

San Ysidro Port of Entry, Section 106 consultation meeting

San Ysidro Port of Entry, San Ysidro, CA

Thursday, February 19, 2009

Meeting Minutes

Attendees:

Jane Lehman, Regional Historic Preservation Officer (RHPO), General Services Administration (GSA)

Betsy Frederick-Rothwell, Historic Preservation Specialist, GSA

Rebecca Karberg, Historic Preservation Specialist, GSA

Ann Klimek, Project Executive, GSA

Greg Smith, Environmental Project Manager, GSA

Peter Watson, Senior Property Manager, GSA

Jose Charles, Site Manager, GSA

Hector Abreu Cintron, GSA Liaison, Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP)

Andy Brinton, Assistant Director for Field Operations, Customs and Border Protection (CBP)

Paul Huss, Chief, Facility Development Branch, CBP

Paul Enriquez, Facility Development Branch, CBP

Oscar Preciado, Director, San Ysidro Port of Entry, CBP

Joseph Misenhelter, Assistant Director, San Ysidro Port of Entry, CBP

Ted Swartzbaugh, San Ysidro Facilities, CBP

M. Wayne Donaldson, State Historic Preservation Officer, California Office of Historic Preservation

Mark Beason, State Historian, California Office of Historic Preservation

Jennifer Hirsch, Planning Department, Historic Resources Division, City of San Diego

Jodie Brown, Planning Department, Historic Resources Division, City of San Diego

Jason Wells, Executive Director, San Ysidro Chamber of Commerce/San Ysidro Smart Border Coalition (SYSBC)

Thomas Currie, San Ysidro Chamber of Commerce

Jennifer Goudeau, San Ysidro Smart Border Coalition

David Alvarez, District Representative, California Senator Denise Ducheny

Caridad Sanchez, District Director, U.S. Senator Barbara Boxer

Michael Ross, Project Architect, RossDrulisCusenbery Architects

John Lesak, Preservation Consultant, Page & Turnbull, Inc.

Keith McCoy, Project Construction manager, URS Corp.

Alberto Vela, Vice President, URS Corp.

The meeting began with an introduction to the process of Section 106 compliance. Jane Lehman explained what section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act calls for, namely, that federal agencies take into account the effects that their undertakings may have on historic properties, and that they give the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation a chance to comment on those undertakings. Then the attendees of the meeting introduced themselves, and an overview of the project was given to the attendees by Ms. Lehman.

As part of the section 106 process, a federal agency has to assess the proposed undertaking's effects on any historic properties. In this case, the old port building (OPB) at San Ysidro, is clearly affected by the proposed expansion. Other buildings that were discussed later in the meeting are also affected.

There are three possible outcomes when an agency is determining effects. An undertaking can have no effect, no adverse effect, or an adverse effect on a property. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the effects, and how to avoid, minimize or mitigate them.

Ms. Lehman gave a brief overview of the history of the port, outlining how the port has expanded through the years. The OPB was part of a nationwide building program that resulted in the construction of many buildings in the early 1930s. Many of these were border stations, which were constructed according to a standard plan. A remodel of the OPB in 1960 removed the port-cochère, but that element was restored in the 1973 project that resulted in the current Land Port of Entry (LPOE) buildings. The OPB was placed on the National Register in 1982. The LPOE is now under the jurisdiction of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), which is imposing a new set of security requirements that have been formulated since the 9/11 attacks, and so the agency must address a new set of needs.

The proposed project was introduced, and Michael Ross spoke some of the specific challenges. The site is constrained by geography, with the Otay Mesa hills to the east. Concerns for Tijuana's historic neighborhood, which lies nearby to the south, and a desire to allow for use of the site by the San Ysidro community, also figure in the site's design. A major concern was how to route pedestrian traffic. The site's master plan calls for routing both southbound and northbound pedestrian traffic along the eastern edge of the site, which currently sees only northbound traffic. This proposed change would increase the number of pedestrians traveling annually through that part of the site from 8 to 16 million.

Discussion then turned to the OPB's eligibility for the National Register, and what might affect it. The development that has occurred around the OPB has detracted from its integrity, and so options were considered for moving the building to another location. Page and Turnbull carried out the relocation study, and identified three options, all of which have pros and cons.

At this point, the meeting turned to group discussion. Hector Abreu led off the discussion, questioning the loss of the OPB's integrity, and the effect that moving the building would have on its eligibility for the National Register. Ms. Lehman replied that the building's setting, and feeling and association were lost, and that its materials and workmanship were deteriorating. Wayne Donaldson commented that the National Register nomination should be reconsidered, since it was now 27 years old. The building remains significant for its role in international relations and trade. Mr. Donaldson also suggested multiple property landmark designation for all 3 California ports of entry. Enough of the bones of the building remain that Mr. Donaldson saw potential for rehabilitation.

Mr. Abreu noted that moving the building would affect its integrity—why should the OPB be taken out? Ms. Lehman answered that the addition of the southbound pedestrian traffic required more space than currently exists there; if only northbound traffic were routed through that area, then the OPB posed no restriction on space. Oscar Preciado spoke to the specifics of traffic flow, noting that the wait for northbound pedestrian was often long at peak times. Mr. Ross noted that the state of Baja California is planning a transit hub on the Mexican side of the border, which has the potential to increase the number of pedestrians seeking to cross at that point. Alberto Vela added that cost estimates for relocation were conservative, and that it would likely cost between 15 and 20 million dollars, whereas demolition would be much less expensive. Mr. Abreu inquired if rehabilitation had

been studied, and Peter Watson answered that rehab costs were estimated at 5 million, or \$300 per square foot. Mr. Ross replied that the southbound pedestrian traffic was still a concern, and that the location of the OPB impeded it.

