Reimagine Bidwell Mansion SHP
Virtual Community Workshop Summary

Tuesday, April 14, 2026| 6:00pm - 7:30pm via Zoom
Meeting Recording: LINK
Participants Attended: 63
Participants Registered: 80 RSVPs
Project Team Attendees: 12

California State Parks	*PlaceWorks – Consulting Partner Staff:*
• **Matthew Allen**, District Superintendent	• **Jessica Chen**, Planner
• **Logan Cherland,** Park and Recreation Specialist	• **Emily Fan Michaelson**, Associate Principal
• **Noel Lopez**, District Interpreter	• **Isby Fleischmann**, Associate Principal
• **James Newland**, Planning Division Chief	• **Joe Sison**, Project Planner
• **Jennifer Pooley**, District Interpretive Manager	• **Amanda Tsang**, Planner
• **Jared Zucker**, District Services Manager	• **Logan Woodruff**, Senior Associate

Introduction

In December 2024, the Bidwell Mansion, part of **Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park** (SHP), was extensively damaged by fire attributed to arson. Since then, California State Parks has launched **Reimagine Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park** to help determine the future of the site while honoring its extensive and layered histories. The project includes a multi-phase public outreach and engagement effort, which includes two community workshops. This document summarizes the first workshop, and includes:

- **Meeting Objectives**
- **Meeting Agenda and Summary**
- **Participant Demographics**
- **Discussion Group Overview**
- **Synthesis of Key Insights from Discussion Groups**
  Questions and Answers Summary

Meeting Objectives

The Objective of the virtual meeting was to provide the community members a focused group setting to share their feedback on the Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park project. In this setting, community members would be able to hear from and engage with other participants about the future of the Bidwell Mansion and park. Feedback from this workshop and the rest of the engagement process will be summarized in the Reimagine Bidwell Mansion SHP Vision Plan.

Meeting Agenda and Summary

Introduction *(10 mins)*

The introduction to the presentation included a brief overview of the optional accessibility tools and a notice that the meeting was being recorded. Matthew Allen, Northern Buttes District Superintendent, issued a formal welcome to the meeting and a land acknowledgement. Matthew introduced the speakers for the evening. Logan Woodruff of PlaceWorks (the consulting team supporting State Parks) concluded the introduction by launching the five question-Zoom poll for participants. Results from the Zoom poll are summarized in the following section.

Presentation *(30 mins)*

The presentation began with an overview of the park's context, led by Jennifer Pooley, District Interpretation Manager. Jared Zucker, Northern Buttes District Services Manager and Local Project Lead, gave further project context, provided an update on the recovery process, and summarized expected project outcomes. Logan Woodruff followed with an overview of the project timeline and engagement completed to date. Jim Newland, acting Planning Division Chief, concluded the presentation with an overview of the range of potential treatment options for the Bidwell Mansion.

Small Group Discussion and Activity *(30 minutes)*

After the presentation, participants were assigned to one of four breakout rooms. The purpose of the breakout rooms was to provide participants with a focused, small group setting to share feedback and hear from other interested individuals about potential future experiences at the park and future treatment options for Bidwell Mansion. Facilitators from California State Parks and PlaceWorks led the discussion in each breakout room, which was focused on participants' hopes, aspirations, and opinions on the four treatment options.

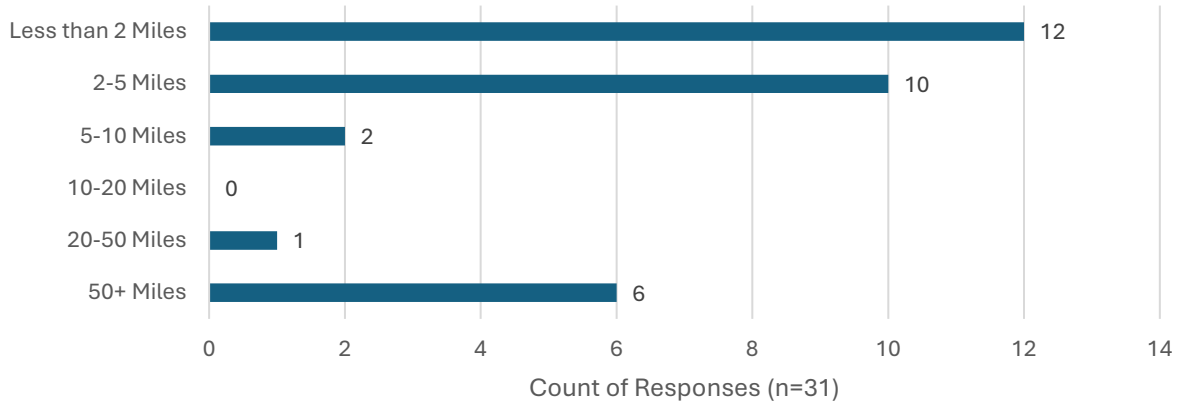
Q&A, Shareback and Closing *(20 minutes)*

