Memorandum

To: City of Berkeley Landmarks Preservation Commission
From: Rhoades Planning Group
Date: March 3, 2016
Re: 1900 Fourth Street

We look forward to this preview meeting as an initial discussion of the archeological work done to date at the 1900 Fourth Street site, as well as the proposed project.

Between January and March 2014, Archeo-Tec, Inc., of Oakland, led by Dr. Allen Pastron, carried out a systematic program of archival research, field investigation, and laboratory analysis of the 1900 Fourth Street site, currently the Spenger’s Fresh Fish Grotto parking lot, located between Third and Fourth Streets and Hearst and University Avenues. The purpose of the work was to: (1) discover and characterize sub-surface cultural and historically significant materials that may exist on the property, (2) clarify and fill-in gaps in the archaeological understanding of the site, especially as it relates to the Ohlone Indians who settled in the area, and (3) provide guidance on potential future uses of the parking lot.

The research and investigation was carried out under the observation of Andy Galvan, an Ohlone Indian and cultural resource management consultant. The methodology, findings, and conclusions were reviewed by Berkeley writer and historian Richard Schwartz.

As is described further in the attached executive summary of the findings as well as in the complete archeological report, investigators found no historically significant remnants of the West Berkeley Shellmound within the parking lot grounds and have concluded to near certainty that none exist within the property. It is the sincere hope of the researches that the findings and conclusions advance general understanding of the history of the site and its surroundings, and contribute to fact-based land-use decisions and policy-making going forward.

The executive summary of the archeological findings is attached here. You may download the full report at 1900fourthst.com/archaeology, sent to this Commission previously.

We look forward to discussing this work with you, and to a robust environmental review and public process regarding the archaeology of the site and proposed project.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Between January and March 2014, Archeo-Tec, Inc., of Oakland, carried out archival research, field investigation and laboratory analysis of the Spenger’s Fresh Fish Grotto parking lot, located between Third and Fourth streets and Hearst and University avenues, in the City of Berkeley. The purpose was to: (1) discover and characterize sub-surface cultural and historically significant materials that may exist on the property, (2) clarify and fill-in gaps in the archaeological understanding of the site, especially as it relates to the Ohlone Indians, who settled in the area, and (3) provide guidance on the future viability of development of the parking lot. The program was designed to identify and evaluate archaeological resources in accordance with California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) guidelines. Its primary focus was searching for the presence of intact and/or disturbed deposits of the West Berkeley Shellmound within the property. The research and investigation was carried out under the observation of Andy Galvan, an Ohlone Indian and cultural resource management consultant—with the methodology, findings, and conclusions reviewed by Berkeley writer and historian Richard Schwartz. It is the sincere hope of the researchers, investigators and writers of this report that the findings and conclusions advance general understanding of the history of the property and its surroundings, and contribute to fact-based land use decisions and policy-making affecting the parking lot and its surroundings.

The Spenger’s parking lot is part of a group of several properties that were previously designated as a Landmark site by the Landmarks Preservation Commission of the City of Berkeley in the summer of 2000. This status was conferred in an effort to preserve the area as an important Ohlone Indian living and burial site, defined primarily by what prior researchers and investigators estimated as the location and potential dimensions of the West Berkeley Shellmound, one of the oldest surviving remnants of native settlements in the Bay Area. When the first scientific research and recorded archeology occurred on the site in 1902, the mound was reportedly 18 feet high and covered roughly the area between Second and
Third streets and between Hearst and University avenues, on the north bank of what was then Strawberry Creek. The most intensive archaeological research of the Shellmound took place during the middle of the 20th century, regrettably long after the mound had been altered and disturbed during industrial development and urbanization of the East Bay. By 1950, the only visible remnant was “wedged tightly between two old factory buildings,” according to the authoritative 1975 study of the archeological site (CA-ALA-307) by University of California, Berkeley, professors William J. Wallace and Donald W. Lathrap. Based on evidentiary data, Wallace and Lathrap suggested that the center of the mound was “at the juncture of Second Street and Hearst Avenue.”

