BRUNZELL
HISTORICAL

June 6, 2016

Robert Salisbury
County of Santa Clara, Department of Planning and Development
70 W. Hedding Street, East Wing, 7th Floor
San Jose, California 95110

Subject: Historical Nomination of the Cambrian Park Plaza carousel sign at 14900 Camden Avenue, San Jose, Santa Clara County, California

Dear Robert,

I am pleased to present the following letter report, which comprises the historical nomination of the Cambrian Park Plaza carousel sign as a Santa Clara County Historical Landmark.

Methodology
Kara Brunzell conducted a site visit on April 7, 2015. The site visit included collecting photographs of the sign from several views, as well as photographs of its setting in the Cambrian Park Plaza shopping center. (Although views of the setting were collected in order to gather information about the carousel sign, this project did not include recordation or evaluation of the Cambrian Park Plaza shopping center property.) Kara Brunzell conducted a personal interview with a former property manager and contacted long-time business owners at Cambrian Park Plaza. She performed research through the San Jose Library and County of Santa Clara Building Department, and undertook additional online research at ancestry.com, History San Jose, and other websites.

Summary of Findings
The purpose of the site visit and research was to evaluate the carousel sign for local historic eligibility pursuant to Santa Clara County Code Sec. C17-5. - Designation Criteria. The sign is eligible for listing as a Santa Clara Historic Landmark.

Historic Context
Post-war Santa Clara County
Residential development in the Cambrian neighborhood began in the late 1940s, in the context of San Jose's exponential growth and suburbanization after World War II. The United States' entry into the war in the waning days of 1941 set in motion a series of changes that would transform Santa Clara County from an agricultural to an industrial powerhouse and allow San Jose to become Northern California's largest population center. Proximity to war training and embarkation centers in San Francisco and at Fort Ord to the south brought huge numbers of people through Santa Clara County. People from all over the country relocated to the area to work in local defense industry plants, and many stayed after the war ended. Wartime contracts also led to the growth of early technology companies, laying the foundation for what would become Silicon Valley. After the war

ended, federal policies encouraged the construction of new highways and suburban neighborhoods, and military veterans had access to attractive terms for home loans. Rapid residential development had already begun when City Manager A.P. Hamann took over in 1950. Hamann presided over San Jose's expansion from seventeen to 137 square miles over the next two decades.[1]

Cambrian

The Cambrian Park neighborhood, which is also referred to simply as Cambrian, is an unincorporated area of Santa Clara County. It is bordered by the communities of Campbell and Los Gatos and is virtually encircled by San Jose neighborhoods. Local use of the name began in the nineteenth century, when a settler from Wales gave a school the Latin name of his homeland. The rural area between Campbell and Los Gatos was utilized for wheat-growing and later orchards. Cambrian remained planted in orchards until the late 1940s, even after the widening of Highway 17 made Campbell and Los Gatos more accessible and San Jose began to grow and industrialize. But rising property values and population growth eventually made Cambrian's development inevitable, and residential subdivisions of the neighborhood began near the end of the decade. Cambrian Park Unit 1 just west of Cambrian Park Plaza was subdivided and developed in 1948. Six more Cambrian Park subdivisions were completed over the next few years. When Paul Schaeffer developed Cambrian Park Plaza just five years after Cambrian Park Unit 1, there were already plenty of potential shoppers living in the neighborhood. The new plaza (one of the San Jose area's early shopping centers) transformed the neighborhood, providing a de facto town center and further stimulating residential development. The use of "Cambrian Park" as a name for the neighborhood appears to have followed its use in the subdivision and shopping center names. By 1970, the neighborhood was nearly built out.[2]

Cambrian Park Plaza

Paul Schaeffer's seventeen-acre parcel just east of Highway 17 was an attractive location for commercial development in the early 1950s as developers began to transform Cambrian's orchards to residential subdivisions. Born around the turn of the century in Philadelphia, Schaeffer relocated to Carson City, Nevada in his youth. He married a woman named Marion about 1927 and worked in the construction industry. By 1940, the couple had relocated to San Jose, where they lived in the older neighborhoods near downtown. Schaeffer sold agricultural implements and had a trucking business. He appears to have formed Schaeffer Land Company (the entity which owned the shopping center for decades) in the early 1950s in order to develop Cambrian Park Plaza. He is likely to have developed some of the local residential subdivisions, and he donated the land for the Methodist church built in 1952 southwest of the shopping center site. Beginning in 1953, Schaeffer developed the shopping center with the help of builder Christian A. Wilder. The partners began pouring concrete foundations for the first buildings in the spring of 1953. Initial construction was complete by fall, and the partners added the buildings adjacent the intersection in 1954. After Marion Schaeffer died in 1960, Paul married a woman named Joyce. He died in 1982, but the

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[1] Preservation Action Council of San Jose, "San Jose Mid-Century Modern Context," Prepared by PAST Consultants, LLC, June 2009, 24 – 27; County of Santa Clara, "County of Santa Clara Historic Context Statement," Prepared by Archives & Architecture, LLC, December 2004 (Revised 2012), 46.

