



Official Public Correspondence for the Record: 222 E. Cypress Avenue Project

From jcain310@gmail.com <jcain310@gmail.com>

Date Tue 4/7/2026 7:31 PM

To City Clerk <CityClerk@monroviaca.gov>; Alice Atkins <aatkins@monroviaca.gov>

Cc 'Monrovia Historic Preservation Group' <mohpg1980@gmail.com>

 1 attachment (845 KB)

Ingersoll House study session response.pdf;

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Dear Ms. Atkins and the Office of the City Clerk,

Please find attached my formal letter and the accompanying historic sites survey regarding the proposed development and preservation efforts at 222 E. Cypress Avenue.

I am writing to formally request that this email and all attached documents be placed into the official administrative file and project record associated with 222 E. Cypress Avenue. Additionally, please ensure that these materials are made readily available for public review and are included in the public correspondence packet for any upcoming City Council meetings, study sessions, or commission hearings regarding this property.

While I have copied the Mayor, City Councilmembers, and City Manager on this communication, I kindly request that your office officially distribute these materials to them as part of standard procedural record-keeping. I have also provided a printed version to each at the meeting tonight (4/7/26)

Thank you for your time and for your dedication to maintaining an accurate, transparent public record for the City of Monrovia.

Sincerely,

Joshua Cain
210 W Colorado Blvd, Monrovia

Subject: A Moral Reckoning for Monrovia: Relocating the Ingersoll House, Restoring Redlined History, and Protecting Housing Funds

Dear Mayor, City Councilmembers, and City Manager
CC: Monrovia Historic Preservation Group Board Members,

I am writing today not just as a resident, but as a witness to a conversation that is currently failing the history of this city. During the recent council study session regarding 222 E. Cypress Avenue, I was struck by a comment claiming that moving the Ingersoll house off its current plot would be an action that repeated the racist acts of segregation and redlining. This is a staggering distortion of the truth. To equate the relocation of a wealthy white pioneer's estate with the systemic state-sponsored violence of redlining is a profound insult to every family who actually lived through that oppression.

If we are really going to be honest here, the truth is the exact opposite: leaving the Ingersoll house anchored in this neighborhood—a 130-year-old monument to the very wealth and privilege that the minority residents of this district were legally barred from attaining—is the true act of erasure. It forces the descendants of redlined families to live in the permanent shadow of a "gentleman's orchard" they were never allowed to set foot in. It is a physical reminder of a "whites-only" legacy that was built with city support while the Black and Hispanic communities just blocks away were starved of every basic resource. Why is saving the white gentleman's estate more important than creating affordable housing when an option for *both* is on the table? Why wouldn't we prefer *both* as a city?

Let us call the outrage over moving this house exactly what it is: performative and deeply cynical. Where was this intense, burning passion to save the Ingersoll house over the past thirty-plus years? For decades, the previous owners were allowed to let this supposedly priceless historic gem rot in plain sight. They executed a massive amount of illegal, unpermitted work that severely compromised the structural integrity and effectively ruined the historic interior of the home. Where were the tearful pleas to the City Council then? Where were the public outcries while its actual history was being gutted from the inside out with cheap, unpermitted renovations? It will now take the work of a forensic preservationist to piece the interior back together because this now "untouchable" home has been ignored for decades.

The public commenter who audaciously weaponized the trauma of redlining at the study session is deeply embedded in the local government and historical societies. Where was her righteous indignation over the years while this house was being subjected to demolition by neglect and illegal construction? I will tell you where it was: nowhere. This sudden, frantic, performative outrage only magically materialized the exact moment this 0.75-acre lot was slated to serve working-class families with affordable housing. To sit in silence for years while a historic home is gutted, only to suddenly scream "preservation" to block affordable housing, is the definition of NIMBYism cloaked in a faux-historical disguise. Weaponizing the pain of actual segregation to justify keeping a white pioneer's mansion exactly where it is, just to stop dense housing, is not

just hypocritical—it is shameful. This isn't about saving history; it's about controlling the land and dictating who gets to live on it today.

