

**UNOFFICIAL MINUTES  
OF THE  
SALINAS HISTORIC RESOURCES BOARD  
April 7, 2025**

The meeting was called to order at 12:00 p.m. in the City Hall Rotunda.

**ROLL CALL**

**PRESENT:** Chairperson Hirahara, Vice Chairperson Mazgai, Board Members Shim, Callander, and Munoz

**ABSENT:** Wadsworth

**STAFF:** Planning Manager, Grant Leonard, Community Outreach Assistant, Bianca Arizmendi, and Assistant Planner, Yesenia Segovia

**COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC FOR ITEMS NOT ON THE AGENDA**

Opened for public comment at 12:01 p.m.

Closed for public comment at 12:01 p.m.

**CONSENT:**

**APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES:** March 7, 25 ID #25-121

Board Member Callander and Vice Chairperson Mazgai pointed out the misuse of pronouns for Board Member Shim on the last page and on page two suggesting that "he" be changed to "she". Vice Chairperson Mazgai also noted a misspelling of his surname on pages one and five. Furthermore, Vice Chairperson Mazgai requested clarification regarding the confirmation that 119 Cayuga is not on the National Register. Chair Hirahara confirmed that Grant Leonard has verified the address, and further clarification regarding 119 Cayuga will be provided later in the meeting. Board Member Shim motioned to approve the minutes and Vice Chairperson Mazgai second the motion.

**AYES:** Chair Hirahara, Vice Chairperson Mazgai, Board Members Callander, Shim

**NOES:** None

**ABSTAIN:** None

**ABSENT:** Board Member Wadsworth

The motion passed with a 4-0

## CONSIDERATIONS:

### ID#25-122 34-38 Soledad Street Update

**Chair Hirahara:** Introduced the 34-38 Soledad Street update and noted the recommendation to receive the project update and discuss architectural elements for preservation.

**Grant Lenord:** Provided an overview of the final Historic Structures Report, which found the building potentially qualifies as historic under state and federal criteria but also highlighted significant structural and cosmetic deterioration due to 40 years of vacancy. Reported that a recent break-in caused additional damage, particularly to already compromised stucco siding. Photos were shown to illustrate spreading gaps and cracks. The building has since been red-tagged and condemned. Emergency repair proposals are underway, but demolition may be necessary depending on the building's rate of deterioration. Emphasized the need to identify and salvage historically significant elements—especially from the front façade—in case demolition proceeds. Requested board input on preservation priorities.

**Chair Hirahara:** Invited questions or comments from the board.

**Chair Hirahara:** Asked whether a partial demolition was possible or if the entire building must be demolished. Noted that the east-facing façade was likely the only portion planned for reuse, primarily as a façade.

**Grant Lenord:** Responded that he would consult with the chief building official about the feasibility of partial demolition. Explained that the west and north walls are reinforced concrete, while the south and east walls are wood, with the most damage concentrated on the south side due to dry rot, fire, and structural failure.

**Board Member Shim:** Asked if the building would be rebuilt in the same design if demolished.

**Grant Lenord:** Confirmed that TF Design's plans incorporate the original design into the future mixed-use project, including either the existing or reconstructed front façade.

**Board Member Munoz:** Emphasized the importance of preserving character-defining features such as historic textures, paint colors, and architectural details. Highlighted Chinatown's unique color history and the need for any repainting or restoration to follow the Secretary of the Interior's standards.

**Chair Hirahara:** Invited further comments.

**Board Member Mazgai:** Indicated he had a brief comment.

**Chair Hirahara:** Asked if there could be partial demolition and emphasized the importance of preserving the east-facing façade, noting it was likely the only portion to be reused. Later inquired about the opportunity for board input before demolition and proposed the idea of a mural as a design concept, referencing the nearby P.I. Market.