Jason Wells noted the real need for a southbound pedestrian path. Also noted was the instruction from the state of California to GSA to work with the community. The San Ysidro community feels that the feeling and association of the OPB are important, and that the building currently is not accessible to the community. The SYSBC's suggested plan, to keep the façade of the building as a front for the LPOE's central plant, and constructing an international conference center, preserves the feeling and association of the building while making it a functional structure within the community. Ms. Lehman noted that a measure such as that is more mitigation than preservation. Mr. Abreu asked what was planned for the site of the OPB, and Mr. Ross replied that the size of the southbound pedestrian facility would be smaller than the OPB.

Mr. Preciado made the point that security is an issue, and that CBP operations are visible from the walkway—there needs to be separation between public spaces and inspection areas. Mr. Abreu asked if it would be possible to use the OPB as an intermediate inspection site, and Mr. Preciado replied that problems exist with people attempting to cross the border illegally by going up over the top of the OPB, and the area around the OPB was being treated as a park—the location of the building is a problem. Mr. Wells noted that CBP is doing its job in San Ysidro's front yard, and Mr. Vela noted the value of the OPB's location.

Mr. Abreu reiterated a request to know what would replace the OPB if it were demolished, and asked why it was worth getting rid of the building. Mr. Donaldson commented that his office is working to promote sustainability and thinking out of the box, as it were, and noted that there should be reckoning of the building's embodied energy. That figure would help determine costs for rehabilitating the building. The projections through 2030 for traffic through the LPOE were noted. The need for GSA to carry out its section 110 responsibilities, namely stewardship of the buildings in its inventory, was also noted.

A GSA associate stated that Otay Mesa and other border stations might absorb some of the traffic projected to come through the area, and CBP replied that pedestrian traffic could not be rerouted like automobile and truck traffic—the need for a southbound pedestrian thoroughfare was still an issue. Mr. Wells stated that once the wait times at San Ysidro were seen to decrease, then this crossing would increase even more in popularity. Mr. Vela added that San Ysidro/Tijuana is currently planned to become a portal and a hub for transportation, and Mr. Wells replied that the crossing's prominence is important. Mr. Ross added that Interstate 5 is already a huge artery, so that must also be contended with.

Mr. Donaldson asked if more thought should be given to the matter, and that perhaps old paradigms were still being adhered to. Mr. Abreu asked why the building needed to be moved to accommodate traffic—couldn't traffic be planned to go over, under, or through the building? The Capitol building and its new entrance was mentioned as a comparandum. Jennifer Hirsch stated that the OPB's integrity was not totally lost, and asked if there wasn't a way to incorporate the building into the expansion. The stated relocation options were not convincing as the only alternatives. Ms. Lehman agreed that further study of additional alternatives was needed. David Alvarez queried the location of

design proposals for locating the southbound pedestrian traffic at the east side of the facility, and questioned if it would be possible to move lanes at the western end of the port to allow for space there.

Ms. Lehman noted these points, and mentioned Tecate and Calexico, other LPOEs in California that have historic customs houses and port facilities. Calexico is in the process of disposal and will be transmitted to a local group, and Tecate has both the main building as well as residences that have been rehabilitated for future use. Mr. Wells asked if a public-private partnership would be appropriate for the OPB's use, or if the proximity of the building to CPB's operations posed a problem. Joseph Misenhelter replied that it was too close, and that security remained a problem. Andy Brinton noted that pedestrians are not screened by the point that they pass the OPB; Mr. Ross stated that if a building for screening and scanning pedestrians is constructed, it will be placed well back from the border, and perpendicular to it.

At this point in the meeting, a list of action items was compiled, and discussion turned to responsibilities and deadlines for involved parties. Mr. Donaldson confirmed that the SHPO was officially part of the consultation, and Mr. Abreu noted that the ACHP would need to send a letter confirming that it had joined the consultation. Mr. Ross confirmed that the OPB was part of phase 3 of the plan for the LPOE expansion. Ann Klimek stated that GSA intends to award the construction contract this fiscal year, which ends on September 30. Mr. Abreu inquired as to the status of NEPA compliance proceedings, and Greg Smith answered that he was hoping for an agreement in the fall. Mr. Donaldson stated that an undertaking such as this needed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA), not a Programmatic Agreement (PA). Ms. Klimek noted that a NEPA Record of Decision (ROD) needed to be signed prior to awarding construction, and that the MOA should be in place alongside it. Mr. Donaldson asked if relocation of the building was still a possibility, and Ms. Lehman replied that it was still part of the discussion, but that relocating the building was a long shot. Agreement was reached that an effort would be made to have a MOA signed by August in order for a construction award to be made by the end of September.

During the morning discussion of action items, the representatives of CBP stated that removing the south wing of the OPB would solve many of their concerns, since that is the location that most people choose when trying to enter the US by climbing over the top of the building. Demolishing this portion of the OPB was mentioned again in the afternoon portion of the meeting.

The afternoon session of the meeting focused on discussion of the effects of the LPOE expansion on the other buildings in the APE. The outcome of this discussion was a list that has been incorporated into the list of action items, and is distributed separately from these minutes.