Passed by Monrovia voters in November 2019, Measure K (the "Keep Monrovia Revenues Local Sales Tax Measure") enacted a 0.75% increase in the local sales tax. The city pitched this tax increase to the voters to fund essential "general city services"—specifically citing things like community center improvements, police, fire, 911, parks, recreation, and infrastructure. It generates a massive amount of money for the city (around \$6.8 million annually). Because it's a special tax, the City Council established a five-member, volunteer Measure K Citizen Advisory Committee. Their official responsibility is to monitor the revenues, receive reports from city staff, and review and comment on the annual spending plans for the Measure K funds. Brenda Trainor was appointed by the City Council to sit on this exact five-person committee. (Her current term runs through June 2028). Recently, there have been direct discussions about using Measure K funds to finance the acquisition, preservation, or development of the Ingersoll property at 222 E. Cypress Ave. (Is this some of the "other money" Councilman Belden was referring to, intertwining with regional housing grants?).

Let's connect the dots on what just happened at that study session: the City wants to spend millions of dollars arguably ruining a wealthy, white pioneer's historic orchard instead of maximizing affordable housing. To pay for it, they are looking at tapping into Measure K funds (taxpayer money meant for general infrastructure and parks) or affordable housing grants. Brenda Trainor stood up at the public podium, weaponized the trauma of redlining, and fiercely advocated for the city's plan to preserve the house on-site to minimize the amount of affordable housing that could be created. She sits on the exact, five-person committee that advises the City Council on how to spend Measure K money. Is this preservationist push not just performative outrage, but an insider job? It is not just a random, concerned citizen speaking out; when a committee member aggressively advocates for a project that her own committee helps oversee the potential funding for, it raises serious questions about conflicts of interest. The public record shows that on December 17, 2024, this Council approved a Measure K Spending Plan allocating \$1,530,000 for this "Land Acquisition - Affordable Housing Project". This was a decision reviewed by the Measure K Citizen Advisory Committee. To have a member of that same committee now advocating to use those funds to *reduce* affordable housing density is an act that must be addressed before another cent of taxpayer money is spent.

Why was the Measure K rep the commenter that put the fear of God into the council? Why weren't industry experts invited to this study session so that Monrovia could ask questions of the potential people and businesses who might be completing this work? Where were the preservationists with decades of experience? Where were the builders that have completed multi-family affordable housing developments? Where was the expert on state and federal historic tax credits, which could easily be used to restore the structure properly? Where were the immediate neighbors of the site; were they specifically invited to at least listen if not speak?

There is also a dangerous narrative being pushed that keeping this house on its current latitude and longitude is the only way to "save" its status for a potential National Register of Historic Places nomination. As someone who cares deeply about real preservation and as someone

who has *added* many sites to the National Register of Historic Places over my career, I must tell you: this is a fantasy. According to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards, it is crystal clear—historic integrity is not just a set of GPS coordinates; it is defined by **Setting and Feeling**. If you strip away the .75 acres that remain of the original orchard and hem this Victorian farmhouse in with affordable housing units, you are not preserving it; you are suffocating it. You are destroying the very context that makes it historic. Ironically, if you want to actually save the "soul" of the Ingersoll house and make it eligible for the National Register, you must relocate it to a historically similar plot—a place where it can actually breathe and convey the story of a 19th-century estate. A place where it can have accessory structures like a barn, a toolshed, or raised gardens. A place, as Jim Wigton of MOHPG elegantly put it, where a family can live. Relocating it is the only way to give the house a future, while freeing the land to give Monrovia some of the affordable housing it desperately needs.

We must also stop pretending that a private developer will treat this house with the reverence it requires. Developers are in the business of land yield, not museum-quality restoration. To expect a developer to spend the exorbitant sums required to fix a crumbling 1892 Victorian while trying to build affordable housing around it is a recipe for disaster. We are inviting a "demolition by neglect" scenario where the house is left to rot until it is declared a safety hazard and bulldozed anyway. Or worse, as I have seen in other circumstances, there will be a lackluster effort on the builder's part to "finish" the house by gutting it and refilling it with cheap junk from Home Depot or leftovers from past projects just to get it out of the way. By legally requiring that it remain on-site, the City is essentially signing the house's death warrant while claiming to be its savior.

