



AGENDA REPORT

City Council

DATE:	June 17, 2025
TO:	Mayor Martinez and Members of the City Council
FROM:	Councilmember Soheila Bana Councilmember Doria Robinson (co-sponsor)
Subject:	Visibility, Preservation and Protection of City-Owned Historic Buildings and Historically Significant Locations
FINANCIAL IMPACT:	Anticipated costs include staff time to coordinate the inventory, fabricate and install signage, and implement basic protective measures. These expenses may be minimal, phased in and potentially offset by external grants and partnerships.
PREVIOUS COUNCIL ACTION:	None.
STATEMENT OF THE ISSUE:	<p>Richmond is home to many sites and structures of architectural, cultural, and historical significance that reflect the city's diverse and vibrant past. However, two recent fires have highlighted the vulnerability of these assets:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• On April 25, 2023, the privately owned International Hotel which was one of Richmond's most historic buildings tied to the legacy of the Pullman porters, was completely destroyed by fire, resulting in the loss of an irreplaceable cultural asset.• On May 23, 2025, the Sakai house one of 3 historic Mira Flores structures, which is also privately owned and is located on a site historically linked to Richmond's Japanese American and agricultural history and preservation efforts, sustained significant fire damage.

	<p>These events have drawn public concern and emphasized the need for Richmond to take a proactive approach to preserving its historical resources.</p>
RECOMMENDED ACTION:	<p>DIRECT City staff to work with the Historic Preservation Commission and community groups to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formalize and publicly share a verified list of city-owned historic buildings and historically significant locations. • Create a process to accept nominations, review and if warranted, install commemorative signage on City-owned historic structures and important locations of cultural memory (e.g., the former site of the International Hotel). Additionally, the City should offer to coordinate and assist with the installation of plaques or historical markers for privately owned historic buildings and sites, provided the property owners are willing. This will help commemorate important places regardless of ownership and ensure the community's history remains visible and celebrated. • Develop and implement basic preservation measures to protect city-owned historic buildings from vandalism and fire damage. • Explore grant and partnership opportunities to support preservation efforts, with support from the Historic Preservation Commission and local history organizations. • Create a staff led and City Council approved process to evaluate whether any of the identified historic buildings require additional site-specific protection measures that would involve new budget allocations. Rather than mandating uniform maintenance rules, evaluate each structure's preservation needs individually, based on historical significance, community interest, and available resources. • Provide a status update to the City Council within 180 days on progress made, challenges encountered, and next steps for implementation - Councilmember Soheila Bana (510-672-3490)/Councilmember Doria Robinson (510-672-1387).

DISCUSSION:

To ensure Richmond honors and preserves its history in a meaningful and actionable way, the following steps are proposed:

- **Inventory & Visibility:** Work with the Historic Preservation Commission and other community groups to verify and maintain a public inventory of historic buildings and historically significant sites both those that are city owned and privately owned. Ensure the inventory clearly indicates current ownership.
- **Commemorative Signage:** Create a process to accept nominations, review and if warranted, install commemorative signage on city-owned historic structures and important locations of cultural memory (e.g., the former site of the International Hotel). Additionally, the City should offer to coordinate and assist with the installation of plaques or historical markers for privately owned historic buildings and sites, provided the property owners are willing. This will help commemorate important places regardless of ownership and ensure the community's history remains visible and celebrated.
- **Protection Measures:** Implement basic, cost-effective measures to protect high-priority sites, such as lighting, fire-resistant landscaping, fencing, and, where feasible, surveillance equipment.
- **Case-by-Case Approach:** Rather than mandating uniform maintenance rules, evaluate each structure's preservation needs individually, based on historical significance, community interest, and available resources.
- **Funding & Collaboration:** Seek preservation grants and engage community partners such as the Richmond Museum of History to support ongoing efforts and minimize fiscal impact.

This approach balances action with practicality, ensuring that Richmond's historical legacy is honored without placing unsustainable financial burdens on the City.

DOCUMENTS ATTACHED:

None