[2] Cambrian Community Council, "History of Cambrian," ©1997-2016 Real Estate Websites by PropertyMinder, http://campbell-properties.com/Cambrian, accessed 10 May 2016.Historic Aerial Photographs, Copyright 2009-2016 Nationwide Environmental Title Research, LLC, historicaerials.com, accessed 9 May 2016; History San Jose, Index to Santa Clara County Subdivision Maps 1930-1970, http://historysanjose.org/wp/research-collection/research-library/, accessed 9 May 2016.

shopping center remained in the Schaeffer family until 2015. The shopping center appears to have originally been referred to as "Cambrian Plaza" or "Cambrian Park Plaza" interchangeably, but over time the latter usage became dominant.[3]

Figure 1: Aerial Photograph of Cambrian Park Plaza, c1960, Del Carlo (Arnold) Photograph Collection, Sourisseau Academy for State and Local History.

Born in San Francisco to Danish parents, Christian Wilder became a lumber-mill foreman by the age of 22. By 1940, he was in his late 30s and managing the mill. After World War II, he relocated to Santa Clara County, where he formed the Wilder Company and began constructing residential subdivisions. In 1950 – 51 he built the Rancho Los Altos Shopping Center (a template for Cambrian Park Plaza) over the opposition of local merchants. After constructing Cambrian Park Plaza in the early 1950s, Wilder went on to construct at least one more shopping center (in Aptos) and headed a shopping center group.[4]

[3] U.S. Census Records, Santa Clara County, 1940; Polk Directory of San Jose, 1947; Building Permits on file with the County of Santa Clara.

[4] Santa Cruz Sentinel, 12 March 1961, 4; U.S. Census Records, San Francisco, 1920, 1930; Santa Clara City Directory, 1947.

In the 1950s, building records were much less detailed than they are today, and Santa Clara County building permit files do not contain any information about the original construction of the carousel sign or the replacement of its lettering at an unknown date, probably after 1980. Research has not revealed when the iconic carousel sign was constructed, or whether the Wilder Company built it (although recent newspaper stories state that it was designed by a local baker.)

The stylish new shopping plaza brought the Cambrian area into the fashionable mainstream. With its eight acres of stores and even larger parking area, the plaza dwarfed the "corner" commercial developments that had previously characterized Cambrian. Shopping centers were a new type of commercial development in Santa Clara County, (although Rancho Los Altos fourteen miles to the northwest preceded Cambrian Park Plaza by two years.) The nine-acre parking lot located adjacent to the street and the plaza's convenient location (near both the freeway and the junction of two arterials) oriented it toward the automobile, which by the 1950s was dictating the form of San Jose's expansion. The center's sprawling, low-slung buildings with their non-orthogonal layout blended Ranch and Mid-century Modern architecture. Natural materials such as brick and shake roofs softened modernist features like clerestory windows and exposed beams. Cambrian Park Plaza (which predated the local library and community center) became the town center in a neighborhood that had been rapidly transformed from agricultural to residential and which lacked a traditional commercial district. The whimsical moving carousel sign near the corner, with its bright colors and cartoonish depiction of people at leisure, performed an important function at the new plaza. With its one-story buildings nearly 200 feet from the street, the shopping center's stores lacked the visibility of a department store or bank in a traditional downtown. The perpetually spinning carousel was tall, brightly colored, and situated near the intersection. Neon lettering that spelled out "Cambrian Plaza Shopping" below the carousel on the wooden portion of the sign would have been especially visible after dark. Designed to catch the eye of passing motorists, the unique sign became the symbol of the Cambrian community as well as the shopping center.

Figure 2: Cambrian Park Plaza carousel sign, undated c1960 photo, photographer unknown.

Photographs

Figure 3: Cambrian Park Plaza carousel sign, Kara Brunzell, April 7, 2015.

Figure 4: Cambrian Park Plaza carousel sign and shopping center setting, Kara Brunzell, April 7, 2015.

Figure 5: Detail, carousel sign, Kara Brunzell, April 7, 2015.

Figure 6: Detail, carousel sign, Kara Brunzell, April 7, 2015.

