

## **HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION STAFF REPORT**

**PROJECT TITLE:** Historical Features in Nisenan Park

**PROPOSAL:** Nomination for listing on the City of Folsom Cultural Resources Inventory

**RECOMMENDATION:** Determine the resource eligible for listing

**APPLICANT:** The Heritage Preservation Group of Folsom

**OWNER:** The City of Folsom Parks and Recreation Department

**LOCATION:** Located in the Empire Ranch Specific Plan area, east of Golf Links Drive and south of Village 39

**ASSESSOR'S PARCEL NO.:** 072-1170-091

**GENERAL PLAN DESIGNATION:** Open Space (OS)

**ZONING:** The Russell Ranch Specific Plan (SP92-3)  
(renamed to Empire Ranch in August 2000)

**ADJACENT LAND USES  
AND ZONING:** North: Empire Ranch, Village 39 (SP92-3)  
South: Open space area and Broadstone Parkway (SP92-3)  
East: Open space area and Sundahl Drive (SP92-3)  
West: Golf Links Drive and Empire Ranch Village 50 (SP92-3)

**SITE CHARACTERISTICS:** Nisenan Park incorporates the largest connected open space area within the boundaries of the Empire Ranch Specific Plan. A seasonal tributary to Willow Creek runs along the west side of the property (close to Golf Links Drive). Substantial slopes covered by oaks and native grasses dominate the site. The future park improvements are limited to the north end of the property.

**PREVIOUS ACTION:** City Council approval of the Russell Ranch Specific Plan Amendment in August 2000  
  
City Council approval of the Master Plan for Nisenan Park on August 24, 2005

<b>FUTURE ACTION:</b>	Add the nomination package to the City of Folsom Cultural Resources Inventory List
<b>APPLICABLE REGULATION:</b>	The Historic Preservation Master Plan approved by Folsom City Council on November 24, 1998
<b>ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTATION:</b>	The project is exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act pursuant to California Code of Regulation Title 14, Section 15061 (Review of Exemption).
<b>ATTACHED REFERENCE MATERIAL:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The south and central sub-areas of the Empire Ranch Specific Plan</li> <li>2. The approved master plan of Nisenan Park (including a natural area with historical features)</li> <li>3. Nomination Package</li> <li>4. Excerpt from the Cultural Resources Investigation for Nisenan Community Park, prepared by Kyle Napton, Ph.D. and E. A. Greathouse, M.A.</li> </ol>
<b>PROJECT PLANNER:</b>	Lisbet Gullone, Associate Planner

## **BACKGROUND**

On November 5, 1998, the Folsom City Council approved the 'Historic Preservation Master Plan.' This document established goals and objectives for historic preservation within the City of Folsom, identified a process for the listing of locally significant historic sites and structures, and authorized the Historic District Commission to determine the eligibility of sites nominated for listing. As a part of the approved master plan, 73 locally significant historic sites were listed and identified on a map. The master plan also specified that properties that have been determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places or the California Register of Historical Resources are automatically eligible for local listing.

The Russell Ranch Specific Plan covers 1,738-acres in the east part of Folsom. When the plan was amended in August 2000, a 55-acre parcel along Golf Links Drive was designated for park use. The property was later named Nisenan Park and dedicated to the City's Parks and Recreation Department. The original plan to reconstruct an historic barn at the park site was later abandoned when the Parks and Recreation Commission and the Folsom Arts & Cultural Commission approved a new location for the barn project (adjacent to Empire Ranch Road).

A cultural resource study was prepared as a part of the preparation of a Master Plan for Nisenan Park. This study identified two clusters of grinding rocks within the park property. Both sites are listed with the California Register of Historical Resources (Site 441 and 450). The study also documented that a rock with petroglyphs (cupules) had been examined at the site. It was the professional opinion of the investigators (Kyle Napton, Ph.D. and E. A. Greathouse, M.A.) that the feature had no archeological significance. When a design was prepared for Nisenan Park, all park improvements were located away from the areas with identified historic features (bedrocks with mortars) or features with a potential historic connection (the cupule rock). A 2.33-acre natural open space area was reserved around the cultural features associated with Native Americans. An area was also preserved for an interpretive display panel, designated to the local history of Native Americans. The master plan was approved by City Council on August 24, 2005.

## **NOMINATION**

The Community Development Department has received a request for the listing of the cupule rock and bedrocks with mortars in Nisenan Park at 511 Golf Links Drive as locally significant historical features. The submitted registration form was prepared by the Heritage Preservation League of Folsom. Historic information regarding the features was obtained from two archeologists (Phil Hines with the California State Department of Parks and Recreation and Jerry Johnson with the California State University of Sacramento), two Native Americans from the Maidu Tribe (Jeff Murray and Rick Adams), an anthropologist (Sheri Tatsch with the University of California, Davis) and a geologist (Jim Williams) in addition to researching books and news articles.