After the breakout rooms, participants were brought back to the main meeting room. Questions submitted via the Q&A Zoom tool were answered to the entire audience. Afterwards, the facilitators of each of the four breakout rooms shared three key insights from their respective discussion groups. The meeting concluded with closing remarks and an invitation to stay involved in the project.

Participant Demographics: Zoom Poll

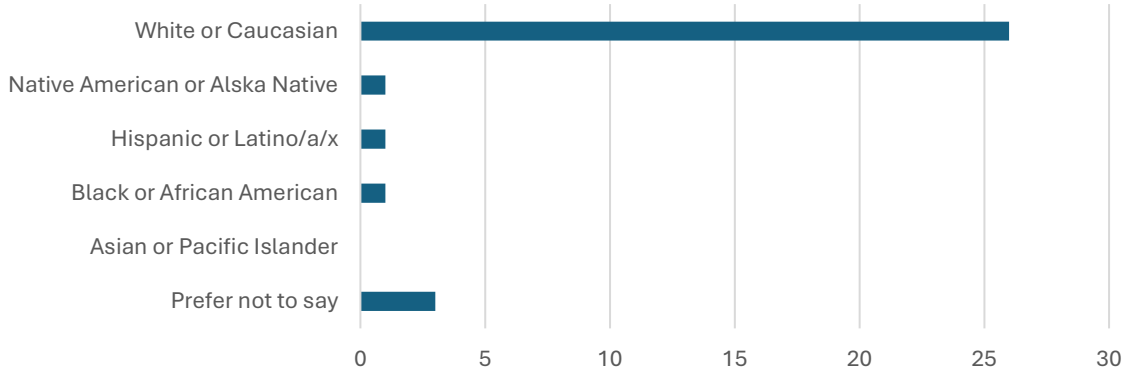
As described in the summary in the previous section, the workshop began with a five question Zoom poll for attendees. Responses to the questions helped the project team better understand who was attending the workshop. The questions asked about the participants' current distance from the site, race and ethnicity, age, and more. Among the 63 workshop participants, 31 responded to the optional poll. Results of each poll are summarized below.

FIGURE 1: How far do you live from Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park?



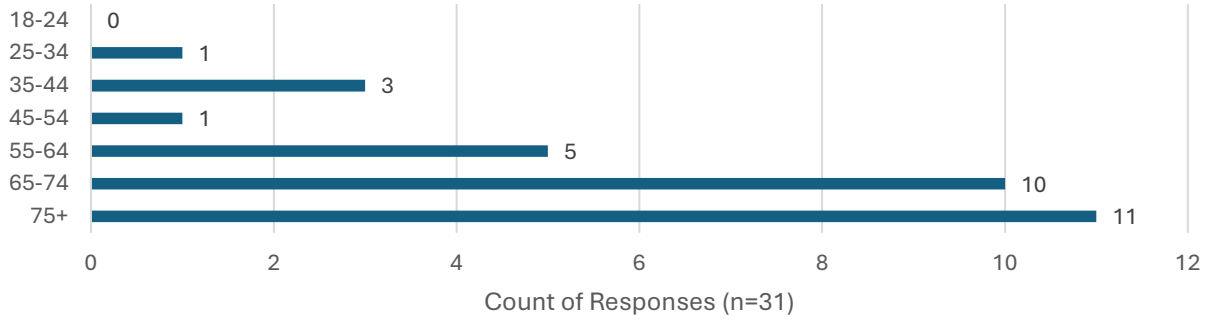
Most of the attendees who completed the poll live less than 5 miles from the Bidwell Mansion Historic Park, though there was a significant representation of participants who live further away.

