

San Diego LGBTQ Historic Sites Project

October 24, 2022

Historical Resources Board
1222 First Avenue, MS 501
San Diego, CA 92101

Re: HRB October 27, 2022 Agenda
Item #06: 3780-3786 Fifth Avenue – (HRB# 1453 –LGBTQ Community/Albert Bell Building, Site Development Permit No. 3134887

Chair Hutter, Board Members and Staff,

The San Diego LGBTQ Historic Sites Project would have preferred that the designated resource, HRB# 1453 –LGBTQ Community/Albert Bell Building, be preserved and incorporated into any proposed new development. The potential loss of one of the first LGBTQ designated historic sites in the City requires significant measures implemented for the adverse effects of the loss. That this site represents San Diego's LGBTQ's early history during the onset of AIDs and the creation of community demands special attention for any loss and in any mitigation.

Kolanymous, the developer, has made efforts to engage the community about the proposed development and additional measures that might be taken to offset the loss. They have explained the challenges attempting to incorporate the resource. The San Diego LGBTQ Historic Sites project regrets that Kolanymous has been unable to incorporate the resource into their project and would request that if the Historical Resources Board (HRB) approves the staff recommendations being presented that additional conditions be considered and implemented as part of the decision.

In presentations to the Uptown Planners Historic Committee and to the Uptown Planners Planning Group, the developer stated their intent to undertake some additional public benefit elements that would be in addition to the required mitigation measures proposed by HRB staff.

Mitigation 1:" The (MMRP) required for the Project specifically requires the project applicant to work with San Diego Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Community Center, the Gay Center for Social Services (The Center) and/or the Lambda Archives to create an interpretive display featuring a QR barcode link to online interpretive material outlining the historical events and activities associated with the former community spaces and occupants of 3780 Fifth Avenue."

Proposed condition of approval:

1. The developer said that the QR barcode would be linked to a website that they would create and maintain for the building. The QR code linked to a website would bring up a 2-3 minute video, an excerpt from a longer video they are proposing to create about the site and its history. This QR barcode and website

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presence should be maintained under the current ownership and be tied to any potential sale as a condition for any future change in ownership or management. This will ensure a continued on-line presence of the important history of the site and should be a condition of approval.

In Mitigation 2: "Additionally, the MMRP requires the applicant to work with the Lambda Archives and a Historical Documentarian, well-versed in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer Plus (LGBTQ+) Community History and the designated historical structures and site, to fund an oral history project involving the community members who participated in the previous organizations which operated on site that were important to its significance. The final project will be archived at the Lambda Archives."

Proposed condition of approval:

2. The developer mentioned a short video being created of the history of the site. Potentially this could be part of the "oral history project" or linked to the development web site. If it is not part of any mitigation components then a condition of approval would be that the developer creating this video for public access. See 1 above as well, "short video."

There were some additional efforts that Kolonymous said would be part of their commitment to respect what occurred at the site of the proposed project and which are not mitigation measures in the staff report but which the HRB consider as other conditions in addition to the ones above to any approval.

Proposed conditions of approval:

3. The creation of a commemorative art piece. With some creative design this could be incorporated into Mitigation 1, the interpretive display or a separate element. This should be another condition of approval.
4. The possible naming of the development as "The Albert" or some variation. This a nice gesture and a branding issue for the developer and could possibly be another condition of approval.
5. A drone flyover footage and a 3D walk thru was also mentioned by Kolonymous. It is not clear if this is part of Mitigation 1, QR code tied to online interpretive material, Mitigation 2, "oral history", or Mitigation 3, HABS documentation. It also could be part of the video (see 2 above) that would be in addition to the mitigation requirements. This should be a condition of approval.

In summary, the San Diego LGBTQ Historic Sites Project regrets the potential loss of this significant LGBTQ historic site. The mitigation measures proposed are the minimum and are difficult to value with respect to the potential loss. The additional items or

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clarifications (1 thru 6) that Kolonymous has proposed for commemorating and honoring the significance of the site should be discussed as conditions of approval by the Board.

Quoting from “Commemorating Historically Significant Gay Places Across the United States” by Camden Miller and Alex Bitterman

“The stories of gay spaces across the United States are largely unrecorded, undocumented, and are not centrally collected or archived beyond informal reports and oral histories. Evidence demonstrates that the preservation of historic sites allows for future generations to benefit from intangibles related to community and identity. However, the LGBTQ+ community has been unable to gain benefits that place-based, historic sites can provide, due to an inability to commemorate spaces that have shaped LGBTQ+ history in significant ways.”

In conclusion, the San Diego LGBTQ Historic Sites Project recommends that if the Historical Resources Board accepts the mitigation measures for the loss of HRB# 1453 LGBTQ Community/Albert Bell Building due to the proposed development at 3780-3786 Fifth Avenue, that additional conditions as described previously be placed on the approval and the mitigation measures being considered by the Board.

Respectfully submitted,



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