Evaluation

The Cambrian Park Plaza Carousel Sign meets Santa Clara County's criteria for historic landmark designation as set forth in Section C-17-5 of the Municipal Code in the following respects:

A. *Fifty years or older:* The sign was constructed in the 1950s, and is therefore over 50 years old.
B. *Retains historic integrity:* Historic integrity is the authenticity of a property's historic identity, evidenced by the survival of physical characteristics that date from its historic period. Although the original neon lettering on the sign was replaced at an unknown date with the current backlit box and changeable-letter sign below, other components of the sign assemblage have kept their original forms. It has three main parts: spinning metal carousel atop three-sided wooden base supported by a heavy square post. All three elements appear to be original, and their spatial relationships are unchanged. The square post retains its original form, although in 2016 its base is surrounded by a brick planter. The three-sided wooden central portion of the assemblage, with its saw-toothed edges that coordinate with the rustic modernism of the shopping center buildings, has remained virtually unaltered except for the removal of original neon. Most importantly, the moving carousel which is the most unique and visually distinctive element of the sign, appears to have retained the essence of its original design. Close inspection demonstrates that its two-dimensional cutout characters appear to have been repainted in recent years. The characters' expressions and costumes have been somewhat altered, but their forms appear intact from the carousel's original 1950s design. Its striped canopy has also been repainted, and the width of its blue and white stripes doubled, but like the characters its form remains. All properties change over time, and paint on metal would not last 65 years without being refreshed, so the carousel's repainting can be considered an expected alteration (analogous to replacing a worn out roof) that does not negatively affect integrity. The removal of neon lettering is a significant alteration that has negatively impacted the integrity of the resource. Despite this

change, however, the sign retains its landmark character-defining features including its perpetual-motion carousel with colorful canopy and whimsical characters, as well as its three-sided wood base with sawtooth edge. The sign therefore retains sufficient integrity for historic eligibility despite altered lettering and repainting.

C. *Meets one or more of the following criteria of significance:*

1. Associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of local or regional history, or the cultural heritage of California or the United States;

The Cambrian Park Plaza Carousel Sign is not associated with events that have made a significant contribution to history or cultural heritage.

2. Associated with the lives of persons important to local, California or national history;

The Cambrian Park Plaza Carousel Sign has no known association with the lives of persons important to history.

3. Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, region, or method of construction, or represents the work of a master or possesses high artistic values; or

The Cambrian Park Plaza Carousel Sign embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type and period of construction. With its whimsical kinetic sculpture depicting a carousel in motion, the unique sign is an eye-catching example of Roadside Vernacular architecture. Like historic landmarks in this style within San Jose city limits, the Cambrian Park Plaza Carousel Sign was designed within Santa Clara County's post-war tradition of expressive and idiosyncratic programmatic architecture. Buildings, signs, and structures built in the Roadside Vernacular style were overtly commercial, intended to command the attention of passing motorists and persuade them to stop and patronize the businesses with which they were associated. Individual examples of Roadside Vernacular architecture tend to be idiosyncratic, but most share certain features: utilization of bright colors, exaggerated scale, and kitschy panache to seize attention. Examples of the style that are City of San Jose historic landmarks include Mark's Hot Dogs ("The Orange"), Babe's Mufflers, and the Futurama sign. The carousel sign is one of the largest and most distinctive signs designed within this context (no other local examples are known to incorporate mechanical moving parts). It is also an important monument for the Cambrian neighborhood, which lacks a downtown business district and other traditional landmarks for wayfinding and community identity. As such, the Cambrian Park Plaza carousel sign is worthy of designation as a Santa Clara County historic landmark.[5]

4. Yielded or has the potential to yield information important to the pre-history or history of the local area, California, or the nation

The Cambrian Park Plaza Carousel Sign does not appear to be an important source of information in this regard.

Recommendations

The Cambrian Park Plaza carousel sign is an eligible as a Santa Clara County historic landmark because it is over 50 years old, is a unique example of Roadside Vernacular architecture, and retains sufficient integrity to convey its historic identity. Any future projects should be undertaken in a manner that will not result in loss or significant alteration of character-defining features. The

[5] City of San Jose, Landmark Registry, https://www.sanjoseca.gov/index.aspx?NID=2173, accessed 10 may 2016.

Cambrian Park Plaza shopping center, which was not evaluated as part of this project, also dates from the historic-period, and should be evaluated before any projects are undertaken to alter the buildings on the parcel.

Preparer's Qualifications

Kara Brunzell holds a Master's degree in Public History and has worked multiple facets of historic preservation and cultural resource evaluation since 2007. She is meets the Secretary of Interior's Professional Qualifications for both History and Architectural History. Her experience includes municipal preservation planning and working as the lead staff member of a non-profit preservation organization. Since 2012, she has worked full-time as a historical consultant, completing dozens of evaluations for CEQA and Section 106 compliance. Additionally, she has completed local and national register nominations, historic context statements, and HAER recordation. In addition to working with historic-period domestic, agricultural, and commercial properties for private and municipal clients, she has evaluated post offices, military bases, university campuses, hospitals, church properties, and a NASA site. She is listed as a Historian and Architectural Historian on the California Office of Historic Preservation's roster of qualified consultants for every county in California.

Please contact me by phone at 707/290-2918 or e-mail at kara.brunzell@yahoo.com with any questions or comments.

Sincerely,

Kara Brunzell, M.A.
Architectural Historian