

Santa Barbara County Historic Landmarks Advisory Commission

MEMORANDUM

TO: Director Lisa Plowman, Planning and Development Department, County of Santa Barbara

FROM: Ronald L. Nye, Chair, Historic Landmarks Advisory Commission, County of Santa Barbara

RE: Notice of Resignation

DATE: July 27, 2026

CC: Supervisors Joan Hartmann, 3rd District, Laura Capps, 2nd District, Roy Lee, 1st District
Travis Seawards, Anne Rierson, David Villalobos, Keith Coffman-Grey, Jonathan Martin

Dear Lisa and County Supervisors:

This memorandum is to notify you that as of today I am resigning my position as a member and chair of the County Historic Landmarks Advisory Commission. I was appointed several years ago by two former County supervisors to the "At Large" commission seat. I am thus addressing this notice to the three current County supervisors with whom HLAC has worked with the most during my tenure. I am proud of the work we have accomplished to date and value my long-time associations with the dedicated volunteer commissioners who enthusiastically put in many hours of time attending hearings and subcommittee meetings, studying project documents, and visiting numerous historic properties throughout the county. County support staff, David Villalobos and Jonathan Martin, and HLAC legal counsel, Anne Rierson, have also made timely contributions to our efforts.

The last two and one-half years have been challenging for HLAC. P&D began implementing a re-assessment of HLAC's role in identifying potential impacts to eligible historic properties during this time. This important role had been the decades-long practice by HLAC. In fulfilling this task HLAC assisted P&D staff in processing permit applications and carried out our mission, as authorized in County Code Chapter 18A and HLAC Bylaws, to "promote the economic welfare and prosperity of the county by preserving and protecting" its historic resources, and to inform the "general public and to remind the citizens of this county and visitors" of the county's historical inheritance. Under the P&D's new policy the department brought only seven projects to HLAC for review in 2024, and no projects in 2025 and 2026, although several consultant assessment reports on potential historical impacts have been required of, and submitted by, the applicants during this period. This leaves HLAC with very little meaningful official "business" to conduct during our regularly-scheduled hearings, and has resulted in frequent hearing

cancellations and serious deficiencies in P&D's ability to protect and preserve the county's historic resources. HLAC members acknowledge the understandable need for this policy change in response to recent intense public pressure and State legislative mandates that required the department to streamline its permit review processes. Vice Chair Keith Coffman-Grey and I have urged P&D to consider adopting a middle policy path that would provide HLAC with a practical yet reduced level of input on potentially historic property-related projects, inspire a true sense of participation in the preservation process on the part of our volunteer commissioners, and still meet the department's administrative objectives. These discussions have not resulted in a positive outcome for HLAC, however, and based on Director Plowman's memorandum to me of June 22, 2026 (see attached memorandum), I do not foresee a path going forward that would provide HLAC's volunteers with an opportunity to contribute a useful and gratifying role in the preservation and protection of our county's historic resources. Thank you for the opportunity to be of service to the County of Santa Barbara and its citizens.

Ronald L. Nye
Historian



MEMORANDUM

TO: Ron Nye

FROM: Lisa Plowman, Director

SUBJECT: HLAC

DATE: June 22, 2026

CC: Joan Hartmann, 3rd District Supervisor
Travis Seawards

Dear Ron,

Thank you for your service to the County's Historic Landmarks Commission. P&D has spent considerable time and resources the past two years to clarify HLACs purview as outlined in County Code Chapter 18A. As discussed, the County has been challenged on previous projects that were sent to HLAC that were not consistent with HLAC Bylaws or Chapter 18A, warranting a re-assessment of our practices. In addition, the State has enacted numerous laws pursuant to the Housing Accountability Act that regulate how housing projects can be reviewed and approved, including single-family residences, and the County is required to demonstrate compliance with these laws. As explained to you, SB 330 limits the amounts of hearings/meetings that can be held for a housing project after completeness, and HLAC meetings count as a hearing. This has resulted in a re-alignment of what projects come before HLAC, but the process is now consistent with Chapter 18A and HLAC bylaws.

We understand that members of HLAC would like to see incentives at a County level for property owners to a designation of their properties as landmarks. Additionally, members are concerned about the reduced number of items at HLAC hearings. Here is a bullet-point list of the issues that have been discussed over the last two years based on the County's review of Chapter 18A:

- The primary role of HLAC is to designate new County Landmarks and review changes to already designated landmarks. HLAC can also designate County Places of Merit.
- Properties that are formally designated as a Landmark are reviewed by HLAC. Properties that are eligible, but not formally designated, are not subject to HLAC review. In addition, the County cannot compel private property owners to designate their property as a Landmark.
- CEQA impact analysis and policy consistency analysis for projects is conducted independently of HLAC review. Properties with potential historic resources are required to produce a Historic Report, and if needed, Historic Reports receive a peer review from qualified historians. HLAC is not designated as a peer review body.
- The County does not currently have programs, such as adoption of Mills Act provisions, that provide incentives for residents to designate structures or properties as Landmarks. The County would need to amend its laws to create such incentives.

P&D Efforts at Engagement with HLAC

In response to prior concerns from HLAC requesting assistance in helping to identify new properties to

designate as a Landmark, P&D implemented a system where we created a Box folder that HLAC members can access historic reports received from applicants. The purpose of this was to allow the HLAC to review the reports and identify properties that they may want to nominate as a Landmark. It was understood that the HLAC Chair and Vice Chair could review historic reports and determine if they would like to put the structure/property on an HLAC agenda as a discussion item.

Ideas for More Engagement with HLAC

HLAC has expressed a desire to be more involved when a historic report finds a property/structure eligible for Landmark. As identified above, Chapter 18A is clear that properties that are eligible, but not formally designated as Landmarks, are not subject to HLAC review. P&D estimates that there are maybe 5-7 projects per year that consist of properties that may contain a Landmark eligible resource. Given HLACs limited purview, here are some additional steps for more engagement that would support HLAC in identifying new properties that they may wish to designate as a Landmark.:

- When a historic report finds a structure or property to be Landmark eligible, the P&D planner can directly email the HLAC Chair and Vice Chair to let them know that there is a historic report in the Box folder. The Chair and Vice Chair can then determine if they would like to put the structure/property on an agenda as a discussion item for the purpose of designating the property as a Landmark.
 - If the HLAC wishes to agendaize the item, the planner can assist in creating the agenda project description and can route the historic report to hearing support. Please note that, consistent with Chapter 18A, this would be a discussion of whether or not to Landmark a property or structure and would not be review of a proposed planning project.
- P&D can identify certain ordinance changes to Chapter 18A that can be brought to the Board such that potential Landmarks do not need to go to the Board for final approval and only need to go to HLAC, with appeals to the Board. This effort would have to be identified in the Long Range Planning work program.

These efforts demonstrate a good-faith effort on behalf of the Department to engage HLAC within the existing legal framework that regulates the historic review and Landmarking of projects in the County.

We look forward to the continued collaboration and shared understanding of these issues with the HLAC.