In 1999, at the direction of the owners of the Spenger’s parking lot, Archeo-Tech commenced initial research, testing and site investigation to begin to determine whether the Eastern edge of the West Berkeley Shellmound ever extended onto the parking lot property. In July of 1999 and in January and February of 2000, Archeo-Tec surveyed the entire site by taking a total of 43 borings, each 24 inches in diameter, down to a depth of approximately 18 feet below surface. Two discrete areas of subsurface prehistoric cultural deposition that possibly represented West Berkeley Shellmound remnants were identified. The first, in the northwest quadrant of the parking lot, was drawn from a single boring, which suggested it was horizontally isolated. The material from this area consisted of clay mixed with an abundance of mussel- and clam-shell fragments, some oyster shell and a small quantity of non-human mammal bones. The second area of subsurface prehistoric cultural disposition was drawn from a set of five adjacent borings within the east-central portion of the lot. It consisted of silt and clay interspersed with flecks of charcoal, a relatively small quantity of fish and non-human mammal bone, a few pieces of fire-affected rock, several possible stone artifacts, and ubiquitous shell pieces. Based on the discrete nature of both findings, and given that it is known with near certainty that the heart of the West Berkeley Shellmound was situated directly to the west of the Spenger’s parking lot (across the Union Pacific Railroad tracks in and around the present-day facilities of the Truitt and White Lumber
Company), the evidence suggested strongly the two areas of prehistoric cultural disposition discovered within the study area were secondary. That is, the evidence pointed to the likelihood that the materials that were found had been spread onto the property, likely during the early 20th Century, rather than remaining as in situ remnants of the original mound.

To further understand the provenance of this shell material, Archeo-Tec recently conducted more extensive study, focusing on the two areas of interest determined in the initial analysis. Archeo-Tec designed and carried out a second phase of archival research and sub-surface site investigation between January and March, 2014, under the cultural oversight of the aforementioned Mr. Galvan, and review of Mr. Schwartz. Field and laboratory methods followed standard archeological research and practice. Twenty test trenches, each measuring five-feet wide by 15-feet long, were mechanically excavated using a backhoe. In the east-central area of interest within the parking lot, trenches were strategically placed so as to extensively sample the areas of prehistoric disposition as indicated by the 1999 and 2000 Archeo-Tec borings. Trenches were placed in north-to-south and east-to-west orientated strings, such that they directly abutted each other, leaving no gaps between trenches. This provided the unique opportunity to assess long, continuous profiles (by summing adjacent trenches), which allowed investigators to map and characterize the vertical stratigraphic relationships and test for lateral facies (soil and rock) along the cardinal directions. In the northwest portion of the lot, investigators exposed two large test units (each 10-feet-by-20-feet square), designed specifically to open a large area in the location known to have the highest potential to yield intact shellmound. Ground-penetrating radar data, supplied by Dr. Scott Byram, was used to pinpoint the most likely areas of potentially intact midden, while also helping investigators avoid extensive fill and rubble debris encountered during the first phase of boring sampling.

During this most recent phase of more in-depth exploration, investigators found no intact shellmound. Investigators found only secondarily re-deposited mound
material that had been moved to its current location. No cultural artifacts or materials of definitive prehistoric origin was discovered. Only refuse-related material dating to the late 19th and early 20th centuries was found in any abundance, primarily food-related glassware and ceramics, brick and assorted demolition debris, and various metallic waste, which are commonly encountered at archaeological sites throughout the San Francisco Bay region. Investigators found a thin lens of shell that may have been originally part of a shellmound deposit, possibly the West Berkeley Shellmound. However, this thin lens of shell was either re-deposited by Strawberry Creek or by early 20th Century excavation and re-distribution as agricultural soil enhancement and road-base fill, both common practices of the era. The latter was deemed the most likely case. No evidence was found that the West Berkeley Shellmound was ever located on the Spenger's parking lot.

From an academic and policy-making perspective, this finding and conclusion is significant, as it is contrary to cursory mapping of the eastern limits of the mound proposed by archeologists at the beginning of the 20th Century and which informed the decision of the Berkeley Landmarks Preservation Commission in 2000 to include the parking lot in a wider area that was designated a historic landmark, an action that was intended to preserve a historically significant site.

However, Dr. Pastron recognizes that the investigation conducted by Archeo-Tec cannot eliminate with absolute certainty the possibility that significant historic and prehistoric cultural materials exist within the footprint of the parking lot, given the long-known inhabitation of the area by the Ohlone people. In the opinion of Dr. Pastron, development of the property would not result in adverse impacts to significant prehistoric or historic period cultural resources under California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) guidelines. However, while Dr. Pastron considers the existence of significant cultural materials to be exceedingly unlikely, he recommends that any development-related ground disturbance below the
historic fill layer, four feet below present ground surface, be monitored by a qualified archaeologist and a representative of the Ohlone tribe.