

HRB Discussion 10/15/14

Nomination of Little League Ballpark site at 3672 Middlefield Road for Palo Alto Historic Inventory





Introduction & Background

- Background
 - I believe it is important for a City to follow due process, even under duress by Verizon and in the absence of a Palo Alto Historic Officer
 - To me, this means that our City's cultural heritage should not be determined by "Verizon's historian" in the context of a celltower application but rather by our local experts, you....our Palo Alto Historic Resources Board
- I, our local historian, and all remaining founders' relatives believe that this site is truly historic and it and its founders deserve to be recognized
- And I will focus on the merits of the site, not the backdrop of a controversial celltower application or the politics around it



Today's presentation

- The nomination is for LOCAL historic inventory, not California Register or National Register as evaluated by Verizon's historian. It contemplates the designed landscape of a baseball arena which also has a two story clubhouse
- Over many months, I and others have:
 - Conducted extensive secondary research (online, at the City's Historic Archives, CA Secretary of State, Santa Clara County Records Office, Santa Clara County Title, City of Palo Alto Planning & Building Departments, Sanborn Maps, old newspaper articles)
 - UNIQUELY have also conducted as much primary research as possible (interviews with all identifiable founder family members Alhouse, Gamage, and Jury, Little League National historian Lance Van Auken, Herschel Cobb, prior coaches and players, Steve Staiger of PA Historic Association, Michelle Messinger State Historic Preservation Office, Jeff Brooke California Office of Historic Preservation)
 - AND given that I am not a historian, had materials evaluated and reviewed our local historian and by Charles Chase at Architectural Resources Group, the City's historical consultant, at Denis Backlund's suggestion

Overview

- The designed landscape was built in 1952 as a rare “sunken diamond” baseball stadium with period of significance ‘52-’64
 - Designed to be an exact replica of the Stanford Sunken diamond
 - Whose founders are honored for this accomplishment by the State of California in 2004 (plaque on bldg)
- The 2 story clubhouse with boardroom/announcers booth on top floor, concession stand/restrooms on bottom was built in 1956
 - Designed by local and famed architect Morgan Stedman
 - Noted in Dames & Moore study as potentially California Register eligible for its architecture in 1998
- The property in its 60+ year history has never been formally evaluated for historic significance
- This is the site of Little League Baseball of Palo Alto, a California Corporation which was incorporated on 1/16/52, and whose first games were played in Spring 1951 in Palo Alto
 - Lance Van Aucken, Little League Historian who runs Little League’s Museum, stated that “Palo Alto Little League appears to be the first League in California in 1951,” after discussing San Bernardino Jaycees participation in 1951 Little League World Series. (PA Weekly 5/5/02 says league chartered 1950)
 - The site’s development one year later appears to represent a) the first dedicated Little League ballpark site in California (San Bernardino’s came years later), b) the first privately owned Little League ballpark site in California (and perhaps beyond)
 - Appears to be the first sunken diamond design Little League field in California (and perhaps beyond) (Howard J Lamade came in ‘59 and according to Lance is not a sunken diamond design, Gene Caporizzo field does not exist, according to Stamford, CT historian)

Significance

- → The opening dedication of the field on 6/29/52 holds cultural significance to Palo Alto and California as it marks the movement of youth baseball West.
- → Per Lance Van Auken, within Little League (the largest global organized youth program) our Palo Alto site is rare, as only 5% of all Little League sites nationally remain private, long since coopted to development and moved to public facilities (as this site could be some day, as R-1)
- → Demonstrates tremendous foresight, creativity, and resourcefulness by the site's founders to accomplish something that would have been impossible just years later (at the time, it was the cost of a home, today it would cost perhaps over \$5M to replicate) and is a shining example of philanthropy and neighborhood cooperation.
- → Led to 62+ years of uninterrupted play at this site
- → Intentionally planned in a residential area, this site ended up anchoring community development of the growing university town of Palo Alto southeast, as the neighborhood social "hub" much revolved around. To follow were Wilbur (JLS) in '53, Mitchell Park in '56, and Mitchell Library in '58
- → Represents one of the most enduring youth programs in Palo Alto's history, with Little League spreading quickly to Menlo Park, East Palo Alto, and Los Altos

People

- Ty Cobb, who the wife of Walt Gamage recalls as an officer and Commissioner of Little League at the time, opened the inaugural dedication ceremony, and his relatives Herschel and Ty threw out the first ball at the 50th. Another of the greatest sports legends ever, Pop Warner who in '51 was named to the Coaches Hall of Fame as one of the most winning coaches, also attended
- Bill Alhouse, Ballpark founder, ex-Dodger, Palo Alto Tall Tree Honoree, National Little League Hall of Fame, American Coaches Hall of Fame
- John Hurlbut, Ballpark founder, VP of the NCAA, Famous Stanford Professor of Law who taught Rehnquist and Day O'Conner
- John Eichler, Ballpark founder, prominent real estate developer of mid-century modern style tract housing in California
- John Arrillaga, Sr. later also contributed to the further buildout of the property
- Numerous professional players coached kids and learned to play themselves on this field (documented by articles in Appendix 18, 19)
- Architect Morgan Stedman as designer of the site, with accolades of House Beautiful's Pace Setter House award and at least one local Historic Resource designed home

Integrity

- Architectural Resources Group's test: "If a player from that era walked onto the field today, would he recognize it as the field he played on?"
- With zero change in Location or Setting, or Association (continuous use for 62+ years as a Little League ballfield, Ty Cobb's heirs in attendance to this day at the HRB meeting, Morgan Stedman's work remaining intact), it retains the Feeling of a long-lasting children's ballpark
- With some changes to the site over time like light poles, safety fencing, batting cages consistent with the site's purpose as a ballfield, even the Design and Materials across the site retain moderate integrity

