March 8, 2007

Ms. Gloria Sciara, AICP
City of Santa Clara Planning Division
1500 Warburton Avenue
Santa Clara, CA 95050

RE: Draft Environmental Impact Report for the Santa Clara Gardens Development Project at 90 North Winchester in the City of Santa Clara

Dear Ms. Sciara,

At the February 15, 2007 meeting of the Santa Clara County Historical Heritage Commission (HHC), the HHC discussed the adequacy of the Cultural Resources section of the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) for the Santa Clara Gardens Development Project. The HHC would like to submit the following comments:

The DEIR lacks sufficient analysis of the historical themes of Santa Clara County in order to adequately evaluate the significance of the property in its historic context. The DEIR discusses Dr. A. E. Osborne’s work with disabled children, the social work of the Women’s Relief Corps on behalf of widows and families of veterans, and the establishment of a University of California Agricultural Experiment Station on the site. Examples of themes related to the history of the property are social services and agriculture in the Santa Clara Valley (Valley) and the research should be analyzed within the context of these important historical patterns.

The significance of the subject property extends beyond the relative importance of the documented persons and individual activities that occurred on the property. The significance involves the relationship of the site to the scientific development of agricultural practices in Santa Clara County that played a critical role in the development of both California and the West. For example, the DEIR mentions that permanent European settlement began in the Santa Clara area in 1777 with the establishment of Mission Santa Clara, but it does not state that this settlement immediately began growing and providing food to supply the presidios of San Francisco and Monterey, sustaining settlements in other parts of California. The DEIR mentions Gold Rush immigration, but it does not note that it was farmers in the Valley that supplied San Francisco with daily shipments of agricultural products from hay to strawberries.
The DEIR lacks specific documentation of the study and development of scientific agriculture that occurred on the subject property. Universities, such as the University of California, played a role in the study and support of agricultural practices, beginning with the Morrill Act of 1862. The University of California Agricultural Experiment Stations made immediate and pertinent practical applications and agricultural advances, most notably in strawberry breeding programs begun in the early 1900s. These breeding programs produced many successful varieties that were shipped all over the country. Such strawberry breeding research was conducted on the subject property through the post-World War II period.

The DEIR lacks substantial analysis that addresses the agricultural history of the site in relation to the (Sarah) Winchester fruit ranch, once the largest in the Valley, and other surrounding properties, which were prominent farming centers at the time. The Winchester ranch is still open to the public and exhibits many artifacts that attest to the high level of efficiency of local fruit ranches, even generating their own electricity. The University of California selected the site as the location for the Santa Clara County Deciduous Fruit Station because of its unique importance and desirability for agricultural production, proximity to the fruit industry in general and more specifically, other fruit ranches such as the Winchester Ranch. Analysis should include an examination of the relationship of the site’s agricultural research station to its immediate neighborhood and agricultural practices in Santa Clara County and California.

Because the above-mentioned areas lack adequate analysis and research, the eligibility of the subject property for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources has not been sufficiently addressed. The HHC believes that the property may be eligible for inclusion in the California Register of Historical Resources.

The HHC appreciates the opportunity to comment on Draft Environmental Impact Report for the Santa Clara Gardens Development Project. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Karen White, Chairperson
Santa Clara County Historical Heritage Commission