FIGIRE 2: Which of the following best describes you in terms of race/ethnicity? (Select all that apply)



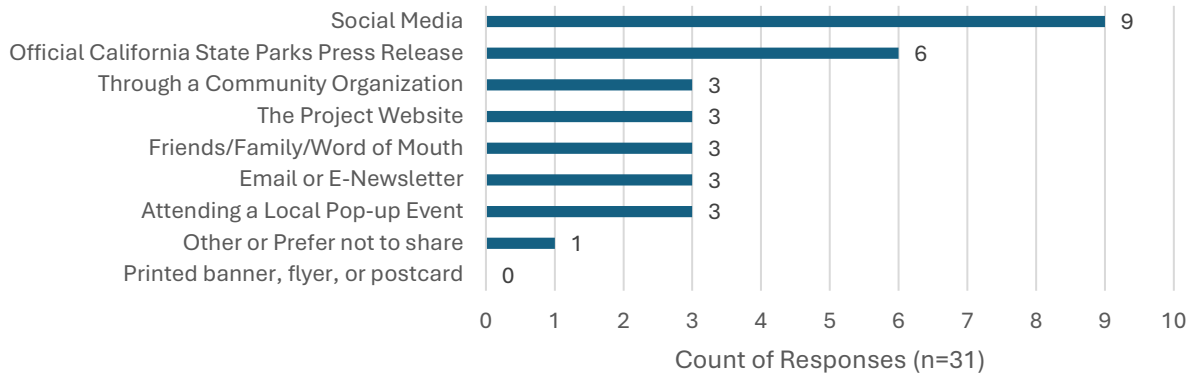
About four out of every five participants that completed the poll identified as White or Caucasian, an overrepresentation compared to their share of the population.

FIGURE 3: Which age group are you in?



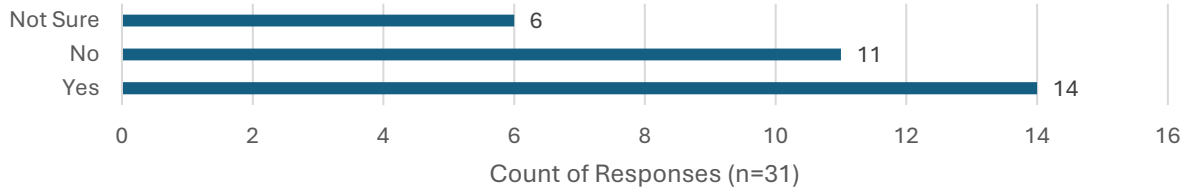
Two out of three workshop participants who completed the poll were over 65 years old. Only 5 participants indicated an age below 55.

FIGURE 4: How did you hear about today's meeting?



About one in three participants who completed the poll heard about the workshop through social media, being closely followed by the Official California Parks Press release. Six of the seven remaining options received three selections each. This suggests that a wide range of outreach efforts contributed to community awareness of the workshop.

FIGURE 5: Have you already completed the online survey published on March 12, 2026?



Among meeting participants that completed the survey, less than half were sure that they completed the online survey at the time of the meeting. The survey officially closed on May 1, 2026 (extended one week from the previous date of April 24.)

Discussion Group Overview

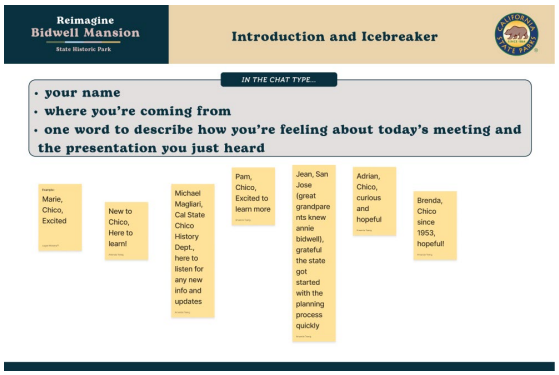
Following the presentation by the project team, participants were assigned to one of four breakout rooms for a facilitated small group discussion. Each discussion group was comprised of approximately 8-10 participants and 2 staff facilitators. The discussion group convened for approximately 30 minutes, during which the facilitators shared a virtual whiteboard on their screen to collect notes via virtual sticky notes. The whiteboard included four activities which are summarized below.

Activity 1: Introduction and Icebreaker – Participants entered their name, where they are joining from, and one word to describe how they're feeling about the presentation they just heard.

