



REPORT TO MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL

AGENDA ITEM

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR
AND CITY COUNCIL

DATE: November 27, 2007

SUBJECT: Proclamation Recognizing Dead Cat Alley

Report in Brief

The purpose for the proposed Proclamation is to recognize Dead Cat Alley

- as an interesting and colorful part of Woodland's history;
- as a significant historical and archaeological resource; and
- as a community point of interest.

Staff recommends that the City Council approve the proposed Proclamation to recognize Dead Cat Alley as an interesting and colorful part of Woodland's past, as a significant archaeological and historical resource and as a community point of interest.

Background

The Woodland Art Center has requested that the City approve a Proclamation recognizing Dead Cat Alley and recommend that the alley remain accessible from Cleveland Street to Freeman Park.

The alley is centered between Main and Court Streets and today comprises nine city blocks, extending from Freeman Park to its western terminus at Cleveland Street. The alley officially received the name Dead Cat Alley in 1962 by the Woodland City Council. The origin of the name, Dead Cat Alley is not clear. However, it appears that by the 1890's the term had come into the active vernacular and was used often.

Downtowns often feature alleys as means of secondary access and loading. This was the case for businesses fronting on Main Street. In Woodland, as in many local communities during the California Gold Rush, a local Chinatown developed along a portion of the alley. Visible evidence of the Chinatown site is gone; however, there is evidence in the historic and archeological records. A recent cultural resource sensitivity study prepared for the City Center Lofts project found that there is "*strong potential for encountering historic subsurface features associated with the second half of the 19th century as well as material remains from later year's occupants from the first half of the 20th century.*" California Archeological Report No 24, prepared in September 1984, identifies a Chinese laundry on the Woodland Opera House site. Laundries were one of the major sources of income for the Chinese in California, after 1870. In 1879 there were seven Chinese washhouses operating in Woodland.

Dead Cat Alley holds historical significance as well. According to the cultural resources report, the name appears to be associated with Woodland's "back alley" during its historic development, particularly Chinatown. Based on 1870 US Census Records, between 70 and 80 Chinese were living in the Woodland area and increased to 100 Chinese in the 1880 Census. The Chinese quarter extended from Elm to College Streets with possible dwellings located between Elm and Walnut Streets.

In 2002 the Woodland Art Center (WAC) created the Dead Cat Alley, Nine Lives project to promote the alley as an art venue, to feature its historical and educational value and to develop its potential as a tourist attraction. The Woodland Art Center has actively promoted Dead Cat Alley through the development of a walking tour booklet, which won a Preservation Award from the Historic Preservation Commission in 2004. The WAC pursued grants from the City of Woodland for historical plaques which have been installed in four locations along the alley. Sculptor Gary Dinnen created ceramic cats that were installed along portions of the alley roof tops. A tour of Dead Cat Alley was included in most recent walking tour book update, "Explore Historic Woodland" and Dead Cat Alley is featured as a tour in the annual Stroll Through History.

Prior Action

A request for a proclamation for Dead Cat Alley was brought before the City Council in April 2007. At that time staff was directed to continue working with a cultural resources consultant to complete a Historic Resources Survey and to work with the Woodland Art Center (WAC) to refine language. A survey of the alley portion adjacent to the proposed City Center Lofts project has been completed. Staff has conferred with WAC regarding the proposed resolution.

Dino Gay of the WAC has been the primary contact regarding the Proclamation. However, members of the Yolo County Historical Society, Stroll through history have indicated interest in recognition of the alley.

Discussion

It should be noted that while the Proclamation proposes recognition of Dead Cat Alley, and mentions that the alley shall remain accessible, this does not imply future development restrictions on the alley as it is unknown at this time the nature and types of projects that may come forward or the nature of ownership along the length of the alley. The term 'continuous passage' can imply pedestrian or auto related access. As is already the case, the alley will continue to be taken into consideration with future development proposals. Further, development proposals that result in subsurface activity will be required, through the environmental review process, to complete historic analysis and archaeological testing.

Fiscal Impact

Adoption of the Proclamation should have no fiscal impact beyond the utilization of staff time.

Public Contact

Posting of the City Council agenda. Copies of the staff report and Proclamation have been provided to the Woodland Art Center and Dino Gay.