This death warrant is not just theoretical; it is already **codified in state law**. Even if the city manages to landmark the Ingersoll house on this location, that protection is likely a mirage. Because the Cypress lot is located within a half-mile of a major transit stop, it falls directly into the crosshairs of SB 79 (the Abundant and Affordable Homes Near Transit Act). Under SB 79, only resources officially designated prior to the January 1, 2025 cutoff are guaranteed robust protection from high-density upzoning. Furthermore, the law mandates allowable densities of 80 to 120 units per acre near transit and strictly caps local historic exemptions at just 10% of a transit zone's eligible area. A developer holding that 0.75-acre lot has a massive, state-backed legal pathway *and financial incentive* to simply bulldoze the Victorian and build up to 100 units per acre. By trapping the house on a transit-adjacent lot, we are legally setting it up for slaughter. Relocating the house to a plot outside of a high-density transit zone is the only way to actually guarantee its architectural survival for future generations.

During the study session, Councilman Jimenez provided a desperately needed dose of reality. I want to strongly commend him for his clear-eyed leadership. He understands exactly what happens when you hand a fragile historic structure over to a housing developer: the inevitable "accidents" during construction, the structure being left open to the elements to rot, the ruination of the historic site by the cheaply made building whims of a non-interested contractor, or the developer simply walking away at the end of the job to bypass the City's "mandatory restoration." With only one RFP that requires the house to remain, this will happen. Councilman Jimenez had the courage to state the obvious truth: the only way to actually save

this house and serve this community is to move the structure out of a neighborhood which is slated for massive development by state law and use the *entire* property for affordable housing.

I also want to express my deep appreciation for Mayor Shevlin and Dr. Kelly during the study session. Their desire to remain flexible, to ask the hard questions, and to openly state their willingness to explore all "options" is exactly the kind of dynamic, open-minded leadership Monrovia needs right now. We are currently drowning in a world and a political atmosphere of performative outrage. It took courage to look past the performance in the room that evening and focus on the practical reality of what is best for the entire community. I applaud Mayor Shevlin and Dr. Kelly for refusing to be boxed into a singular, flawed narrative.

The broader lack of practical foresight regarding how an on-site restoration would actually be executed by the City is alarming. If there is a push to force the preservation of the Ingersoll house on-site, why hasn't there been a demand for two separate RFPs? It takes a highly specialized, qualified historic preservationist to restore an 1892 Victorian, and a completely different set of skills to develop affordable housing. Very few people/companies possess both. As mentioned before, and as many of you have seen, having walked the interior, the particular home requires extensive forensic preservation and restoration work to bring it back. This is the kind of work we have done at the Baker houses in Monrovia, which will be the city's first Historic Inn. This work is slow, expensive, and requires an extreme amount of knowledge and patience. The expectation that a single affordable housing developer will flawlessly execute a museum-quality restoration alongside a dense housing project is either stunningly naive or willfully negligent.

This lack of foresight extends directly to the budget. During the session, Councilman Belden expressed excitement that the City could use "other money" and not its own general funds to finance this project. Let us be unequivocally clear about what that "other money" actually is: local, regional, and state funds earmarked specifically for the creation of affordable housing or measure K money which is legally designated for "general city services."

Using affordable housing money to bankroll the multi-million-dollar preservation of a white gentleman's orchard in the center of a traditional, historically Black neighborhood is a complete misappropriation of intent. Imagine for a moment if the regional or national news media gets a hold of this story. Monrovia will be publicly pilloried. The City will face a massive black eye, plagued by accusations of corruption, systemic racial bias, and the gross mismanagement of local, regional, or state housing funds. We do not need that scandal, and this community does not deserve it. We need to approach this project with an even-keeled, eyes-wide-open, flexible approach that Mayor Shevlin, Dr Kelly, Mr Jimenez, and Mr Feik have all supported. The city is spending public money; this is bigger than the previous owner, bigger than a historic house, and bigger than a few public commenters (myself included).