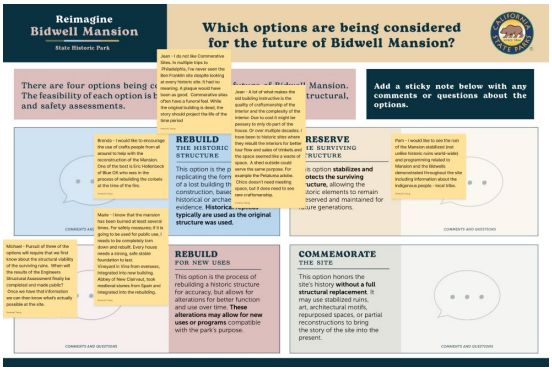
Activity 2: Hopes and Aspirations – Participants responded to the prompt, "I want future generations to experience _____ at Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park."

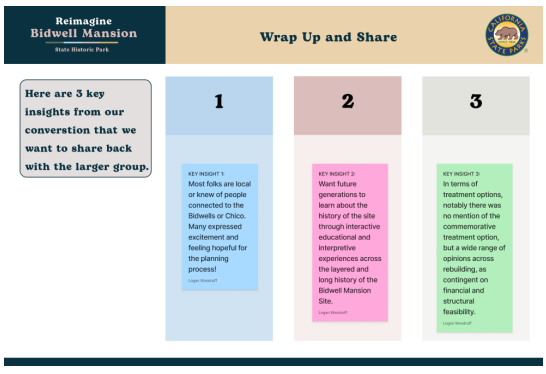
Activity 3: Treatment Options – Participants shared questions and comments about the four treatment options under consideration at Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park.

Activity 4: Wrap Up and Share – Participants collaborated to synthesize the discussion from the previous activities into three key insights to be shared back to the group.









Synthesis of Key Insights from Discussion Groups

This section synthesizes the key insights to emerge from the four discussion groups. Each discussion group participated in the same four activities described above.

Cautious Optimism About the Park's Future

Participants expressed a wide range of feelings about the future of Bidwell Mansion SHP. Many described the loss of the Bidwell Mansion as tragic, while also recognizing that Reimagine Bidwell Mansion SHP creates **an opportunity to thoughtfully consider the park's next chapter**. Following the presentation, participants most frequently described feeling **hopeful, curious, optimistic, excited, grateful, and better informed**. Several participants also expressed appreciation for the opportunity to listen, learn, and be heard. At the same time, not all responses were positive; **a few participants described feeling unhopeful**, reflecting continued caution, disappointment, or uncertainty about the park's future. Overall, the responses suggest that while the loss of the mansion remains deeply felt, many **participants are open to engaging in the process and are looking toward the future with cautious optimism.**

A Beloved Civic Landmark with Deep Community Meaning

Bidwell Mansion SHP holds deep personal and civic meaning for many participants. Feedback reflected the mansion's **importance as a familiar landmark, a symbol of Chico's history, and a place that many residents associate with personal memories, local identity, and community pride.** Participants expressed a desire for the future park to retain that **warmth, accessibility, and sense of connection**. Several also emphasized that making the park truly community-serving will require more **inclusive interpretation, expanded programming, and a broader telling of the site's history**.

A Future Hub for Community Life and Celebration

Participants emphasized that Bidwell Mansion SHP was not only a historic site, but also **an active and beloved setting for community life.** Many remembered the mansion as a place for prom, graduation, wedding, and family photos; informal gathering; tours; music; and shared civic experiences. Several participants expressed a desire for the future site to restore that **sense of activity, joy, and accessibility, especially for young people and future generations**. Feedback also pointed to interest in public events, dances, gatherings, and flexible community uses that would allow the site to remain part of Chico's everyday life, rather than functioning only as a static historic monument.

Strong Interest in Rebuilding, with Openness to New Uses

Participants expressed a range of views on the four treatment options, but the strongest energy was around some form of rebuilding. Many participants **supported rebuilding the historic structure or rebuilding the exterior character of the mansion while adapting the interior for new educational, interpretive, or community-serving uses**. Several participants were skeptical of a commemorative-only approach, describing it as too static, sad, or insufficient for a place with such strong community meaning. Others raised questions about whether the surviving structure could or should be preserved, underscoring the need for more information about structural feasibility, safety, cost, and long-term use. Some felt that the remaining structure was a depressing reminder of the tragic fire.

Tribal Perspectives Should Shape the Future of the Site

Participants repeatedly **identified the Mechoopda as important voices** in the reimagining process and expressed interest in **hearing directly** from Tribal representatives about what they would like to see at the site. Feedback called for future interpretation to more fully **recognize Indigenous history, the ongoing presence of the Mechoopda, and the impacts of colonization and settlement.** Several participants also suggested that Mechoopda and other local Tribal perspectives should help guide future exhibits, programming, and presentation materials, rather than being added after major decisions have already been made.