Response to Planning's Summary 5 Point Recommendation to HRB

- “Potential loss of integrity, so historic status inconclusive”
 - Palo Alto’s historic consultant Architectural Resources Group’s acid test:
 - “Could a player from that era walk on the field and recognize it?”
 - It is OK to replace or repair but “Taken as a whole is the site intact?”
 - Some alterations even with newer materials is acceptable over 60+ years
- “Even if determined historic, would not affect celltower application”
 - Misses the point of due process regarding independent historic evaluation
 - And determination of significant impact is the sole discretion of Michelle Messinger at SHPO
- “Property owner objects”
 - A property in Palo Alto can be recognized based on sound reasons and at the same time rejected by applicant. This should not affect an objective evaluation by the HRB
- “No historic report provided”
 - In several email exchanges with Amy French regarding forms required/process, none was requested nor is one required by precedent (having reviewed at least 3 prior HRB applications)
- “Property owner has provided two reports”
 - Verizon commissioned these reports from “Verizon’s historian” and provided the reports in the context of a celltower application, at the City’s request

Key Palo Alto Historic Inventory Criteria & Recommendation

- 1) Site associated with lives of historic people or events in city, state, or nation
 - Represents the first movement of Little League baseball west into California
 - Represents the early development of unique cultural amenities in a now-prominent university town in its high growth phase, helping to anchor future development
 - Shining example of local philanthropy and neighborhood cooperation of locally and nationally prominent Palo Altans in the creation of a private Little League field
 - Nationally recognized Ty Cobb as officer, per founder's wife
- 2) Site representative of an architectural style or way of life important to a city, state, or nation
 - The children's ballpark was the social hub for youth during this era, "the only game in town," around which family schedules, news coverage, meals revolved
- 5) The architect or building was important
 - Morgan Stedman designed and a rare example of a recreational building in his body of work
- 6) The site contains elements demonstrating outstanding attention to architectural design, detail, materials or craftsmanship
 - Unique sunken diamond Little League field design
- Recommendation: Category 1, given the site's state level importance.



APPENDIX

- **Historic Review Process- Procedural Issues**
- **Key points of Content Disagreement vs. other Studies and Rationale**
- **Character Defining Features**
- **Others contacted**

Historic Review Process To Date- Procedural Issues

- 8/26 neighbors emailed EBI (Verizon's historical consultant) with written response (cc'ing Planning) to 30 Day Request for Comments Notice in PA Daily Post 7/29. No reply.
- 9/15 Daily Post: Palo Alto Planning official inappropriately and quite prematurely states that "the (ball) field has already been determined not to be a historic resource," potentially biasing the proceedings
- September ARB agrees to request for HRB's evaluation at the request of neighbors
- Reports all by externally contracted historians, paid for by Verizon...no use of Palo Alto's
 - Verizon historian initial version 7/9 stated not National Register eligible, subsequent version added not California Register eligible (no date) , latest Verizon HRB version entirely new
- MGroup evaluation of potential project impact typically handled by State Historic Preservation Office later, deemed by Michelle Messinger of SHPO to be inappropriate for City to hire and present to HRB at this stage
- Clear focus in HRB briefing package (and in the HRB discussion) on celltower project, clearly distracting from the task at hand for the HRB, the property's historic merit
- Clear focus in HRB briefing package (and in the HRB discussion) on property owner's opposition to listing, despite Municipal Code's guidance that it should have no bearing
- "Peer review" of EBI report not delivered to applicant until after HRB meeting. Hand delivered to HRB members prior night. Also unread by at least a few HRB members prior to meeting.



Key Points of content disagreement: Primary interview findings

First Little League in California

- “Little League came to California with the formation of the Jaycee Little League in San Bernardino, California in 1951”
 - Contradicts interview with Little League Historian, none west of Texas by 1950, so 1951 was the year

Integrity

- “Character defining features of the ballpark: diamond, fencing, dugouts, pitcher’s mound, bleachers, flagpoles, scoreboard, clubhouse”
 - Architectural Resources Group acid test: “Could a player from that era walk on the field and recognize it?”
 - It is OK to replace or repair but “taken as a whole is the site intact?” Some alterations even with newer materials is acceptable over 60+ years

Sunken Diamond

- “Howard J Lamade Stadium” is not a better example of the growth of Little League in the US, as it post-dates Palo Alto Little League
- “Carl Stotz Field in Williamsport, PA,” per Little League historian, not a sunken diamond but rather “a natural amphitheater between two terraced hills” “Not a sunken diamond but built into the side of a hill with two terraced hills above the outfield fence.”
- “Gene Caporizzo field,” according to the Stamford, CT historian, does not exist
- “Exact replica” of Stanford Sunken Diamond is a quote from local newspaper from the era

Ty Cobb

- Was not an officer “according to PALL’s records”
 - There are no records that exist that far back, so speaking with founders is required
- Misinterpretation of dozens of players comment (see Appendices 18, 19 for detail)



Character defining features of the site: buildings and functions of the site (starting large and moving smaller)

- Unique orientation of planned field
- Sunken diamond design playing field
- Two story clubhouse
- Relationship between clubhouse and field
- Visual landscape with Eucalyptus viewshed
- Field level dugouts

- Bleachers
- Scoreboard



Others Contacted

- Jerry Tinney
- Bud Budelli
- Jane Gee
- Bob Evans
- Barbara Alhouse

Interviewees unable to reach:

- Tim Anderson
- Clark Schiller
- Manny Lozano
- Fred Brown
- Stu Pederson