

# Agenda Report

**TO: CITY COUNCIL** **DATE: AUGUST 18, 2003**  
**FROM: CITY MANAGER**  
**SUBJECT: PUBLIC HEARING: NOMINATION OF 529 NORTH LOS ROBLES AVENUE FOR DESIGNATION AS A LANDMARK**

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## **CITY MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATION:**

It is recommended that the City Council, following a public hearing:

1. Find that the single-family residence and garage/accessory structure at 529 N. Los Robles Avenue qualifies for designation as a landmark under criterion 2 of Section 17.52.040, P.M.C. because of their association with David J. Macpherson;
2. Approve the designation of the property as a landmark;
3. Adopt a resolution designating the property as a landmark (ATTACHMENT A);
4. Authorize the Mayor to execute the attached declaration of designation (ATTACHMENT B);
5. Direct the City Clerk to record the declaration with the Los Angeles County Recorder; and
6. Acknowledge that the application for a landmark designation is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act.

## **HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:**

On July 7, 2003, the Commission voted unanimously to recommend that the City Council designate 529 N. Los Robles a landmark.

## **BACKGROUND:**

### Nomination Application

On April 29, 2003, the owner of 529 N. Los Robles submitted an application for landmark nomination of the house and garage/accessory structure to the City.

### Public Notice

Notice of a public hearing by the Historic Preservation Commission to review the nomination was posted and mailed to property owners within a 300-foot radius of the nominated property.

### Review by the Historic Preservation Commission

On July 7, 2003, the Historic Preservation Commission held a public hearing to consider whether the property met the criteria for designation as a landmark and to forward a recommendation to the City Council. At that meeting the Commission found that the property meets landmark criterion 2 based on documentation that the property was the home of David J. Macpherson, the engineer who, in 1891, designed the Mt. Lowe Incline Railway.

### Description

The nominated property has a primary single-family residential building and a garage/accessory structure that are both original and were constructed in 1895. The fencing and landscaping elements, because they do not contribute to the character defining features of the property, are insignificant and thus not part of the nomination.

The house is a two-story, three-bay, wood-frame structure with a side gable roof with an offset cross front gable and off-set recessed front porch. It has narrow weatherboard siding, corner boards and molded belt courses at the foundation and above windows on both first and second stories. Significant character defining features also include original windows, front door, louvered gable vent, fish-scale shingle gable wall, boxed eave returns, a wide ornamented bargeboard and a rectangular projecting bay window on the north elevation. Minor alterations to the house include newer concrete porch steps and a brick planter across the right bay foundation.

The garage/accessory structure is a 1¾ story two bay wood frame structure with a side gable roof and narrow weatherboard siding. Significant features include garage door openings with a centered double window with narrow lights under a small gable, flat board fenestration surrounds and corner boards. This building also has minor alterations: a small (3' x 8') front addition and replacement of garage doors.

### Significance

The David J. Macpherson house and garage/accessory structure are significant under landmark Criterion 2 because of their association with the life of a person who is significant in the history of Pasadena. David Joseph Macpherson (1854-1927) moved to Pasadena in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and was involved in the land speculation boom of the late 1880s. The buildings are sited on Lot 3 of the Macpherson's Subdivision. Macpherson's profession, however, listed as civil engineering in the 1907-08 City Directory, is where he made his most important contribution to the early development of the city.

In 1890, Macpherson became interested in building an incline railway up Mt. Wilson to transport tourists and campers to areas on the mountain that had already become popular recreation destinations. After extensive survey of the mountain, he was convinced that the railway could be constructed. Without financing to complete the project himself, he sold his idea to Thaddeus Lowe, who formed the Mt. Lowe Railroad in 1891 to build the first electrically powered incline system in the United States. The Mt. Lowe incline was an immediate tourist attraction that was influential in the economic development of Pasadena. The city-wide historic context report, *Architectural/Historical Development of the City of Pasadena*, cites the incline as an important event in the context of Pasadena as a health, tourist and social mecca that began in the early 1890s. Along the Mt. Lowe incline, the Macpherson Trestle was named for its designer. (Kyle, Evelyn Peter, *The Dreams of the Pioneers*, 1982). The incline was in operation until 1937 when it was abandoned by the Pacific Electric Railway.

Both buildings at 529 N. Los Robles appear to have been constructed in the same year, 1895. Tax assessor records and the 1903-07 Sanborn Map indicate both buildings in place in that timeframe. City Directories document David Macpherson living at the address in 1895 until approximately 1907, when he is listed at 1070 Topeka Street. At the time of his death in 1927, his address was listed as 1120 Atchison. The house and garage/accessory structure on the property are architecturally intact and, despite a few alterations, they appear as they did when Macpherson lived at the address.

#### Landmark designation

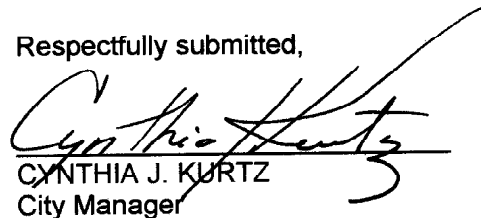
To date, Pasadena has designated 52 landmarks and historic monuments. When a property is designated as a landmark, it is protected from inappropriate alterations and demolition. The Historic Preservation Commission or staff reviews exterior alterations for compliance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. The Commission may deny demolition of the house or garage.

The designation has no legal effect on zoning, land use, or the sale of the property. The City applies the State Historical Building Code to work affecting designated landmarks. Owners of designated landmarks may apply to the City for a Mills Act contract.

#### **FISCAL IMPACT**

A decision on the designation will have a negligible effect on revenues to the City. The General Fee Schedule exempts designated landmarks from fees for Certificates of Appropriateness (permits) from the Historic Preservation Commission (except for applications to demolish a building). The City does not, however, waive any other fees (e.g., plan check, construction tax) for projects affecting designated landmarks. Some staff time may be needed if there is a proposal to expand or alter the designated structures in the future.

Respectfully submitted,



CYNTHIA J. KURTZ  
City Manager

Prepared by:



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Senior Planner

Approved by:



Richard Bruckner, Director  
Planning & Development Department

- Attachments:
- A. Resolution
  - B. Declaration of Designation
  - C. Photographs