If a private developer truly wishes to preserve the Ingersoll house, the correct funding mechanism already exists: State and Federal Historic Tax Credits. These programs are designed specifically for historic preservation, are available exclusively to private developers, and come with strict, state and federally mandated requirements for both the interior and

exterior to guarantee the house is actually restored properly. Local and state affordable housing money should never be hijacked to do the job of Historic Tax Credits, especially not to elevate white history at the expense of affordable housing in a historically minority neighborhood.

It does not matter whether the public funds for this project come from the City, the County, or the State. It is all taxpayer money. Spending millions of those dollars to protect and keep only *this one specific house in this neighborhood* is a choice to continue a century of biased investment.

There was legitimate council concern expressed (thank you Dr Kelly) for the lack of recognized historic assets in south Monrovia; I agree 100%. This house is not that legacy. While the \$160,000 grant to study this house may already be set, I am calling on this Council to commit to a new direction for immediate future historic recognition. For decades, the "history" of Monrovia has been told through the mansions of the privileged north of Olive Avenue (the former Pacific Electric Red car tracks and the actual border between the segregated parts of historic Monrovia). It is time we fund the research and restoration of the sites that housed and roused some of the true heroes of this city—the Black pioneers who built a community from *nothing* when the city turned its back on them.

Where is the urgency for **423 E. Maple Avenue**, the "Founders' Home" of Second Baptist Church? Where is the funding to save the original wooden sanctuary of **Shiloh A.M.E. Zion**, built with the scraped-together pennies and physical labor of congregants before 1900? Where are the \$160k grants to protect the modest cottages on **Walnut, Maple, and Chestnut** that sheltered the citrus pickers and domestic workers who were the literal backbone of this city? These buildings, not a white man's citrus estate, are the physical evidence of Black and Brown survival and resilience. To let them crumble while we obsess over the immutable location of the Ingersoll Victorian instead of filling this large lot with appropriately scaled affordable housing is a choice to value white leisure over Black foundational history.

My Formal Call to Action:

1. **Relocate the Ingersoll House:** Save the architecture by moving it to a contextually appropriate location where private developers can utilize Historic Tax Credits for a genuine restoration, and where its National Register potential can actually be realized. *This is never going to happen at its current site unless nothing else is built around it.*
2. **Maximize Affordable Housing & Stop "Saving Everything":** Clear the lot on Cypress Avenue. While the few native Oak trees hold true ecological value and absolutely deserve to be protected, the romanticized idea of "saving everything" else on this property is actively harming the potential for housing. The original agricultural orchard is long gone. What remains are trees like Chinese Elms, Trees of Heaven, etc—which are non-native, notoriously "dirty" nuisance trees that drop excessive litter and act as invasive weeds in our local ecosystem. Do not compromise the density of this project to save non-native brush. Protect the oaks, clear the rest of the lot, and dedicate the maximum footprint of that 0.75-acre property to providing the affordable units working families desperately need today, utilizing the housing funds exactly as they were intended.

- 3. Commit to Restorative Preservation:** Pledge that future municipal grants and city sponsored research will be directed toward the redlined districts. We need a formal survey of our minority-owned historic sites before the last of them are lost to the bulldozer of "progress." As a passionate advocate for *all* historic preservation in Monrovia, I would gladly volunteer my time to assist in this endeavor. I've attached a brief topline view of some of the most important sites that currently still exist and deserve our attention and historic designation as a city. I'd be thrilled to meet with any of you to discuss this potential project or others.

Stop prioritizing the architecture of wealth over the history of resilience and the need for affordable housing. It is time for this Council to rectify the wrongs of the past and build a Monrovia that finally belongs to everyone.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joshua Cain', with a long, sweeping underline that curves to the right.

