

Agenda Report

TO: CITY COUNCIL **DATE:** APRIL 25, 2005
FROM: CITY MANAGER
SUBJECT: DESIGNATION OF 636 N. HOLLISTON AVENUE AS A
LANDMARK (COUNCIL DISTRICT 3)

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the City Council:

1. Find that the bungalow court, Holliston Court, at 636 North Holliston Avenue does not meet the criteria for landmark designation in §17.62.040(B) of the Pasadena Municipal Code for the reasons identified in Attachment A, Application of Landmark Criteria; and
2. Deny the application for designation of the property as a landmark.

RECOMMENDATION OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

On February 7, 2005, the Historic Preservation Commission voted unanimously to recommend to the City Council that it approve the designation of 636 North Holliston Avenue as a landmark.

BACKGROUND

On September 28, 2004, two former residents of the bungalow court, Laura Kaufman and Beverly Dunning, submitted an application for the designation of 636 North Holliston Avenue as a landmark. The application represented that the property, a bungalow court with seven detached units, meets criterion c of the criteria for designating a landmark.

As specified in the City's historic preservation ordinance, the staff reviewed the application, conducted additional research and evaluated the property according to standards of the National Park Service. The staff then concluded, in a decision letter dated October 25, 2004, that the property does not have a sufficient level of significance to meet criterion c or any of the other three criteria

for landmark designation. On January 12, 2005, the applicants appealed the staff's decision to the Historic Preservation Commission.

On February 7, 2005, at a noticed public hearing, the Historic Preservation Commission found that the property qualifies for designation as a landmark and voted to approve the landmark designation citing criterion c: *It embodies the distinctive characteristics of a locally significant historic resource property type, architectural style, period, or method of construction, or that represents the work of an architect, designer, engineer, or building who is locally significant, or that possesses high artistic values that are locally significant.* The Commission believed that the distinctive characteristics of this court are its simplicity and lack of ornamental details and its courtyard plan.

Additional Evaluation of Property

Because of the controversial nature of this application for landmark designation, the staff contracted with Leslie Heumann and Associates, an architectural/historical research firm, for an independent evaluation of 636 North Holliston Avenue. Ms. Heumann's report (ATTACHMENT E) concurs with the staff's finding that the bungalow court does not meet the requirements for designation as a landmark.

ANALYSIS

The property is a simple, vernacular design of the bungalow court property type. Staff believes that it is unworthy of the individual distinction intended for a landmark. In a city with many outstanding examples of bungalow courts, including over twenty-five courts listed in the National Register of Historic Places, 636 N. Holliston, is beyond the range of properties normally considered for landmark designation. Staff analyzed the property according to the four criteria, of which one must be met to qualify as a landmark, and found it to be insignificant because it was constructed several years later than the period for which the bungalow property type is considered to be significant in the City's history of architectural development. In addition, it lacks the distinctive characteristics that the earlier courts possess.

Instead of individual designation as a landmark, an appropriate evaluation for the Holliston Court is as a contributing property to a potential landmark district, which is currently under consideration. On November 15, 2004, the Historic Preservation Commission reviewed and recommended approval of an application to designate a landmark district on North Holliston Avenue. As proposed, this district includes Holliston Court. Upon receipt of a petition with 51% support from property owners in the proposed district, the Planning Commission will review the application.

The effort to designate a district on North Holliston commenced after a proposal to demolish the bungalow court was submitted to the City. Subsequently, the

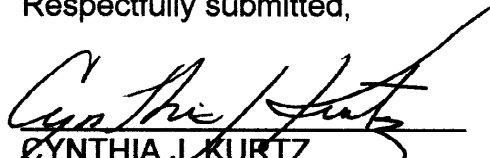
owner has amended the original plans to repair and preserve the six units on the front of the lot, demolish the rear unit and detached garages at the rear of the property, and replace the two structures with a new four-unit apartment building and fourteen covered parking spaces.

In the context of bungalow court development in Pasadena, the late construction date and lack of architectural integrity should disqualify Holliston Court as a locally significant landmark. Although it lacks individual distinction as a landmark, the small scale, the materials and the site design and features of the court are sufficiently intact to meet the criteria as a contributor to the pending landmark district on North Holliston Avenue. If the City Council approves the designation of the landmark district, the court will be subject to similar regulatory reviews as those that apply to individually designated landmarks. Under the City of Gardens development standards the property would also be protected as a contributing historic resource in a landmark district according to the California Environmental Quality Act guidelines and subject to design review.

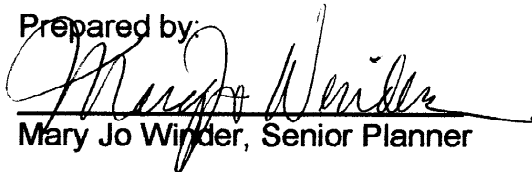
FISCAL IMPACT

A designation as a landmark creates an opportunity for the property owner to apply for a Historic Property Contract, which allows a lower property tax assessment. The denial of this application for landmark designation does not affect revenues to the City.