**Grant Lenord:** Explained the structural composition of the building and confirmed that most damage is on the south wall. Agreed to raise the partial demolition idea with the chief building official. Confirmed that TF Design plans to retain the front façade in future development. Added there is no firm demolition timeline but committed to keeping the board updated. Responded positively to the mural idea as a possible design element, pending architectural input.

**Board Member Mazgai:** Stressed the building's historic and community value but emphasized that the east-facing façade is the key feature worth preserving. Questioned the relevance of restoring the interiors to their 1940s-50s form, suggesting the neighborhood's needs have evolved. Later acknowledged that the historic report already includes interior recommendations.

**Board Member Callander:** Agreed with preserving the façade and suggested removing the structurally compromised sections would simplify the process.

**Board Member Munoz:** Emphasized the importance of preserving the visible envelope of a historic structure in line with state and federal preservation guidelines. Recalled the original interior's beauty and proposed using photographs or community outreach to help restore or replicate lost features.

**Board Member Shim:** Noted the building was originally two stories and suggested reconstructing the façade to reflect that, even if the interior remains single-story, potentially serving as a museum or open space to maintain historical integrity.

**Chair Hirahara:** Summarized that the Historic Resource Board supports preserving the east façade, if possible, and favors partial demolition over total demolition. Emphasized the need for the board to have a chance to provide input before any final decisions are made. Asked who would be making the ultimate decision regarding demolition.

**Board Member Munoz:** Referenced the historic study's recommendation to maintain and restore the east façade using differentiated materials and minimal detailing to reflect its original form.

**Board Member Mazgai:** Asked how the red-tagging and potential demolition would impact interest from developers.

**Grant Leonard:** Confirmed the board's input was valuable and assured that updates would be provided. Clarified that the city, specifically the chief building official, would make the final call on demolition if it posed a public safety concern. Explained that the city is working with TEF Design on pre-development planning. Once complete, a request for proposals will go out to affordable housing developers. Noted that a clear

site could be more attractive and cost-effective for developers than adaptive reuse, though both approaches are viable.

**Chair Hirahara:** Invited final comments on the 34–38 Soledad Street discussion.

## OTHER BUSINESS

ID#25-123 History of Chinatown Presentation

Receive Preservation on the History of Salinas' Chinatown

**Board Member Shim:** Shared a historical overview of Salinas' Chinese community, noting its roots before 1870 and the cultural loss following the closure of the Republic Cafe and departure of established families and property owners. Despite past revitalization efforts, the area has deteriorated. Shim emphasized the urgency of preserving Chinatown's legacy and advocated for establishing a museum or memorial to honor the community's contributions.

She also presented broader historical context, referencing similar patterns of displacement and destruction of Chinese communities in California and the Pacific Northwest. Cited incidents in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Honolulu, and Pacific Grove, including fires, massacres, and forced relocations. Notably referenced a 1900 article from the *San Francisco Chronicle* that described how a fire in Salinas' Chinatown was deliberately exacerbated due to anti-Chinese sentiment, leading to substantial losses.

She presented on the politics of racism that shaped Chinese American history, beginning with Dennis Kearney's 1870s anti-Chinese activism in San Francisco, where economic fears led to widespread xenophobia. Early Chinese immigrants were initially welcomed by Mayor John Geary for labor needs, but sentiments shifted, leading to discriminatory laws such as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. Key figures like newspaper editor Charles de Young opposed this racism and was ultimately murdered. Shim noted that Salinas' own Mayor Philip Roach advocated for the exclusion act at the federal level.

She also discussed oppressive local ordinances like the "Cubic Airspace" law and forced inoculation mandates during the bubonic plague, aimed at displacing Chinese residents. However, figures like Luk Tin Eli helped resist these efforts by initiating the architectural and cultural reconstruction of Chinatown after the 1906 earthquake.

Shim highlighted artists who documented Chinatown, including Eldridge Burbank, known for portraits and temple sketches despite personal struggles, and Nanying Stella Wong, a Bohemian watercolorist and niece of Charlotte Atai. She then showcased traditional Chinese architectural elements incorporated into post-1906 buildings, emphasizing their cultural resilience.

