



STAFF REPORT

AGENDA NO: 11c

MEETING DATE: July 6, 2026

To: Honorable Mayor and City Council

Date: July 6, 2026

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Subject: Update Regarding the Historic Resource Evaluation of the Existing City Hall

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the City Council receive an update regarding the Historic Resource Evaluation of the existing City Hall.

BACKGROUND

The existing City Hall site is zoned R-4 (High Density Residential), which allows for residential, government, and open space uses.

In February 2025, the City Council authorized the City Manager to negotiate and execute a Lease Agreement, Purchase and Sale Agreement, and Tenant Improvement Agreement for the building located at 1440 Chapin Avenue, which will serve as the new City Hall (Resolution No. 015-2025). Tenant improvements at 1440 Chapin Avenue are underway, and the move is anticipated to occur in August or September.

After staff moves to the new City Hall, the City will have the opportunity to rethink the usage of the site that contains the existing City Hall. The City will no longer need the building, and repurposing City Hall for other civic uses is quite costly given the need for seismic retrofits, asbestos removal, and other improvements as well as ongoing maintenance. Similarly, turning the site into a large park would also be expensive as that would require demolishing the building, filling in the underground garage, building the park, and then maintaining the park.

To inform the City Council's decision of how to utilize the site in the future, staff undertook a public engagement campaign to gather the public's input. The campaign included press releases, social media posts, electronic newsletter articles, letters, postcards, an unscientific survey, an in-person community workshop, and a virtual community workshop.

During the outreach process, the City Hall Ad Hoc Subcommittee (composed of Councilmembers Colson and Stevenson) requested that staff research whether the existing City Hall is eligible for

listing on a historic register and what a historic designation would mean for the sale and/or future use of the site.

In November 2025, the City retained Environmental Science Associates (ESA) to complete a Historic Resource Evaluation for the existing City Hall.

DISCUSSION

In the attached Historic Resource Evaluation, ESA determined that the existing City Hall would be considered a historic resource for the purposes of environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

The existing City Hall was evaluated based on State regulations (California Register of Historic Places) and local regulations (Burlingame Municipal Code Chapter 25.35 (Historic Resources)) to determine if it is eligible to include on a Local (Historic) Register. National Register criteria are not typically considered in evaluations of potential historical resources under CEQA; however, the Burlingame Municipal Code uses National Register criteria to evaluate architectural resources for eligibility for listing on the Local Register, so this evaluation was also conducted.

National and California Registers

The Federal and State Historic Registers each consider four criteria when determining if a property is eligible for listing on the register. If a property meets one or more of the following criteria and retains integrity, it is generally eligible for listing on the State and Federal Historic Registers.

1. The property is associated with significant historical events.
2. The property is associated with the lives of persons significant to history.
3. The property contains distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity.
4. The property yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

ESA opined that the existing City Hall is eligible as a historic resource on the National and State Registers based on Criteria 3 for the following reasons:

- The existing City Hall is an important example of late-modernist architecture in Burlingame.
- The existing City Hall contains three significant structurally separate components, geometric forms, and more.

In addition, according to the ESA report, the existing City Hall retains integrity of its setting (surrounded by many contemporary buildings); design, materials, and workmanship (the building

has undergone some repairs and alterations, but the original building is still largely intact), and feeling (physical features convey the historic character).

Local Register

Burlingame Municipal Code Section 25.35.040 establishes the City of Burlingame Historic Architectural and Places Resources Register (Local Register). Any properties officially included on the California and/or the National Register are automatically included on the Local Register. The criteria for listing on the Local Register are based on those for the National Register (described above), and at least two of the following criteria:

1. Buildings, structures, or places that are important key focal or pivotal points in the visual quality or character of an area, neighborhood, or survey district.
2. Structures that help retain the characteristics of the town with respect to the immediate surroundings.
3. Structures that contribute to the unique urban quality of a downtown, for properties located within the Downtown Specific Plan.
4. Structures contributing to the architectural continuity of the street.
5. Structures that are identified with an event or person who significantly contributed to the culture and/or development of the City, State, or nation.
6. Structures that represent an architectural type or period and/or represent the design work of known architects, draftsmen, or builders whose efforts have significantly influenced the heritage of the City, State, or nation.
7. Structures that illustrate the development of California locally and regionally.
8. Buildings retaining the original integrity of and/or illustrating a given period.
9. Structures unique in design or detail, such as, but not limited to, materials, windows, landscaping, plaster finishes, and architectural innovation.
10. Structures that are at least 50 years old or properties that have achieved significance within the past 50 years, at the time the determination is made, if they are of exceptional importance.
11. Places that have been visited by a person or persons important to City, State, national, or international history or prehistory.

ESA found that the existing City Hall meets the following criteria:

1. The existing City hall is visually prominent and located at a major intersection.
2. The design is consistent with the low-rise, mixed-use character of Downtown Burlingame.
3. The existing City Hall represents the center of civic activities and, like many Bay Area cities, is located near the city's Downtown.
4. The existing City Hall represents civic, late modernist architecture, designed by master architect William A. Whifler, which clearly influenced Burlingame's "heritage."
5. The existing City Hall represents the development of local government.
6. The building retains its original integrity, even with some repairs and additions.

7. The existing City Hall contains distinctive characteristics of late modernist architecture, without many other examples in Burlingame, so it is unique.
8. The existing City Hall is 55 years old, over the required 50 years.

To date, the property has not been officially listed on any Federal, State, or Local Register.

Historic Evaluation Summary

According to the ESA report, the existing City Hall meets Criteria 3 of the aforementioned State and Federal Register criteria, meets eight of the Local Register criteria, and retains its integrity. ESA has thus opined that the existing City Hall would be considered eligible for listing as a historic resource on the Local, State, and Federal Registers.

CEQA requires project applicants to analyze specific impacts to a “historic resource,” as defined. In other words, if a site is a “historic resource,” a project sponsor must consider the project’s potential for substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource as part of the project’s environmental analysis. Here, since ESA has opined that the existing City Hall site is eligible for the Federal, State and Local Registers, any future project would require CEQA review of the existing City Hall as a historic resource.

ESA’s opinion that the existing City Hall is eligible for the Federal, State and Local Registers could be refuted by other consultants, or by the Federal or State agencies, which would ultimately make the decision about including the existing City Hall on its respective register.

Next Steps

Staff will return to the City Council in closed session at a future date to discuss the disposition of the property.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact associated with the discussion of the Historic Resource Evaluation.

Exhibit:

- Historic Resource Evaluation