A More Complete, Layered, and Inclusive History

Participants described the history of Bidwell Mansion SHP as **meaningful, complex, and larger than the mansion itself.** Many want future **interpretation to continue telling the story of John and Annie Bidwell, while also expanding beyond the previous interpretive focus to include the Mechoopda, Rancho Chico, agriculture, architecture, land history, other ethnic groups, and the broader development of Chico and Northern California**. The feedback suggests that participants are not looking for a single simplified narrative. Instead, many want a more complete account that can hold respect, loss, complexity, and a fuller understanding of the people and histories connected to the site.

Continued Interest in the Bidwell Legacy, Placed in Broader Context

Participants continue to express **strong interest in John and Annie Bidwell, their lives, their home, and their influence on Chico's development**. Comments referenced their contributions to the city, Bidwell Park, Chico State, agriculture, architecture, and the community's sense of identity. At the same time, **interest in the Bidwells was often**

paired with calls for a fuller and more nuanced interpretation of the site. Participants appear to value the Bidwell story, but many want it presented in a way that acknowledges historical context, includes Annie Bidwell more fully, and situates the Bidwells within the broader histories of the land, Indigenous people, and the region.

Active, Engaging Interpretation for Future Generations

Participants expressed a clear desire for Bidwell Mansion SHP to **remain a place of learning for future generations.** Feedback **emphasized tours, exhibits, demonstrations, speakers, partnerships, hands-on learning, and opportunities for youth to experience the scale, craftsmanship, and historical character of the mansion**. Participants also suggested partnerships with groups such as Chico State, the Bidwell Mansion Association, and other community organizations to support ongoing research, interpretation, and public programming. Overall, participants want the future site to feel **active and educational**, with interpretation that helps people understand the layered history of the mansion, the land, and the community.

Transparent Communication About Cost, Safety, and Feasibility

Participants raised practical questions about the **cost, funding sources, timeline, safety, and structural feasibility** of the treatment options. While many participants expressed a preference for rebuilding, they also recognized that decisions will depend on the results of the structural assessment, available funding, and the ability to create a long-lasting and safe public facility. Several participants specifically asked when the structural assessment would be released and where funding would come from. This suggests **that transparent communication about feasibility, tradeoffs, costs, and decision-making criteria will be important as the planning process moves forward.**

Questions and Answers

The following questions were asked by virtual meeting participants. Several of the questions were answered live during the meeting. Responses to all questions received are provided below.

Q: Do they know if the mansion structure is safe? Or if it needs demolition?
A: It is currently unsafe to be around the unstable mansion structure which is why the security fencing is in place. Extensive shoring is required to stabilize the structure before any further work can take place.

Q: Who are considered stakeholders?
A: The stakeholders for this project include the Bidwell Mansion Association, the Mechoopda Indian Tribe of Chico Rancheria, CSU Chico, local museums, Chico Unified School District, Explore Butte County, California State Parks Foundation, North Valley Community Foundation, City of Chico, and other associations and organizations associated with Chico's heritage.

Q: How is the involvement of the Mechoopda Tribe being carried forward beyond the planning process and into the ongoing use of the space?
A: State Parks is engaged in ongoing Government to Government consultation with the Mechoopda Tribe. The Tribe's voice and input into this process is both an important and necessary part of this project.

Q: How will we be able to view/reference this presentation in the future?
A: A recording of this workshop and a summary of the Q&A is posted on the project website.

Q: Are we reaching out to younger generations for their insights on the mansion?
A: State Parks is reaching out to all members of the public, including younger generations for their insights on the mansion. Future community engagement efforts will continue to provide opportunities for individuals from younger generations to get involved.

Q: Know that a very talented craftsman, Eric Hollenbeck was working on the reproduction of the corbels when the fire happened. He has said publicly that there are many other craftspeople who would be interested in helping recreate the mansion. Has he been contacted? And is this a feasible use of talented people that want to help?
A: At this time, craftspeople have not been contacted as part of the Reimagine Bidwell Mansion project; however, State Parks is aware that there are interested and skilled

craftspeople eager to assist with the recovery process. Currently, the project is focused on determining feasible treatment options given existing conditions of the mansion and input received from stakeholders and the public.

Q: Where can we find the lawsuit that has been filed against the security company?
A: Please refer to the statement released by California State Parks on March 13 for details on the lawsuit. For additional information, please inquire with the Butte County Superior Court of California.