## **CRITERIA FOR LISTING**

The Historic Preservation Master Plan includes the following criteria for listing a resource in the City's Cultural Resources Inventory:

- 1) Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history;
- 2) Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past;
- 3) Property embodies distinctive characteristics of a type, period, region, or construction method, or represent the work of a creative individual; or
- 4) Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in Folsom's prehistory or history.

Both the historical features at Nisenan Community Park meet some of the criteria for listing as established by the Historic Preservation Master Plan. The park property is close to the site of a Native American village that was in continuous use from the pre-historic to the early-historic periods. A cluster of four grinding rocks has been identified within the oak grove in the north part of the park site. The rock with cupules is located in the same general vicinity. Additional grinding rocks are located within the adjacent drainage corridors that add spring run-off to Willow Creek.

While the bedrocks with mortars have previously been listed by the State, mixed assessments are available regarding the cupule rock. This type of feature has been associated with historic Native American ceremonies. According to the beliefs of early Native Americans, rocks have the ability to store memories. Cupules were therefore cut into the surface of significant rocks and when ceremonies were held, mementos were inserted into the cupules. Of the experts that were contacted, two archeologists, one anthropologist and two representatives of the Maidu tribe considered the rock petroglyphs consistent with pre-historic cupules. In addition, a geologist determined that the rock indentations were not a result of natural geological processes. However, one of the City's environmental consultants (Rick Windmiller), in addition to the experts that prepared the cultural resource study for Nisenan Park, questioned whether the rock features have any connection to the early native population in the area (see Attachment 3: Registration Form).

## **DETERMINATION OF ELIGIBILITY**

The bedrock mortars are associated with the grinding of acorns by early Native Americans as a part of food preparation. Many oaks located in the vicinity of the historical features provide acorns that are associated with the historic use of grinding rocks. In addition, the native oaks separate the historic features from the park activities and will in the future provide screening of park improvements. The rock with cupules may indicate where Native Americans gathered in historic times and illustrate a part of the village ceremonies. In summary, staff has concluded that the cupule rock provides a link to the State-listed bedrocks with mortars at the same site and the adjacent Native American village site.

## **LISTING**

Based on the listing with the California Register of Historical Resources (Site 441 and 450), the Grinding Rocks are automatically eligible for local listing. Because the property owner (the City of Folsom Parks and Recreation Department) has no objections to the actual listing, staff will include this feature with the Cultural Resource Inventory.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW**

The project is exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act pursuant to California Code of Regulation Title 14, Section 15061 (Review of Exemption), as it can be said with certainty that the project will not have a significant effect on the environment.

## **STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends that the Historic District Commission determine the Cupule Rock at Nisenan Park, 511 Golf Links Drive eligible for listing on the City of Folsom Cultural Resource Inventory with findings.

## **HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION ACTION**

MOVE TO DETERMINE THE CUPULE ROCK IN NISENAN PARK AT 511 GOLF LINKS DRIVE IS ELIGIBLE FOR LISTING ON THE CITY OF FOLSOM CULTURAL RESOURCE INVENTORY WITH THE FOLLOWING FINDINGS:

## **GENERAL FINDINGS**

- A. NOTICE HAS BEEN GIVEN AT THE TIME AND IN THE MANNER REQUIRED BY THE CITY OF FOLSOM HISTORIC PRESERVATION MASTER PLAN.
- B. THE PROJECT IS CONSISTENT WITH THE GENERAL PLAN, THE ZONING CODE AND THE AMENDED RUSSELL RANCH SPECIFIC PLAN.
- C. THE PROJECT IS EXEMPT FROM THE PROVISIONS OF THE CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT PURSUANT TO CALIFORNIA CODE OF REGULATION TITLE 14, SECTION 15061 (REVIEW OF EXEMPTION).

## **ELIGIBILITY FINDINGS**

- D. THE CUPULE ROCK IS LOCATED CLOSE TO A SITE THAT HAS BEEN IDENTIFIED AS AN EARLY NATIVE AMERICAN VILLAGE SITE.
- E. STATE-LISTED BEDROCKS WITH MORTARS AND MATURE NATIVE OAK TREES ARE LOCATED WITHIN THE SAME VICINITY AS THE CUPULE ROCK.
- F. THE CUPULE ROCK MAY YIELD IMPORTANT INFORMATION REGARDING PRE-HISTORIC AND EARLY-HISTORIC EVENTS.

## **HISTORIC PRESERVATION FINDING**

- G. ALL HISTORIC FEATURES WITHIN THE NISENAN PARK HAVE BEEN PRESERVED BY THE PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT WITHIN A 2.33-ACRE NATURAL AREA.