

For Immediate Release

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California State Historical Resources Commission Unanimously finds Willow Glen Trestle eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places

San José (April 19, 2016) – The Friends of the Willow Glen Trestle nominated the Willow Glen Trestle for listing on the California Register of Historical Resources and the National Register of Historic Places. The nomination was approved yesterday following a public hearing before the California State Historical Resources Commission in San Francisco. The nomination was contested by the City of San José.

In 2014, the Friends of the Willow Glen Trestle won their public-interest lawsuit challenging San José's refusal to prepare an environmental impact report (EIR) to consider alternatives to demolition of the evocative 1922 Trestle as part of the Three Creeks Trail. The City's appeal of that decision to the Sixth District Court of Appeal remains pending. The City also prepared an EIR but has not yet reconsidered the demolition based on that EIR.

The City's Historic Landmarks Commission had previously voted, unanimously, to designate the Willow Glen Trestle as a City landmark, but its recommendation was overturned by the City Council. The EIR considered conflicting opinions as to historic status but relied on the opinion of one historic expert to conclude that the trestle was not historic.

"Now that the State Historical Resources Commission has determined that the Willow Glen Trestle qualifies as an historic resource eligible for listing on the California and National historic registers, California law requires that the City treat it as historic," said Friends of Willow Glen spokesperson Dr. Larry Ames. "We are thrilled that this issue has been conclusively resolved."

The EIR prepared by the City had concluded that the trestle could be safely rehabilitated for use in the Three Creeks Trail project, but could be slightly more costly to maintain over the next 50 years than a new steel bridge. Since the EIR concluded that the trestle was not historic, its demolition would have no adverse environmental impact. That conclusion is no longer valid.

One of the speakers in favor of historic status was Milford Wayne Donaldson, FAIA, the former California State Historic Preservation Officer. Another was Seth Bernstein, an expert in historic resources, who explained to the Commission how the trestle helped to shape the community of Willow Glen.

“Now that the trestle is confirmed to be an historic resource, demolition is unlawful because rehabilitation for the Three Creeks Trail project is feasible,” said Friends’ lawyer Susan Brandt-Hawley, “and the City’s appeal is moot.”

Gayle Frank of Preservation Action Council of San José (PAC*SJ), who also spoke in favor of listing at the hearing of the state Commission added: “We are so pleased with the unanimous vote that will protect the Willow Glen Trestle.”

Martha Heinrichs, a member of the Friends group, stated:

“This amazing 94-year-old wooden train trestle in Willow Glen has supported many decades of history here in Santa Clara County when we were known as the ‘Valley of Hearts Delight.’ It is an important link to the families that farmed and had orchards here; to those workers who labored picking the crops to send to the canneries; to those who worked in the canneries; and to those connected with the railroad. One can see how closely genealogy, history, and historic preservation are connected with this train trestle: a treasure worthy of recognition and preservation.”

“We are long-time trail advocates. We commit to working with the City to secure funding to rehabilitate the trestle as a safe, long-term segment of the new Three Creeks Trail,” added Dr. Ames.

