



February 9, 2021

(By electronic transmission)
Parks, Recreation, and Youth Development Commission
Oakland City Council
Department of Public Works Project Team and Consultants
Nicholas Williams, Parks, Recreation, and Youth Development Director

Dear PRAC Commissioners, Council President Fortunato-Bas, Councilmembers, City Staff, and Consultants,

We write with respect to the planning process for San Antonio Park, a historic park with great importance for its neighborhood and for Oakland as a whole. As you may have noted, our 1991 *Oakland Heritage Alliance News* article was provided by the consultants as the resource material for this park's history.

Oakland Heritage Alliance is keenly interested in all Oakland's public parks, and has weighed in recently with regard to Mosswood, the various Lake Merritt parks, Snow Park, Joaquin Miller Park, and Union Point/Cryer, among others.

Of course we are familiar with the current fire station; it is on our popular summer walking tour of the neighborhood. While we think it is a wonderful historic structure, we know that it is well over a hundred years old, and not built to house modern fire equipment and methods.

However, there is a long Oakland history of attempts to construct facilities in parks, uses that are not directly park-serving. Some examples include a thwarted 1967 plan to put a hotel on Snow Park, the averted attempt to put a Cathedral on public land near the Oakland Auditorium/Henry J. Kaiser Convention Center (which resulted in Measure DD), and the unfortunate route of 580, which took out a big chunk of Mosswood as well as a piece of Lakeside Park. Parks just look like available land. But our parkland and open spaces are irreplaceable and precious, and Oaklanders don't have enough. Current Oakland park ratios are low.

Therefore, in considering a new master plan, we'd suggest that it may not be wise to reduce the amount of available open space to accommodate a utilitarian city facility. Once relinquished, it is nearly impossible to obtain additional land to compensate for any loss of area. It should not be viewed that as "free" public land. Rather, it should be valued, and a determination should be made whether it might be advisable to obtain land on the open market, or to use surplus public land not previously designated as open space. Other site options should be intensively investigated, and the results should be presented to the public.

We consulted our longtime member, past president of the Alameda County Historical Society, retired Oakland Fire Lieutenant Edmund A. Clausen. Here is what he wrote:

An interesting idea. Not a good one, but an interesting one. I can understand the need for a replacement for Station 4. The existing building was constructed after the 1906 earthquake to house both horses and men. It is a solid building but the fire service has changed around it. It is a Landmark Building, but it lacks the amenities of modern fire stations.

As fire engines and ladder trucks have grown longer, larger and wider, the building has kept its original footprint. The apparatus doors have been widened at least once but tolerances entering and exiting are a challenge. Stopping traffic on International Blvd. for responses can be nerve wracking and backing in upon return can be a threat to life and limb, especially at night.

Siting a new station in San Antonio Park and expecting firefighters to keep watch over visitor activities reminds me of an idea someone on the Council had in the 1970s of moving the fire stations to the parks and having the firemen cut the grass. Gardening and policing are not in a firefighter's job description.

As I recall, San Antonio Park, née Independence Square, was set aside by the residents of Brooklyn and Alameda County as a proposed site of the County Court House. While the Court House was built elsewhere, the property has remained as open, recreation space for the benefit of the neighborhood. I don't feel that it is the best location for a heavy equipment garage (Engine, Truck and ancillary apparatus) with attached living quarters.

The park should be left a park and a new Station 4 should be sited elsewhere. I understand the appeal of "free" land, but I don't feel comfortable replacing a portion of the sweep that is San Antonio Park with a 'parklet' on some crowded Clinton corner.

—eAc

As is clear from the 1991 article, this park is a cultural and historical resource, and any large project there likely would be subject to an environmental impact report. The Douthat article references the history of the Peralta family lands. That article did not cover the pre-Spanish-land-grant period, but it is highly likely that the area saw vigorous Native American habitation and activity, research which remains to be pursued but has been in evidence in connection with Peralta Hacienda and its surroundings, which share similar background. It is probable that there are archaeological resources at the site.

We support the city's effort to improve the park—particularly in providing open and green spaces for the residents, and urge everyone to think about alternate places to put a fire station.

Sincerely,



Mary Harper
President

cc: Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board