

Alameda Sun



Locally Owned, Community Oriented

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Alameda Sun
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Today	07:12	17:33
Feb. 3	07:11	17:34
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Quick Action Saves West End Railroad Landmark

Conchita Perales

Railway historian Thomas Cornillie recently saved a piece of Alameda's history from destruction. He played a role in preventing the scheduled demolition of a historic railroad building by alerting the Alameda Architectural Preservation Society (AAPS) of its imminent demise.

The building in question sits on the south side of Lincoln Avenue, about 100 feet east of Webster Street. From Sept. 7, to Nov. 8, 1869, railroad tracks carried trains past this spot to a wharf near today's Main Street and Pacific Avenue that was built to serve the San Francisco & Alameda Railroad. In 1872, the Central Pacific Railroad stopped using the wharf and began running trains down today's Constitution Way and across the Alice Street Bridge into Oakland. The tracks west of Mastick Junction, where Lincoln Avenue trains headed for Oakland, stopped carrying main-line trains. The intersection of Lincoln Avenue and Webster Street lost its role as a railroad stop for the next 39 years.

In 1911 the Southern Pacific Railroad (SP) introduced the East Bay Electric Lines. Once again trains began running along Lincoln Avenue past Webster Street on their way to Main Street and Pacific Avenue. Tracks from there carried passengers to the Alameda Mole, now buried beneath the old runways at the defunct Naval Air Station.

The new electrified cars, popularly known as the Big Reds, stopped at Webster Street. SP built the shelter east of Webster for passengers. The Big Reds ran for 30 years. After 1941, when SP stopped service, the little shelter fell into disuse.

In July 2016, the Planning Board was set to approve developer Kevin Lam's 7,100-square-foot building at Lincoln and Webster. Lam got set to demolish that forlorn, little building and remove a pesky tree that stood in his way. The city posted notices at the site alerting property owners and residents of the plan approval hearing that would soon take place.

As a historian, Cornillie knew that a living piece of Alameda's railroad was hiding under the plaster and concrete blocks. He grew up in a railroad family and spent most of his career working with railroads and in public transportation. "I was always on the lookout for remnants of that railroad history on the Island," he said. "So when I first saw this building, I was suspicious that it had some railroad connection." He thought it once had a more per-

manent purpose than as an office for a small rental car lot.

He remembered seeing a 1934 picture of the Webster "waiting station shelter" in its original setting in Grant Ute and Bruce Singer's book *Alameda by Rail*.

"When I saw the picture in the book I just put two and two together," he said. "At this point, the rental car office was still open, so I brought the book over and asked the man working there, Oswald Loly, if he'd let me look inside the walls. As I did, I saw that the original arches were still there, covered by the wood panels that were put in later.

"Lying dormant under what now looks like a shack, was a Mission Revival station shelter for commuters, probably dating to the 1912 electrification of the railroads by SP when passenger trains ran down Lincoln Avenue, once aptly named Railroad Avenue," he said.

"So I searched for someone to reach out to," Cornillie said. "I knew that there had to be someone or some group in Alameda that cared about historic preservation, and that's how I found out about AAPS. I sent them an email alerting them about the situation. I let them know I had this information, I had the research and I wanted to see if they could do something about it. Chris Buckley picked up the ball and ran with it."

Buckley, the Chair of the Preservation Action Committee, knew that something had to be done and fast. An email with the subject line: "Southern Pacific Train Station at 712 Lincoln Ave. threatened with demolition" went out to the AAPS Board of Directors and Preservation Action Committee just four days ahead of the hearing.

The demolition, it stated, was to be considered for approval at the Planning Board's July 25, 2016, meeting.

"It was very fortuitous that Thomas brought this to our attention when he did, so that we could go to that hearing and not 'miss the train' so to speak", Buckley said. "We didn't know it was a historic train station! It was a real revelation to learn that this is the last surviving free-standing station for the SP trains in Alameda. We immediately sent a letter to the City Planning Board alerting them of its existence and historical value and to require that the station be preserved on the site as part of the new development and, ideally, restored."

TRAIN: Page 10



Courtesy *Alameda by Rail* by Grant Ute and Bruce Singer

The Mission Revival station shelter in its original setting. The billboard seen on the right edge of the photo for the Neptune Palace Theatre, where *Good Dame* and *Melody in Spring* were running at the time, dates this picture to 1934.



Eric J. Kos

The railroad shelter as it appears today.



