**Protect our Historic Resources**

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Virtually every account of Calaveras County’s assets – economic and aesthetic – places historic resources -- charming gold rush towns, rolling ranch landscapes, picturesque historic homes, mining history, and nearly 10,000 years of Native American presence -- near the top of the list. However, Calaveras County is woefully deficient in instituting programs that will help protect and enhance these vulnerable resources. We have no official inventory of important buildings and sites, no control over new construction design in historic areas, and no procedure for reviewing proposed demolition of historic buildings. The list goes on. In brief: while we in Calaveras are eager to promote our historic assets, we are doing little to protect them.

In full disclosure, Judith Marvin (historian and Murphys resident) and I (Julia Costello, archaeologist and Mokelumne Hill resident) have operated our cultural resources firm Foothill Resources for over thirty years. Our professions involve identifying and evaluating archaeological sites, historic buildings, and historic districts throughout California, primarily for state and federal agencies such as Caltrans, the US Forest Service, and the National Park Service but also for numerous county and city governments. We work with many smart and dedicated public servants who want to identify and protect their heritage sites. It has been discouraging to see our home-town historic resources treated with such little regard. Judith and I have contributed extensive comments on all drafts of the General Plan since 2006 and have been gratified to see many of our suggestions incorporated in various versions.

We propose that these be added to the admirable list of “Cultural Resources Programs” found on page COS 19 of Chapter 6 (COS-6A-6F) which address identification of areas important to Native Americans, mandate professional standards in identifying and carrying our cultural resource studies, and provide a process for addressing archaeological remains found during construction. These are all long overdue and we applaud the Planning Department for including them. In addition, we believe that the following programs should also be added to this list:

1. *Establish a County Register of Historic Resources*

This official register would guide heritage tourism in the County, serve as a baseline to track cumulative effects of projects, and facilitate consideration of demolition requests (which would be faster and less costly to developer). Incentives for registration include use of the Mills Act (reducing property taxes for eligible properties) and use of the California Historical Building Code. Preliminary inventories have already been completed for Mokelumne Hill, San Andreas, Murphys, Copperopolis, and Angels Camp.

2. *Provide Contractors the option of using the California State Historical Building Code for buildings 75 years of age and older*.

The California Historical Building Code (CHBC) provides alternate building regulations for the preservation and restoration of qualified historic buildings. Until Calaveras County establishes its own Register of Historic Resources (see No. 2 above), this proposed program would formally allow restoration work on historic buildings to follow these history-sensitive regulations.

*3. Adopt and implement the Mills Act*

This state-wide program allows property-tax relief benefits for the maintenance and restoration of historic buildings. The program can be applied to Historic Districts, neighborhoods where historic preservation is to be encouraged, or individually recognized historic buildings.

4. *Require a cultural resource study prior to demolition of buildings 75 years of age or older*.

Fifty years is the time established by both Federal and California laws for assessing a building’s historical merit; 75 years seems more appropriate for our Mother Lode communities. These evaluations would be carried out by qualified professionals, and would prevent the inadvertent loss of important community icons.

5. *Establish County-wide design review guidelines for all new commercial construction projects in areas with concentrations of historic buildings*.

Tourism has been identified as one of our leading economic forces and new construction should be architecturally compatible. People are coming to see our historic Mother Lode towns and landscapes and new development can be sympathetic to this setting. Mokelumne Hill’s *Design Review Guidelines* could be used as a model.

6. *Require that the developer be responsible for curation of artifacts recovered from a County-mandated study*.

This would require that archiving of important archaeological remains excavated as part of a project’s pre-construction studies be borne by the developer. This is a standard requirement for Federal and State projects and without it the cost of long-term preservation of significant artifacts would fall on the County.

*7. Develop and adopt a Cultural Resource Management ordinance.*

County statutes and mandates related to cultural resources would be consolidated under one heading, making procedures easier to identify and implement. Included here would be the proposed programs COS-6A-6F, as well as those identified above.

These are all programs long established in most counties in California; they are not extraordinary or expensive. Inclusion of them in the General Plan acknowledges that our cultural resources are important to us, and that these are worthy goals to work for.