Joshua Cain
210 W Colorado Blvd

Historical Fact Sheet: Monrovia's Threatened Black Pioneer Legacy

While the City of Monrovia has prioritized over \$1.5 million in public funds and a \$160,000 preservation study for a single Victorian estate at 222 E. Cypress Avenue, the foundational sites of the city's Black community remain largely unprotected, under-researched, and excluded from municipal preservation funding.

These structures were not built with the ease of city support or banking infrastructure; they were built with scraped-together pennies, intense physical labor, and a defiant spirit in the face of legal segregation and redlining. These buildings are not just "old"—they are the physical evidence of survival.

1. The "Founders' Home" (423 E. Maple Avenue)

- **History:** In 1902, Monrovia was deeply segregated. African American residents were forced to live south of the Pacific Electric tracks on Olive Avenue and were largely barred from renting public halls or meeting in downtown spaces. Because they had no public spaces of their own, the push for spiritual and civic dignity had to start in private living rooms. This modest, 600-square-foot cottage is where 13 Black pioneers gathered to organize, pray, and officially found the **Second Baptist Church of Monrovia**. It is essentially the "Independence Hall" for South Monrovia. Where is the plaque with their names: Deacon William H. Watkins & Deaconess Pinky Watkins (who moved to Monrovia in 1902 and helped spark the church's beginnings), Brother Eli Charles Lyle & Sister Loretta Lyle, Brother Wm. M. Burlison & Sister Bettie Burlison, Brother Robert Gordon & Sister Gordon, Brother William Monroe, Rev. William Robinson, Sister Amelia Richardson, Brother E. D. Stogland, Sister A.C. Terrill
- **Reality:** The people above who organized in this house were domestic workers, laborers, and citrus pickers who were systemically denied wealth. Yet, inside this tiny footprint, they generated enough collective power to build an institution that has survived for over 120 years.
- **Crisis:** Because it is a tiny, aging, 1-bedroom house on a residential street, it is viewed by modern real estate developers merely as a "tear-down." Without a dedicated city study and landmark status, this cradle of community organization is at immediate risk of being bulldozed, erasing the physical origin point of one of Monrovia's oldest institutions.

2. Second Baptist Church (925 S. Shamrock Avenue)

- **History:** Because of the foundation laid at the Maple Avenue home, the Second Baptist Church was able to attract an absolute titan of American history as its first official pastor in 1906: **Lt. Colonel Allen Allensworth**. Born into slavery in Kentucky, Allensworth escaped during the Civil War, joined the Union Navy, became a Buffalo Soldier, and rose to become the highest-ranking Black officer in the United States Army. He stood in this pulpit to shepherd Monrovia's marginalized community before going on to found the famous utopian, all-Black town of Allensworth, California.
- **Reality:** This building carries the weight of national civil rights history. When the Black community was pushed south of the tracks, they didn't give up; they expanded their institution on Shamrock Avenue to ensure their children had a sanctuary when the rest of the city was hostile.
- **Crisis:** The City's current preservation strategy treats "history" as something that only happened to people with money. To ignore this building's need for historic recognition while obsessing over the "gentleman's orchard" of a white pioneer suggests that the city

believes the only history worth saving is the history that looks like a postcard. Col Allensworth gets a lonely plaque next to a sidewalk, fence, and open field at the corner of Shamrock and Almond; why wasn't this placed where someone can see it near the entrance of the historic church?

3. The Original Shiloh A.M.E. Zion Sanctuary (1023 S. Canyon Blvd)

- **History:** Tucked behind the current 1915 church is the original wooden structure, built before 1900. It is one of the oldest African American-built structures in the entire San Gabriel Valley. Founded by families who migrated from the South to work the local ranches, this congregation built their first wooden chapel with their own hands because white contractors often refused to take the job.
- **Reality:** This building is a "living ghost." It represents the transition from the post-Civil War migration to the established Black community of the 20th century. Funding its restoration isn't just "maintenance"—it is a formal, municipal apology for the decades the city spent ignoring this corner of town while paving the streets of Old Town.
- **Crisis:** When the "new" sanctuary was built in 1915, the community refused to destroy the old one, physically moving it to the back of the lot. Today, it deserves a municipal restoration grant to research and ensure the craftsmanship of these original pioneers survives another century. The 1915 structure in front also deserves a landmark status, research and restoration; the original siding is hidden underneath stucco and all of the original gothic pointed windows have been removed, stripping the building of its architectural integrity. Can we find the regional grant money to restore this gem?