Executive Order Spurs Islanders into Action

Gabrielle Dolphin

In just 24 hours after the call went out, an estimated 300 to 400 Alamedans showed up at Ninth Street and Santa Clara Avenue, in front of the Islamic Center, in support of Islamic Alameda residents. The crowd asserted the message that "We All Belong Here," and rose up to say "no" to the Executive Order seeking to ban people from seven primarily Muslim nations from entering the country. The group of Alamedans chanted and cheered as they were met with support from people driving by. After the rally the crowd marched a short distance and were joined by neighbors coming out of their homes, cheering "This is Alameda!" Alamedans in attendance included City Councilmember and City of Alameda Democratic Club President Jim Oddie, Vice Mayor Malia Vella, City Councilmember Marilyn Ezzy Ashcraft and Mayor Trish Spencer as well as members of Alameda's faith community.



Eric J. Kos

The view of Thompson Field from Walnut Street shows development looming in the background. The aging warehouse behind the scoreboard also belongs to the Alameda Unified School District.

District Eyeing Future for Thompson Field

Hornet Ground could become part of real estate strategy

Ekene Ikeme

An Oakland-based consulting firm held a presentation for Alameda Unified School District (AUSD) board members to discuss real estate strategies last Tuesday, Jan. 24, at City Hall.

Jim Musbach and Ashleigh Kanat of Economic & Planning Systems, Inc. (EPS), an economic and financial consulting firm, held a 50-minute presentation for AUSD board members to recommend how the school district can best monetize its real estate properties. Musbach and Kanat explained that AUSD's most valued asset is the Thompson Field site that also contains an adjacent food services warehouse. Musbach recommended the school district rezone the property to residential and sell it to a developer.

"You would get most value for the site if you (rezone) the site, than to just give it to a developer and have them go through the rezoning process," said Musbach, managing principal at EPS. EPS believes the site can hold 80 to 100 housing

"I'm in favor of slowing the process way down until we get more information..."

— Trustee Jennifer Williams

units, according to a memo from City Manager Jill Keimach.

Kanat said selling the site can create enough income to build a new and more efficient sports complex for Alameda High School. The Thompson Field track is not regulation-sized and the field has water-drainage problems.

EPS also believes the district would have enough funds left over after building a new sports complex to fund Alameda High programs and carry out some of the district's other objectives. The district wants to build employee housing and needs to find a new district office site.

The board members were not too welcoming to the idea, however. Board members questioned EPS on where the new sports complex

would be located. Kanat believes a new site can be built on Alameda High's campus, but had no concrete plan for where the new field would go or if Alameda High has enough space.

"I'm not sure we need to proceed with the zoning request change if we don't have a plan," said board trustee Jennifer Williams. "I'm in favor of slowing the process way down until we get more information available to us, and that includes public input."

AUSD applied to rezone the Thompson Field site on Nov. 17, 2016, with the city's Community Development Department. However, according to the city's website, the application status has been withdrawn. Calls to confirm this weren't returned by press time. The site is currently zoned as mixed use.

If AUSD goes through with rezoning the site they would first need to conduct an Environmental Impact Report (EIR). Musbach said the EIR study would take six to seven months.

FIELD: Page 5

City, Schools Make Statements on Political Stances in New Regime

Sun Staff Reports

The City of Alameda and Alameda Unified School District (AUSD) released statements to ensure its residents and students that they will maintain providing an inclusive, a safe and secure environment after controversial executive order was signed by President Trump.

Superintendent Sean McPhetridge wrote AUSD's statement.

"I write today to assure you AUSD remains committed to upholding and safeguarding this vision — especially in these charged and uncertain political times," the statement reads.

The superintendent said he has received numerous emails from AUSD parents and staff members who were concerned for the safety and secu-

rity of Alameda students and their parents who are foreign-born immigrants.

McPhetridge reminded readers that AUSD's board members approved the "Safe Haven Resolution." It pledges to promote tolerance while taking a stand against hate speech. It also urges Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to not conduct immigration enforcement activity at any school without permission by specific federal law enforcement officials unless exigent circumstances exist.

The city's press release also reassured residents that Alameda is determined to make the city safe and inclusive.

"We want to assure Alameda resi-

dents that we are going to be vigilant in defending your rights," wrote Sarah Henry, Alameda public information officer. "Our positive resolution reaffirms the City of Alameda's commitment to LGBTQ rights, religious freedoms and racial, social and economic justice."

The city pledged to become a "sanctuary city" at the Jan. 17 City Council Meeting ("Council Makes Island City a Sanctuary City," Jan. 26).

President Trump signed an executive order on Friday, Jan. 27, that severely restricts immigrants traveling from seven Muslim countries and bars all Syrian refugees indefinitely. The order caused several protests at airports nationwide, including San Francisco International Airport.