

8. **CONSIDERATION OF NEXT STEPS FOR THE TRAIN STATION RENOVATION AND HISTORY MUSEUM**

Report: Recommendation: It is recommended that the Council Review and Consider Recommendations from the Train Station Renovation Ad Hoc Subcommittee Regarding Next Steps for the Train Station Museum; and, if appropriate, authorization of a Budget Amendment in the amount of \$50,000 in Support of Next Steps.

Description:



Item No. 8 Town of Atherton

CITY COUNCIL STAFF REPORT – REGULAR AGENDA

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL

FROM: GEORGE RODERICKS, CITY MANAGER

DATE: APRIL 17, 2024

**SUBJECT: CONSIDERATION OF NEXT STEPS FOR THE TRAIN STATION
RENOVATION AND HISTORY MUSEUM**

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Council Review and Consider Recommendations from the Train Station Renovation Ad Hoc Subcommittee Regarding Next Steps for the Train Station Museum; and, if appropriate, authorization of a Budget Amendment in the amount of \$50,000 in Support of Next Steps.

BACKGROUND

The City Council authorized renovation of the Train Station into a Historic Train Station Museum. While the work of renovating the Station was undertaken, the Ad Hoc Subcommittee was tasked with reviewing options for the interior of the Station Museum and providing the Council with a recommendation for next steps.

ANALYSIS

The Ad Hoc Subcommittee conducted research and analysis into various options for the interior of the Station Museum. The research and analysis included visiting various historic train museums, speaking train aficionados, and reaching out to various train model groups. Attached is a Train Station Display Proposal prepared by the Ad Hoc Subcommittee for discussion by the Council.

The Subcommittee is recommending that the Council consider an initial financial outlay of \$50,000 to allow for staff and the Subcommittee to begin renovation of the display areas within the Museum – to include creation of content, purchase of materials and supplies, purchase of models, and development of display diorama.

The preliminary proposal is for five (5) Display Eras within the centerline display cabinets. The Train Eras depicted would be: 1) The Flag Stop (1863-1912); 2) The First Atherton Station (1912-1930); 3) The Glamorous Period (1930-1950); 4) The Commuter Era (1950-1980); and 5) The Station Closing (2020). Each period would include visual displays, models, and QR-Code connected audio.

At one end of the Museum, there would be a video display that would feature the Town's "Tracks of Change" Historic Video. At the opposite end and along the interior of the Museum would be 2D displays. The exterior of the station would have associated signage, and the external bulletin board would be refurbished with additional 2D display materials.

The centerline cabinetry would feature the covered display cabinets and would include storage areas under the display for the storage of any collected memorabilia.

In addition to allocating funds to begin work, the Subcommittee would like the Council's feedback on the following:

1. The entirety of the allocated budget for the Train Museum was exhausted for renovations, so if the Council wishes to pursue outfitting the interior of the Museum, the council must address funding. The Town can allocate public funds, staff time and other resources; or, the Council could consider private sponsorships, funding, or turning over the museum to a non-profit.
2. Much of the model work would need to be commissioned or built by volunteers. How does the Council wish to proceed?
3. The Council could also seek residents to form a non-profit to manage the museum as well as its memorabilia. This could be done up front or later, after the Town commissions its completion. It is unknown if there is a resident group or interest.
4. The Town could seek out other potential grants from other sources – such as the National Model Train Association. This would require staff time and resources, unless led by an outside group.
5. What considerations should there be for operation? The assumption is that the museum would be unattended, self-guided. What budget should be attached to general maintenance?

FISCAL IMPACT

The preliminary allocation is recommended at \$50,000. While the Subcommittee believes that this is sufficient for initial work; there are still some unknowns with respect to the cost of model building. Any costs above \$50,000 would return to the Council for consideration.

GOAL ALIGNMENT

This Report and its contents are in alignment with the following Council Policy Goals:

- Goal Area B – Preserve Small Town Character and Quality of Life

POLICY FOCUS

The Policy Focus for the Council is funding for the renovations, operation of the museum, and engagement with the community.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public notification was achieved by posting the agenda, with this agenda item being listed, at least 72 hours prior to the meeting in print and electronically. Information about the project is also disseminated via the Town's electronic News Flash and Atherton Online. There are approximately 1,200 subscribers to the Town's electronic News Flash publications. Subscribers include residents as well as stakeholders –to include, but be not limited to, media outlets, school districts, Menlo Park Fire Protection District, service providers (water, power, and sewer), and regional elected officials.