4. The Walnut, Maple, and Chestnut Residential Corridor

- **History:** South of the Olive Avenue former Pacific Electric tracks, these streets formed the heart of Black and Latino homeownership in the face of restrictive covenants and bank redlining. Every pre-1930 home on these streets represents a victory over a system that actively tried to keep minority families from building generational wealth.
- **Reality:** These homes sheltered the laborers, the domestic workers, and the citrus pickers who actually made Monrovia run. Every porch was a hard-won sanctuary. Many of them were flagged in the city's baseline 1990s Historic Resources Survey (though most were never given actual legal protection).

Institutional Anchors

- **423 E. Maple Avenue (Built pre-1904):** As I discussed, this is the 600-square-foot vernacular cottage where the Second Baptist Church was officially founded in 1902. It is the absolute heart of South Monrovia's civil rights history.
- **200 E. Maple Avenue:** The site of a plaque dedicated to **Leroy "Buster" Criss**, a beloved Black pioneer, Monrovia civil rights leader, and community organizer. (The city recently put up this "Neighborhood Treasure" art piece here, but art plaques do not stop bulldozers from these other sites—historic designations and legal protections do).

Alien Land Law Survivor

- **212 W. Walnut Avenue:** The **Tsuneishi Family Home**. Satoru Tsuneishi was a prominent Japanese-American pioneer in early Monrovia. Because of California's incredibly racist 1913 Alien Land Law, Asian immigrants were legally barred from owning property. To secure this modest home in the redlined district, Satoru had to legally purchase it under the name of his American-born, citizen son, Tosh. It is a standing monument to immigrant survival against state-sponsored discrimination. Ironically, the city actually just funded the "Satoru Tsuneishi Park" using Measure K funds, which makes bringing up his actual, unprotected home even more relevant

Working-Class Architectural Survivors

- **518 W. Maple Avenue & 512 W. Maple Avenue:** These are textbook examples of early 20th-century (circa 1910s–1920s) Colonial Revival and vernacular architecture south of the tracks. The city only *just* got around to considering 518 W. Maple for landmark status in late 2022 (I was at the meeting). There are dozens of homes just like these lining the 100-500 blocks of East and West Maple that have zero protection.

Civil Rights "Victory Homes"

- **500 W. Maple Avenue:** The address associated with a plaque for **Betty Mae Scott**, a fierce advocate for Monrovia's Black youth and a recognized "Neighborhood Treasure." Where did she live? Does it still exist?
- **790 W. Chestnut Avenue:** The address associated with **Josephine Anderson**, another foundational Black pioneer and community caretaker who helped hold the segregated South Monrovia neighborhood together when the city neglected it. Where did she live? Does it still exist?
- **Crisis:** These "victory homes" have been and are being demolished one by one for modern high-density development. Because South Monrovia was historically marginalized, the city frequently zoned the areas south of the tracks for higher-density housing and industrial/commercial bleed-over. Today, developers look at a 1915 bungalow on Maple Avenue and don't see history—they see a cheap lot where they can bulldoze the house and build a multi-unit stucco apartment/townhouse complex or a modern small-lot development focused on the resident's vehicles. We are losing the names and stories of the families who lived here because the city has never funded a formal historical survey of the redlined district. Let's identify the homes that are left and work towards a solution. Can we landmark them? Can we create a district with contributors and non-contributors? If the sites are going to be taken over and developed one at a time, can the important buildings be identified and when the wrecking ball eventually comes they are each relocated to create a bungalow court of these important pieces of Monrovia's history?

Can we prioritize and fund this work instead of accusing a preservationist and developer of racism for asking to partner with the city and the council to both maximize affordable housing and save a derelict Victorian farmhouse?