

William Burg, State Historian II, Office of Historic Preservation  
1725 23rd Street, Suite 100; Sacramento, CA 95816.  
via email: [William.Burg@parks.ca.gov](mailto:William.Burg@parks.ca.gov), sent 1/29/16

re: in support of the Willow Glen Trestle historic nomination

Dear Mr. Burg,

When my wife and I moved to San José in 1979, we first read up about our new home and learned that San José was one of the first towns founded in California and also its first State Capitol. Then we arrived and found it to be basically a sea of suburbs, and all that remained of the first capitol was a plaque somewhere and an expressway named after it (along with some car dealerships – “Capitol Ford”, etc.).

When searching for a place to live, we quickly but thoroughly explored the area and managed to find a small region with “character” – the formerly independent town of Willow Glen, complete with its own quaint but somewhat past-prime “main street” shops and an eclectic mix of old farm houses, 1920’s bungalows, and more modern houses and apartments. We bought our home there – a 1925 bungalow – and have been working to restore and maintain it ever since.

The Santa Clara Valley was then in transition. I came to begin my career in “Silicon Valley” at a high-tech firm just down the street from Apple Computer. But I could still see some remaining reminders of the area’s agricultural past as “The Valley of Hearts Delight” as I drove by fields of apricots and passed truckloads of tomatoes on their way to the Contadina cannery in west-central San José.

I soon got involved in my neighborhood – that’s what my parents said any responsible homeowner should do. I served on our local neighborhood association board, participated in a city/community taskforce on revitalizing the local business district, and, as I’m an avid bicyclist, I worked to get the nearby Los Gatos Creek Trail extended into Willow Glen. (“In my spare time”, I worked for 30 years as an aerospace engineer at Lockheed Martin.)

In 1984, while on a creek tour with the trail committee, I first saw the trestle crossing the Los Gatos Creek in Willow Glen to serve the nearby Contadina and Del Monte canneries. It was an amazing experience: here, hidden just blocks from downtown was an old wooden train trestle, looking like it just came from an old Western movie set. We on the trail committee realized it would make a wonderful addition to the trail network, and soon thereafter we began discussions with city planners.

Over the years, the transition into Silicon Valley continued. The orchards were replaced with housing and shops. The canneries closed or moved to be closer to the produce in the Central Valley, leaving only a water tower and a few brick walls remaining. Some of the homes in Willow Glen are being carefully restored and maintained, but others are scraped and replaced. On Lincoln Ave., the shops are revitalized, but we did have to muster community support to save the Avenue’s Grand Old House – “The Buffington House” – from being replaced with some soulless cinder-block bank building. (We were successful and managed to save it: it’s now a city landmark and a vibrant business.)

With the closing of the canneries, there was no longer a need for the railroad to serve the area and so the line was abandoned. As per plans in San José’s Parks Strategic Plan – “The Greenprint” – the rail right-of-way was/is to be acquired and converted into an off-road trail. Now called “The Three Creeks Trail”, it will (hopefully!) eventually connect the Los Gatos Creek Trail (in Willow Glen), the Guadalupe River Trail, and the Coyote Creek Trail (by Kelley Park). We in the community helped the City win funding from various sources – County Parks, the Santa Clara Valley Water District, the Santa Clara County Open Space Authority, and the State of California – by giving presentation to the various representatives. Our charts (one of which is copied below) emphasized the historic nature of the rail corridor, and showed how to tie San José’s “History Park” (part of Kelley Park) to the Del Monte cannery

site by means of a trail crossing the Willow Glen Trestle. Together, these funds amounted to some \$6 Million. (The water district's \$450k grant was specifically for the restoration of the trestle.)



By 2012, the city had acquired the western half of the rail right-of-way (including the trestle), it had state-approved permits for the trestle's restoration, and it had an engineering report from a firm it'd commissioned that detailed how to restore the trestle – down to which bolts to replace and how many fire-sprinklers to add.

Then, in 2013, the city instead abruptly decided it wanted to demolish the trestle and replace it with a prefab steel bridge. Perhaps it reasoned that maintenance would be more routine for a “standard model bridge” than for our unique structure; perhaps the purchasing department is only set up to purchase “catalog items” and can't deal with historic restoration; perhaps the city simply wanted to spend as much of a grant as possible before it expired, and “demolish-and-replace” would use up more of the grant than “restore”.

I and others in the community rallied to save the trestle. We met with city officials, attended public meetings, wrote editorials in the newspaper [I've already submitted copies of these], gave tours, released YouTube videos, and tried to ask questions of the city about this change-of-plans and to submit official comments to the Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration (IS/MND).

When the city refused to do the CEQA-required review or even allow for meaningful public comment, we formed the Friends of the Willow Glen Trestle and had to sue, as per CEQA law, to get the city to do the required Environmental Impact Report (EIR). (My wife said that, after I'd already spent 30-some years working to have the trestle become part of our local trail network, I wouldn't be able to

live with myself if I didn't then spend the money needed to hire a lawyer and historian.) The Court ruled in our favor, and so the city did an EIR. However, even though the city's Historic Landmarks Commission unanimously recommended that the trestle be given landmark recognition, the historian hired by the city's consultant said it wasn't landmark-worthy. The city went along and ruled that it wasn't historic and therefore it could approve the EIR and the plans to demolish the trestle and replace it with the prefab steel bridge.

However, the city also appealed the court's ruling requiring it to do the EIR, and so the courts have then not allowed the city to continue with its plans until that appeal is resolved – a process that may take some months (or years?)

So, here we are today. We have submitted a nomination that relates a significant amount of local and area history, and we've asked friends, neighbors, and supporters to write to you with their personal stories.

- If the trestle is granted state or national historic listing, the EIR for its demolition becomes invalid, and, like the Buffington House before it, we may be able to save this piece of Willow Glen history.
- If the trestle is not given historic status, the city will scrape it, and, like the first State Capitol, all that will remain is a plaque somewhere indicating that once there was a railroad bridge that once served the canneries that once were beneath this suburban sprawl.

Please help us save the Willow Glen Trestle, our connection between future generations and our agricultural past, between Silicon Valley and the Valley of Hearts Delight.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Larry Ames". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Dr. Lawrence Ames,  
Friends of the Willow Glen Trestle  
[Larry@WGTrestle.org](mailto:Larry@WGTrestle.org)