



NEVADA COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
BOARD AGENDA MEMO

MEETING DATE: June 13, 2023 (postponed from May 23, 2023)

TO: Board of Supervisors

FROM: Jeffrey Thorsby, Senior Management Analyst

SUBJECT: Resolution designating the Chinatowns of Truckee, located in Old Truckee Downtown Historical District, with a landmark plaque to be located at the Old Truckee Jail Museum at 10142 Jibboom Street, Truckee California, 96161 (APN 019-102-004-000), be designated as Nevada County Historical Landmark NEV 23-02.

RECOMMENDATION: Adopt the attached Resolution

FUNDING: N/A

BACKGROUND: On April 21, 2023 the Nevada County Historical Landmarks Commission (NCHLC) voted unanimously to recommend to the Board of Supervisors that the Chinatowns of Truckee, located in Old Truckee Downtown Historical District, with a landmark plaque to be located at the Old Truckee Jail Museum at 10142 Jibboom Street, Truckee California, 96161 (APN 019-102-004-000), be considered and designated as Nevada County Historical Landmark NEV 23-02.

On May 23, 2023 the item was set to be considered by the Board of Supervisors for approval via consent calendar. However at the meeting, District V Supervisor Hardy Bullock pulled the item from consent and requested the item be pulled from the agenda for consideration until after he had the opportunity to meet with member(s) of the community to discuss the coordinated effort to acknowledge the hardship and contribution of Chinese immigrants to the community and history of Nevada County. Subsequently, District V Supervisor has met with the community and has asked for it to be placed back on the Agenda for consideration.

Moreover, as outlined in the attached supporting documents, between 1867 to 1886 there were two (2) Chinatowns in the, then, unincorporated Town of Truckee. The first Chinatown was located on the northside of the Central Pacific Railroad tracks of Truckee, before much of it was destroyed by several fires over time. Subsequently, the town established a committee led by Town Site Agent D. H. Haskell, who ultimately recommend the relocation of the China Town to its second location at south of the railroad tracks and across the Truckee river.

The applicant and NCHLC provided detailed historical analysis that includes a fascinating, yet sobering account of the challenges that Chinese immigrants faced including, but not limited to, poverty, challenges of public health, dangers of fire, bigotry and racism, and other harsh conditions, all while playing a critical role in the development of the region, transcontinental railway and culture.

As noted on page 5 in the supporting documents, “The first Chinatown area existed in this general area bounded by the three named streets. Truckee fires frequently occurred: in 1868; January, March, and July 20, 1871; a destructive May 29, 1875 fire starting in Chinatown; and October 31, 1878 fire started in Chinatown; and two more starting in the “New” Chinatown, January 3, 1883, and June 17, 1886.”

Following the fires of 1875 in the first Chinatown, the 1875 Citizen’s Committee Report Truckee Republican outlines that the Chinese immigrants were relocated to the “New Chinatown” location after the Railroad Company and committee members agreed to “...not sell or rent any of the lots on Main Street east of the newly laid out street that are now vacant, to any Chinaman, for any purpose.”

The Reno Gazette-Journal of January 3, 1883, provides a glimpse into the hardship faced by immigrants, “A fire broke out in the Chinese quarter of Truckee this morning about 3 o’clock, and about one-half of the shanties burned. Most of the Chinese merchants saved their stocks. White folks did not afford the Celestials much assistance, choosing rather to look on and see things burn.” Of the same fire, the San Francisco Examiner January 4, 1883 edition states that “...by a free use of snowballs, succeeded in saving the south-side buildings, altogether the majority of these structures were on fire from time to time. The thermometer, at the time the fire broke out, marked five degrees below zero, and half clothed Celestials who had been aroused from their slumbers, suffered intensely from the cold.” By 1886, many immigrants left the area after a Chinese Must Go! Boycott effort “...to economically force the Chinese out of Truckee altogether in 1885-1886, [with] many of the Chinese residents did leave.”

Despite the hardship, the contribution that the Chinese community and immigrants had on the Truckee region, economy, history and culture cannot be underestimated as the Truckee-Donner Historical Society explains:

“Long overdue, the recognition of Truckee’s Chinatowns should be acknowledged publicly. While important, single focus on just the Chinese Herb Shop as the only remaining evidence of Chinese residents in Truckee is woefully deficient. This submission to NCHLC is to recognize and publicly honor contributions that the Chinese made to Truckee’s viability and sustainability. Besides railroad labors, Census records reflect such occupations as wood choppers, merchants, cooks, grocers, miner, washman, doctors, agent, butcher, prostitutes, fish peddler, and launderers. Without such businesses to support the Chinese population and Truckee’s residents, Truckee may not have survived and thrived. The Chinese deserve due honor to be recognized part in the history of Truckee’s development.” (p. 8)

Therefore, the NCHLC recommends that designating the Chinatowns of Truckee, located in Old Truckee Downtown Historical District, with a landmark plaque to be located at the Old Truckee Jail Museum at 10142 Jibboom Street, Truckee California, 96161 (APN 019-102-004-000), be designated as Nevada County Historical Landmark NEV 23-02.

Item Initiated: May 11, 2023
Approved: Julie Patterson Hunter
Submittal Date: May 11, 2023