She concluded with the legacy of the Atai family, particularly Yi Atai, who built the Kangchow Temple, and his daughter Charlotte Atai, who protested its eventual demolition. Also mentioned was the preservation of historical temples, like the 1854 Chinese Temple in Mendocino and the Tacoma Heritage Park, illustrating enduring efforts to honor Chinese American heritage.

**Chair Hirahara:** Acknowledged Board Member Shim's comprehensive presentation on the history and legacy of Salinas Chinatown and Chinese American experiences in California. Detailed the 1885 Tacoma riot, where Chinese residents were forcibly expelled and their village burned, later commemorated by a memorial and a 1993 city council apology.

Commented the timeline of Salinas Chinatown from the 1870s to the present, highlighting significant sites like the Confucius Temple and Republic Cafe. Emphasized the impact of urbanization, rezoning, and the decline of the once-thriving community, despite revitalization efforts starting in 2009.

Commented on the Atai family, especially Charlotte Atai's activism, Yi Atai's contributions, and Lily Atai's long stewardship of the Republic Cafe. Cited extensive sources, including *Bury My Bones* and historical newspapers.

**Board Member Munoz:** Added examples of similar displacements in Watsonville and Pacific Grove, where Chinese communities were forced out or lost to fire, yet left a legacy recognized by efforts to revive cultural traditions.

**Chair Hirahara:** Noted the historical depth of the Atai family and clarified the naming origin—Yi being the original surname. He praised Lily Atai's role in maintaining the Republic Cafe and encouraged reviewing historical context reports, especially those by Page & Turnbull, for further insight. He also mentioned the Sherwood family's key role in enabling early Chinese settlement by allowing property ownership, which helped establish Chinatown in Salinas.

### ***Empire House Project Update***

**Chair Hirahara:** Introduced the next item of business: the Empire House Project at 119 Cayuga.

**Grant Leonard:** Provided the update, clarifying that while the property is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, it is designated as locally significant rather than state or national significance. The project involves an interior remodel to maintain its use as office space, along with minor exterior updates to an addition built in the 1900s. The most notable change was the removal of a non-original exterior staircase—previously added to comply with building codes during a past residential-to-commercial conversion. This staircase has been removed, and the original window restored. A new

deck and ADA ramp have also been installed. Current work includes a restoration of the front staircase using like-for-like materials.

Leonard noted that due to a tracking oversight (a missing historic property flag), the project did not initially come before the board for a finding of consistency, despite involving exterior alterations.

**Board Member Mazgai:** Asked about plans for the facade and how compliance with historical guidelines is ensured. Leonard confirmed the exterior staircase is removed and access is now solely via the interior staircase, with all changes going through regular building permits.

**Board Member Munoz:** Emphasized that the Secretary of the Interior's standards guide such restorations—focusing on preserving visible historic facades and ensuring that additions are distinguishable and removable, allowing the original structure to be restored if needed.

**Chair Hirahara:** Raised a question about ADA compliance, asking whether accessibility features are exempt from historic preservation standards, given the potential conflict between federal ADA requirements and historical integrity.

**Board Member Munoz:** Responded that ADA exceptions exist for historic buildings. For example, a lift could minimize visual impact compared to a ramp, which is more intrusive but also more cost-effective.

**Chair Hirahara:** Acknowledged that while the permit cannot be retroactively altered, steps must be taken to ensure future projects involving historic properties are properly flagged for review.

**Board Member Mazgai:** Asked for clarification on what future work at the Cayuga site would require review. Grant Leonard explained that while interior changes are considered minor and do not require board review, major exterior changes must go through the historic review process and receive a finding of consistency.

**Board Member Mazgai:** Also inquired about tracking protections for National Register properties in Salinas. Leonard and Board Member Munoz confirmed that Monterey County is working on a comprehensive flagging and training system for city staff and boards. The county is also preparing a recorded training to support consistent preservation practices.