Alternative Courses of Action

1. Approve proposed Proclamation to recognize Dead Cat Alley as an interesting and colorful part of Woodland's past, as a significant archaeological and historical resource and as a community point of interest.
2. Do not approve the Proclamation and direct staff to return with revisions.
3. Cease further consideration of a Proclamation to recognize Dead Cat Alley.

Recommendation for Action

Staff recommends that the City Council approve Alternative No. 1.

Prepared by: Cindy Abell-Norris
Senior Planner

Reviewed by: Barry Munowitch
Assistant City Manager

Mark G. Deven
City Manager

Attachment:
Proclamation recognizing Dead Cat Alley

City of Woodland

PROCLAMATION

DEAD CAT ALLEY

WHEREAS, In 1853, The City of Woodland, then known as Yolo City, was born when Henry Wyckoff built a small box frame store on the southeast corner of what is now First Street and Dead Cat Alley; and

WHEREAS, On February 8, 1873, a Yolo Democrat report mentioned Dead Cat Alley by name, evidence that the alley was so-called prior to that date; and

WHEREAS, In 1886, a Sanborn Map revealed a China Town along Dead Cat Alley between College and Elm; and

WHEREAS, A China Town along Dead Cat Alley developed, and was concentrated between Second and Elm Streets but extended between Fourth to Walnut Streets. Residents of this part of Dead Cat Alley, also known as China Alley, included Man Hop, Ah Min, Boy Ying, Ah Fat, Gee Lee and Quong Sing; and

WHEREAS, On July 2, 1892 the Great Fire of Woodland started in a small barn on Dead Cat Alley in back of Bartolli's grocery store between First and Second Streets; and

WHEREAS, In 1912, Woodland's first garage, the Electric Garage Company, was built at Dead Cat Alley and Third Street to sell and repair Studebaker electric wagons manufactured in Placerville; and

WHEREAS, From 1925 until 1947, Chinese immigrants Hew Din and Lock Shee Din raised their family and operated Tai Lee Laundry on Dead Cat Alley, where four of their eight children were born; and

WHEREAS, About 1940, a photograph of young Henry Din, using modified tennis rackets as crutches, taken by Judge Hamilton was circulated across the United States by the Associated Press and became famous; and

WHEREAS, On May 7, 1962, Woodland City Council officially named the passage Dead Cat Alley; and

WHEREAS, In 1984, the California Department of Parks and Recreation published the archaeological report entitled The Chinese Laundry on Second Street Papers: Archaeology at the Woodland Opera House site – California Archaeological Report Number 24, a Study About Human Activities on Dead Cat Alley; and

WHEREAS, in 1999 the Downtown Woodland Historic District, of which Dead Cat Alley passes through a portion, was added to the National Register of Historic Places; and

WHEREAS, In February 2002, the Woodland Art Center created the Dead Cat Alley Nine Lives Project and adopted Dead Cat Alley as an art venue to promote its historical and educational value and its potential as a tourist attraction"; and

WHEREAS, in 2004, the Woodland Art Center received a Preservation Award from the City of Woodland Historic Preservation Commission for the Dead Cat Alley walking tour booklet; and

WHEREAS, the Yolo County Historical Society, the Stroll Through History Committee, and the Woodland Art Center endorse the preservation and enhancement of Dead Cat Alley; and

WHEREAS, the annual Stroll Through History features a tour of Dead Cat Alley which is highlighted by historical plaques; and

WHEREAS, The recently updated Walking Tour book, "*Explore Historic Woodland*" features a tour of Dead Cat Alley; and

WHEREAS, the Yolo County Historical Society, the Stroll Through History Committee, and the Woodland Art Center endorse the preservation of Dead Cat Alley as extending from Cleveland Street to Freeman Park; and

WHEREAS, Dead Cat Alley is a unique and memorable name; and

WHEREAS, There are more valuable stories and facts about all parts of Dead Cat Alley yet to be revealed.

THEREFORE, We, the members of the Woodland City Council do hereby recognize Dead Cat Alley as an interesting and colorful part of Woodland's past, as a significant historical and archaeological resource, and as a community point of interest, and through continuing public and private efforts that the alley be enhanced and improved, and should remain accessible as a continuous passage from Cleveland Street to Freeman Park, for future citizens, merchants, and tourists.

Dated this 27th day of November, 2007.

David M. Flory, Mayor

Marlin H. Davies, Vice-Mayor
Jeff Monroe, Council Member

William L. Marble, Council Member
Artemio Pimentel, Council Member