions of the Historic Mission Plaza and the Mission Bell was removed from Mission Plaza. This act prompted conversations between many of the stakeholders in the Mission Historic District on whether to replace the bell or whether the bell should be removed and whether there was an opportunity to assess the way the story of the Mission was being told to ensure that it reflected the perspective of indigenous people.

From late July - October of 2020, Mayor Cummings and Director Tony Elliot hosted community meetings with representatives from Friends of the Santa Cruz State Parks, California State Parks, Museum of Natural History, Chairman Lopez from the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band, and other indigenous leaders to discuss if and how to move forward with removing the mission bells and how to reimagine Mission Plaza Park in the Mission Hill Area Historic District to better illustrate the history and experiences of the local indigenous people. Items discussed at these meetings included ideas for the replacement of the mission bells, concepts for Mission Plaza Park in the Mission Hill Area Historic District, and recommendations from the attendees. Consensus was reached that the bells should be removed throughout the City and that the narrative of Mission Plaza Park in the Mission Hill Area Historic District should be revised.

At the October 13, 2020 Santa Cruz City Council meeting, the City Council unanimously approved to adopt a resolution of the following:

- 1.) That the Santa Cruz City Council endorses the community's effort to update the narrative of Mission Plaza Park in the Mission Hill Area Historic District so that a more accurate depiction of the history of the indigenous people of the area is included, and;
- 2.) That the Santa Cruz City Council directs the Historic Preservation Commission to place an item on the next possible agenda to discuss the removal of all mission bells from the City of Santa Cruz and bring back a recommendation on whether or not to remove the bell for the City Council to consider.

ANALYSIS

With the City Council's approval of the resolution, they supported the ongoing dialogue among community stakeholders to update the narrative of Mission Plaza Park in the Mission Hill Area Historic District so that a more accurate depiction of the history of the indigenous people of the area is included.

It continues to be important that input and feedback from all the impacted stakeholders is considered in the process. An endorsement from the members of the City Council memorialized support for the group's efforts to continue to work with the community to ensure that the narrative told of Mission Plaza Park in the Mission Hill Area Historic District better reflects the perspective of the indigenous people of this area.

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The second part of the resolution is the specific matter for consideration by the Historic Preservation Commission – “That the Santa Cruz City Council direct the Historic Preservation Commission to place an item at a future meeting to discuss the permanent removal of all mission bells from the City of Santa Cruz and bring back a recommendation on whether or not to remove the bell for the City Council to consider.”

The process for installing these mission bell markers was initiated through the Historic Preservation Committee in 2005/2006 through the acceptance of a grant from the Questors Group. Prior to City Council moving forward with further direction, feedback from the Historic Preservation Committee is an important part of the public process.

With the unauthorized removal of the mission bell at the City’s Mission Plaza Park, only one bell remains in the City. That bell is located near the Hindquarter at 303 Soquel Ave. The recommendation for the Historic Preservation Commission is to support the removal of the one remaining bell.

The Mission Plaza stakeholder group, which includes tribal leaders, State Parks, City of Santa Cruz, Holy Cross, and others, have preliminarily discussed that the missing mission bell at Mission Plaza could be replaced by a plaque, interpretive signage, or art in order to convey the full history of the site. A similar approach would be recommended at the mission bell location on Soquel pending approval by the Commission and City Council.

The purpose of removing the bells is not to remove one aspect of history or replace it with another, but to include the indigenous voice, remove the physical symbols associated with oppression and genocide, and to create an opportunity to include multiple points of view in order to convey the full and accurate history in Santa Cruz.

SUMMARY

Staff is seeking an affirmative recommendation from the Historic Preservation Commission to the City Council to authorize removal of the mission bell in Santa Cruz.

The community stakeholder group, with prior support of the City Council, will continue to work collaboratively to develop concepts to tell the full history at Mission Plaza Park and/or other locations around the City. For any proposals necessitating further review by the Historic Preservation Commission, Arts Commission, Parks and Recreation Commission, or City Council, staff will return to the appropriate body with details and recommendations.

Submitted by:

Tony Elliot

Director of Parks and Recreation

Attachments:

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1. Amah Mutsun Tribal Band and UC Santa Cruz Announce Official Removal of El Camino Real “Mission Bell” from UCSC Campus
2. Valentin Lopez, Healing, and Decolonization: Contesting Mission Bells, El Camino Real, and California
3. Highway of History Revisited by John Sanford, Sentinel
4. Minutes, Historic Preservation Committee April 20, 2005