**Grant Leonard:** Added that an audit of the current system is underway, and missing flags will be corrected as part of that process.

**Board Member Shim:** Questioned whether additions not in keeping with the original design would disqualify a building from its historic designation.

**Board Member Munoz:** Clarified that alterations must be distinguishable and maintain character-defining features; significant changes can indeed cause a building to lose its historic status.

**Board Member Mazgai:** Noted this issue is common in Pacific Grove, where historic listings are lost due to non-compliant changes. Munoz humorously likened it to excessive plastic surgery altering a person's appearance beyond recognition.

**Chair Hirahara:** Speculated that some property owners might prioritize renovations over preservation, possibly forfeiting historic designation intentionally.

**Board Member Munoz:** Emphasized the importance of coordination between historical boards and city staff, with proper training and understanding of Secretary of the Interior standards to ensure informed recommendations.

**Chair Hirahara:** Concluded the discussion and moved on to the next agenda item.

### ***HRB Continued Education Requirements***

**Chair Hirahara:** Initiated the discussion on HRB (Historic Resource Board) continuing education requirements, asking how many hours are required annually.

**Grant Leonard:** Explained that the requirement is minimal—just one relevant training per year, with the board determining what qualifies. He noted that the board has already exceeded this in the past year, including individual trainings completed by members. These can be officially recognized by listing them in the annual report.

**Board Member Munoz:** Recalled that in earlier years, the board held group training sessions with planners to stay updated on CEQA, preservation incentives, and the role of restoration in boosting tourism. He emphasized the value of such joint trainings.

**Chair Hirahara:** Suggested that parts of board presentations might count toward training time, at least cumulatively. He also asked whether board members are required to complete ethics training every two years.

**Grant Leonard:** Responded affirmatively but said he would confirm with the city clerk.

### ***34-38 and 45 Soledad Street Design Update and Open House***

**Chair Hirahara:** Inquired about the upcoming design update and open house for 34-38 and 45 Soledad Street. He confirmed that the event is planned for the Buddhist temple, likely around 6 p.m., in their multipurpose room which is equipped for presentations. He also clarified that during the upcoming ACE (Asian Cultural Experience) event on April 26, the Republic Cafe will not be open but will be included in the walking tour. Efforts are currently underway with the city's community development department to address

the encampments in front of the building, with a goal to have them cleared, at least temporarily, by the event date.

### ***Fox Theater Mural***

**Chair Hirahara** noted public interest in the new mural on the Fox Theater, referencing a Facebook post where many were unaware that the Historic Resources Board (HRB) had been involved in the approval process. He highlighted that it was indeed reviewed and approved by the HRB on July 1, 2024. Noted that the involvement of the Historic Resources Board (HRB) in the approval process was well-received and likely not widely known, emphasizing it as a positive development.

### ***California Preservation Foundation Membership***

**Chair Hirahara:** Inquired about the California Preservation Foundation membership status.

**Grant Leonard** responded that the membership is not yet active but is in progress, as he still needs to complete the procurement paperwork.

FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS:

### ***Certificate of Appreciation Program***

**Chair Hirahara:** Noted that nominations for the Certificate of Appreciation have been announced on Facebook and are open to individuals, organizations, programs, and projects. He acknowledged the application period runs through April 25 and encouraged interest at community events like First Saturday. He also mentioned that some organizations he works with are likely to submit nominations, with final presentations scheduled for the May 5 meeting.

### ***Permit Process and Flagging Historic Resources***

**Chair Hirahara:** Mentioned that an update on the permit process and improvements to the flagging of historic resources will be provided in a future report. He then asked if there was any additional business to bring before the Historic Resources Board.

ADJOURNMENT

Confirmation of attendance for next regular meeting on May 5, 2025.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:15 p.m.

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Larry Hirahara  
Chairperson

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Grant Leonard  
Executive Secretary