COMMISSION/COMMITTEE FEEDBACK/REFERRAL

This item has not been before a Town Committee or Commission

ATTACHMENTS

1. Train Station Display Proposal

Train Station Display Proposal

The Atherton Train Station Museum would incorporate the Train Station Building into the Town Center and create a new public space where visitors can stroll, sit and view displays that tell the story of Atherton's history with the railroad and train station. The exhibits in the station will:

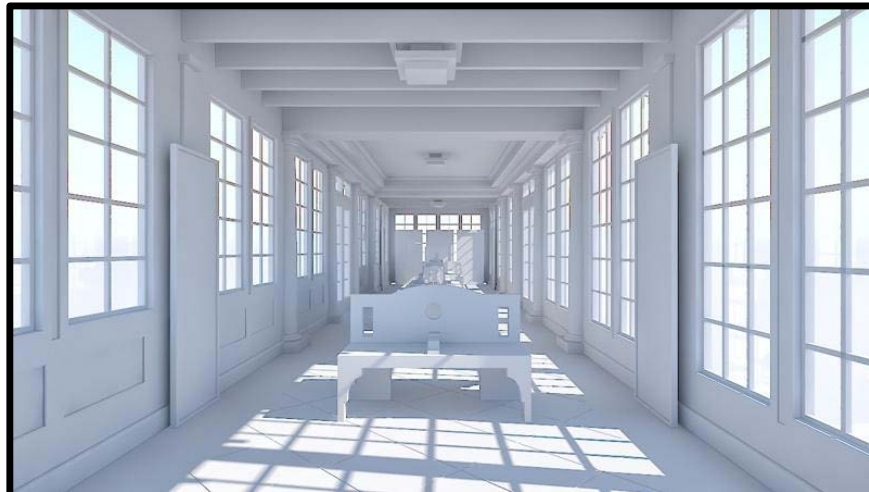
- Provide short, easily understood descriptions of the history of the train, the station building and the train's impact on Atherton.
- Provide an interesting, creative display down the center of the station featuring 150 years of evolution of the station and trains.
- Offer a convenient, comfortable location for visitors to view the Atherton Train Video "Tracks of Change" that was produced for Atherton's Centennial Celebration.
- Provide an outdoor display utilizing the existing schedule display case and outdoor sitting.

Display Areas

The Ad Hoc Train Station Subcommittee recommends, that the Council consider supporting a display that consists of 3 areas inside the station:

- 1) Free standing displays that tell the story of pre-train Atherton (Native Americans, settlers, the stagecoach days and the building of the SF and SJ Railroad in 1863);
- 2) Center display that features a train track with model trains that show the history and evolution of the trains, the station, and the riders over time; and
- 3) Video screen with seating that will show the "Tracks of Change" video.

There are additional wall spaces within the Station that can accommodate other mounted displays or memorabilia cases in the future.



Free Standing Displays

At the northern end of the building, is space for three freestanding 2D-displays.

One of the displays would focus on the Ohlone and the colonization up to the grant of Rancho de las Pulgas in 1795.

A second display would focus on the early peninsula wagon and stagecoach era and the impact of the gold rush.

A third display would focus on the launching of the railroad in 1863 and how it transformed the southern peninsula by bringing in many people, launching the cities and large estates and enabling the transportation of goods to San Francisco.

Center Model Train & Track Display

The center of the Museum would contain an encased model train track in the larger G model scale.

The cases would be divided into five (5) time periods starting from the beginning of the train to the close of the station in 2020.

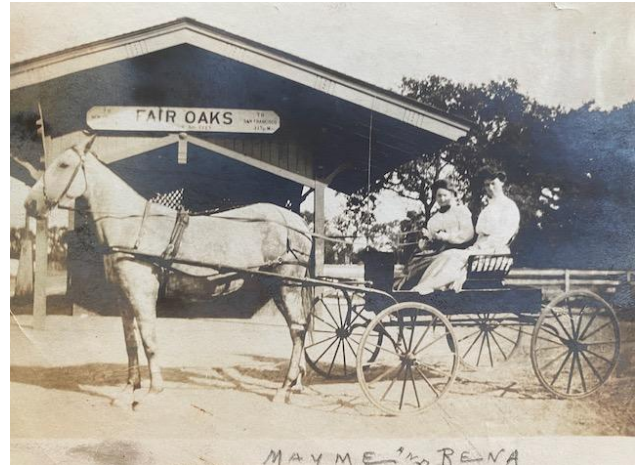
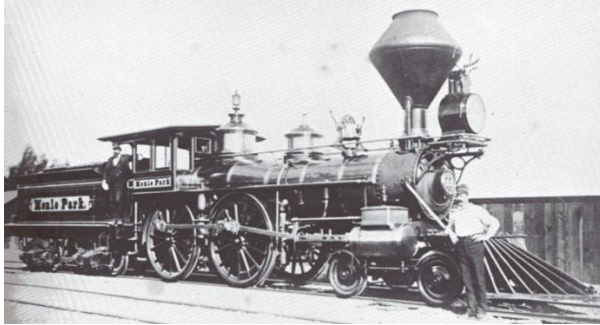
At each station period there is proposed to be a model train engine of that time-period and a model of the train station as it appeared at that time, along with photos and other information and time-appropriate activities for each of those periods. There could be audio triggered by QR code for that station that could be accessed via the visitors iPhone that would play period music and tell the story of that time.



Contemplated Time Periods

1) The Flag Stop 1863-1912

The first stop in the display case would depict the first fifty years including a wood-burner engine, Fair Oaks Flag Stop shelter, horse and buggy with person in period clothes. The audio would play period music and sounds and tell a brief overview of the time-period. The model wood burning engine could incorporate smoke and sounds.



