



REPORT to the MAYOR and MEMBERS of the CITY COUNCIL
From the CITY MANAGER

DATE: November 22, 2022

SUBJECT: CONSIDERATION OF PROJECT 2022-1417 (JONES),
A REQUEST FOR A PROPERTY PRESERVATION
(MILLS ACT) AGREEMENT FOR THE ROACH-
PORTER HOUSE, A LOCALLY DESIGNATED
HISTORIC LANDMARK LOCATED AT 4990 PORTER
HILL ROAD, APN 494-820-05-00 AND 494-820-06-00,
IN THE R1 (URBAN RESIDENTIAL) ZONE

ISSUING DEPARTMENT: Community Development

SUMMARY:

Issue:

Should the City enter into property preservation (Mills Act) agreement with the owner of the Roach-Porter House, a locally designated historic landmark?

Recommendation:

The Historic Preservation Commission recommends that the City Council adopt a resolution (**Attachment A**) authorizing a Mills Act Property Preservation Agreement with the owner of the Roach-Porter House located at 4990 Porter Hill Road.

Fiscal Impact:

The amount of property tax to the City would be reduced by approximately \$950 annually. In exchange for discounted property taxes, the City receives guaranteed property maintenance and improvements to ensure the ongoing preservation, rehabilitation, and restoration of Mills Act properties. Well maintained historic landmarks can increase property values in the neighborhood.

City's Strategic Goals:

- Revitalize neighborhoods and corridors
- Ensure safe and affordable homes for La Mesa's current and future residents

Environmental Review:

This project is categorically exempt from environmental review pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Sections 15301 and 15331.

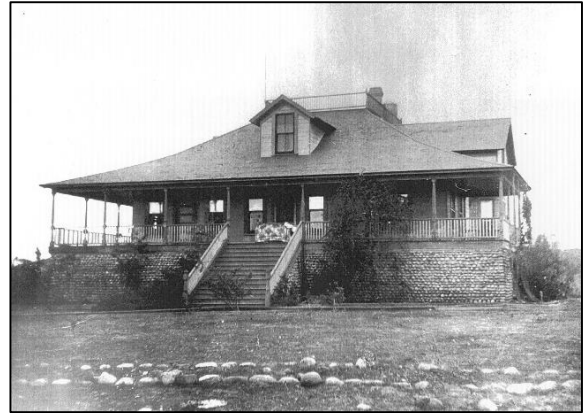
BACKGROUND:

The 0.75-acre subject property is located on the west side of Porter Hill Road, north of Roach Drive, in the Porter Hill neighborhood. Surrounding development consists of single-family residences to the north, south, and east, and the La Mesa Community Center, which is part of MacArthur Park, to the west. Existing improvements on the site are comprised of a one-and-a-half-story residence on a high raised foundation, a detached workshop building, and mature landscaping. A vicinity map is shown below, and the Assessor Parcel Map is provided as **Attachment B**. Photographs are provided as **Attachment C**.

The residence on the site, the 1893 Roach-Porter House, obtained historic landmark designation from the City in 2003. Resolution No. 2003-090 is provided as **Attachment D**. It is one of only a few surviving 19th century residences in La Mesa and is an unusual example of French Colonial design influence. The original owner, Henry Roach, was a Civil War veteran and Texas merchant who had the house built for use as a summer home. By 1905, Henry and Elizabeth Porter had acquired the property from Susan Roach and renamed the house "Ping An Shan," or Hill of Peace. The Porters had lived in China for 30 years before retiring to La Mesa at the outset of the Boxer Rebellion. One of their children, James T. Porter, was a well-known artist and sculptor. The accessory structure in the rear yard was Mr. Porter's art studio. The full statement of significance and physical description are provided in the landmark nomination report, **Attachment E**. An early photo of the house is shown below.



California Government Code Section 50280 et seq. authorizes local governments to enter into property preservation agreements with owners of qualified historical properties for the purpose of preserving, maintaining, and restoring historic properties through reduced property tax assessments. Locally designated historic landmarks are eligible to participate in the program, which is known as the Mills Act. A Mills Act agreement has a 10-year term that self-renews annually on the anniversary of its effective date. The annual renewal automatically adds one year to the initial term of the agreement, so that the remaining term is always 10 years unless either party files a notice of non-renewal.



At the property owner's request, on October 4, 2022, the Historic Preservation Commission voted 6-0 to adopt a resolution recommending that the City Council authorize a Mills Act Preservation Agreement for the property. A resolution memorializing the HPC's action is provided as **Attachment F**.

DISCUSSION:

The property was until recently in the ownership of descendants of the Porter family. A property preservation agreement was not put into place at the time of landmarking because it would not have provided any tax benefit to the long-time owners. The new owner wishes to establish a Mills Act agreement to fund improvements to and maintenance of the property.



The resource is in excellent condition. Two alterations have occurred since historical designation in 2003. The first was a re-roofing project in 2012 to replace wood shake shingles with simulated shake asphalt shingles. The second project involved alterations to the detached accessory structure in the rear yard. Certificates of Appropriateness were granted by the HPC for both.

The new owner has already completed upgrades to electrical and plumbing systems and foundation repairs. Future improvements identified by the owner that would be

funded with the Mills Act tax savings and included in the Mills Act agreement are as follows:

- Install additional exterior porch lighting (by 2026)
- Replace HVAC system, remove window AC units, and either install central air or mini split units in each bedroom (by 2028)
- Repair or replace damaged garage doors (by 2028)

CONCLUSION:

The Historic Preservation Commission recommends that the City Council adopt the draft resolution provided as **Attachment A** authorizing execution of a Mills Act Preservation Agreement for the Roach-Porter House at 4990 Porter Hill Road.

Reviewed by:



Greg Humora
City Manager

Respectfully submitted by:



Kerry Kusiak
Director of Community Development

Attachments:

- A. Draft Council Resolution for Mills Act Agreement
- B. Assessor Parcel Map Sheet
- C. Photographs
- D. City Council Resolution No. 2003-090
- E. Historic Landmark Report
- F. Resolution HPC 2022-07 Recommending a Mills Act Agreement