2) The First Atherton Station:1912-1930

This stop in the display case would feature a Steam Engine, the first Atherton Train Station with 8 posts and terra cotta roof. The audio will describe that period and include the train's use in the 1906 earthquake.



Atherton 1913 – Atherton Heritage Association

3) The Glamorous Period: 1930-1950

This stop in the display case would feature a Daylight Train, the Atherton station with 8 posts, fully enclosed by glass walls and glass doors, with a newspaper stand outside. The audio would describe the period and include the role of the train in World War II.



Atherton 1939 – Arnold Menke collection

4) The commuter era 1950- 1980

This stop in the display case would feature a Diesel Engine. The Atherton station expanded with 15-foot extensions on either side, taking its final shape, with a full parking lot. The model could bring to life the image of Dinkelspiel with a band and kids or depict the daily commuters. This is the busiest time for the Atherton train station in its history. The audio would feature music and a period description.



Between Station No. 4 and No. 5 will be transition audio that would tell the story of the birth of Silicon Valley in pictures and audio. It will cover the 1980-2000 period of limited station use as business changed focus from San Francisco to Silicon Valley.

5) Station Closing 2020

At this final stop in the display case, there could be a Cal train Electric Engine displayed. The model would show the Atherton station as it appeared when it was closed in December 2020. The people would have face masks marking the covid era and there would be a tesla in the parking lot. The audio would describe the period and final closing of the train station.



A southbound train at Atherton station in December 2020 on the final weekend of service to the station

Video Display Area

A third section of the museum on the southern end of the building would be set up for visitors to sit or stand and watch the train video "Tracks of Change ". This video will have a viewer-controlled start button or motion sensor. The historic, large 1910 benches are integrated into either end of the central display case such that viewers can use the bench and face the video screen. The other bench at the opposite end is also embedded into the display case to allow for reading of the 2D displays.

Exterior of the Station

Outside of the station museum is the historic clock which has been relocated to the front of the museum.

The existing Atherton Caltrain station sign could be retrofitted to say Atherton Train Station Museum.

The existing outdoor schedule display case has been renovated in the remodel. It can display historical image reproductions and information. It could be a permanent display or a changing display that is updated periodically to bring new things to the museum.



Content for Displays

Atherton residents and the public would be invited to share and donate period-appropriate model trains, and historical photos and memorabilia.

The town has been offered the donation of a Daylight model train by the Leuger family which could be featured in the center case as part of the glamor era display.

The Town could seek other model train donations or buy the remaining 4 model trains. The train station building models will need to be constructed either from scratch or from modified existing model kits. While the models are being built (or if there are insufficient funds to build the models) photos of the station as shown in this proposal could be utilized.



The Sacramento train museum has offered to long term loan any items they may have in storage and offered to allow the Town to reproduce any flat art they may have.

To create the historical content for the Train Video, the Town collaborated with the Atherton Heritage Association as well as the San Mateo Historical archive, the Menlo Park Historical Society, the Sacramento Rail Museum archives and various historians and video sources. The Atherton Heritage Association has historical photos of the train station and some limited memorabilia. These images can be selected and digitized to create other displays inside and outside of the station.

There is a plaque dedicated to Rosemary Maulbetsch that will be displayed on the exterior of the museum along with a historical building plaque.

At the 100-year Centennial Celebration, the Train Display Area gathered an email list of interested residents. If the Town wishes to pursue interested parties, those that signed up can be sent relevant communications. In addition, the Subcommittee has contacts with the local model train associations.

Building of the Displays

The 2D free standing displays and outdoor case can be commissioned to an outside agency to create. While the main display case is being created as part of the Train Station Renovation, the model trains and stations would need to be constructed. These can be commissioned to professional model builders or a committee of resident volunteers (similar to the model train exhibit in Menlo Park). The Subcommittee recommends that the Town commission the models to be built if the price is reasonable, otherwise at least initially use photos.

Maintenance of Museum

The museum would be an unattended, self-guided experience. The doors would be opened and closed automatically at pre-determined hours. The area is loosely monitored by cameras to the Police Department. The space would be cleaned by the Town's cleaning contractor. The Town's existing insurance covers the structure.

There are many successful local examples of unattended mini museums. The public location adjacent to the police station should deter vandalism. The items of any value such as the model trains and stations are under a glass case. If more expensive items are donated, the Town will need to consider security as well as climate control features, such as UV window treatment and monitored heating and humidity levels. As this time, it is anticipated that there will only be reproductions and no highly valuable memorabilia.



Next Steps and Decisions

1. The entirety of the allocated budget for the Train Museum was exhausted for renovations, so if the Council wishes to pursue outfitting the interior of the Museum, the council must address funding. The Town can allocate public funds, staff time and other resources; or, the Council could consider private sponsorships, funding, or turning over the museum to a non-profit.
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Subcommittee Recommendation:

The Subcommittee recommends that the Council allocate \$50,000 to create the content for the display cases and the center section, including the purchase of any necessary model trains. The Subcommittee believes that the Museum could be ready to receive visitors within 6 months of the contracting with design and development contractors.