Respectfully submitted,


CYNTHIA J. KURTZ
City Manager

Prepared by:


Mary Jo Winder, Senior Planner

Approved by:


Richard Bruckner, Director of Planning & Development

- ATTACHMENT A: Application of Landmark Criteria**
- ATTACHMENT B: Photographs**
- ATTACHMENT C: Letter of Appeal of Staff Decision**
- ATTACHMENT D: Application for Landmark Designation**
- ATTACHMENT E: Evaluation by Leslie Heumann and Associates**

ATTACHMENT A

ATTACHMENT A

APPLICATION OF LANDMARK CRITERIA

The criteria for individual landmark designation per §17.62.040 of the Zoning Code are:

A landmark shall meet one or more of the following criteria:

- a. It is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of the history of the city.
- b. It is associated with the lives of persons who are significant in the history of the city.
- c. It embodies the distinctive characteristics of a locally significant historic resource property type, architectural style, period, or method of construction, or that represents the work of an architect, designer, engineer, or building who is locally significant, or that possesses high artistic values that are locally significant.
- d. It has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important locally in prehistory or history.

Criterion a - The Holliston Court is not an important resource associated with any historic events or broad patterns in the City's history. Although the bungalow court property type is an important historic resource in the City's physical development, this court is not important in this context because it was constructed in 1937, which is after the period that the bungalow court property type is considered to have made a significant contribution in the history of Pasadena. A National Register thematic nomination for bungalow courts in Pasadena, completed in 1983, identifies the period of significance for the courts as 1910-1931. According to this study, bungalow courts constructed after 1931, such as Holliston Court do not exhibit the architectural characteristics for which the earlier courts are noteworthy and, therefore Holliston Court is ineligible for listing in the National Register. The fact that its plan is similar to earlier bungalow courts and that the buildings have most of their original features does not qualify the property for designation.

Criterion b - The original owners of the bungalow court listed on building permits and tax records are Laura Schmidt and Marcella Keeney. Winfield Davis, listed as a carpenter in the 1937 City Directory, was the contractor listed on the 1937 building permit. Permits in 1948 document B.H. Gerpheide as owner; and permits from 1949 and 1950 identify J.A. Simison (a mechanic according to the 1949 City Directory) as owner. According to available primary source documents, none of the owners, contractors or tenants of the property appear to have made significant contributions to the history of the City. Although the application for landmark designation cites several occupants, there is no evidence that any of them are important in the history of this City.

Criterion c - The bungalow court, which includes seven residential buildings and a multi-car parking structure, is not a significant representative work of an architect, designer, engineer, or builder who is important in the history of the city or the history of architecture, locally, state-wide or nationally. The buildings do not possess high artistic values because of their simple execution and lack of design details. Simple boxes with an arrangement of windows in buildings do not constitute distinctive architectural design. Although the site plan incorporates many of the characteristics of the full-court property type, the buildings themselves lack any distinctive characteristics of late 1930s residential architecture. Additions to the front of the six side-facing units and the side of the rear unit are likewise unremarkable and do not contribute any architectural significance to the property.

The trees on the property that are on the City's specimen tree list are subject to the tree protection ordinance. Because the landscape is not exceptional, individual trees that meet the criteria for landmark tree designation¹ could be submitted for separate consideration.

Criterion d – Because there are more outstanding examples of the bungalow court property type of the late 1930s and early 1940s, the Holliston Court is not likely to yield important information in the study of the period or type of architecture.

In its determination of whether Holliston Court meets the criteria for individual designation, staff followed the National Register guidelines for comparing the property to other properties of the multi-family courtyard type from late 1930s and early 40s. In this analysis, staff identified a few better-representative examples of courtyard housing from this later period that have a high degree of architectural integrity. Exceptionally intact and architect-designed courtyard properties are located at 70-92 Avenue 64 (Garrett Van Pelt & George Lind; 1937), 454-470 E. Washington Blvd. (Harold Bissner, 1941), 595 E. Washington Blvd. (unknown, 1940), and 899 S. Marengo Ave. (Harold Bissner, 1940). Like Holliston Court, these properties are ineligible for the National Register because of their date of construction. Unlike Holliston Court, however, they may have sufficient integrity to qualify under criterion c for local designation as a landmark.

¹ "Landmark tree" means a tree designated as a landmark under the P.M.C. as a tree of historic or cultural significance and of importance to the community due to any of the following factors: It is one of the largest or oldest trees of the species located in the city; it has historical significance due to an association with a historic building, site, street, person or event; or it is a defining landmark or significant outstanding feature of a neighborhood.

ATTACHMENT B

HOLLISTON,
COURT
EXHIBIT 30



ATTACHMENT C

Appeal of Holliston Court Pasadena Landmark status

January 12, 2005

RECEIVED JAN 12 2005

To: Ms. Mary Jo Winder, Senior Planner & Historic Preservation Commission

From: Laura Kaufman, 830 Brooks Avenue #3, Pasadena, CA 91103
& Beverly Dunning, 1115 East Cordova Street #201, Pasadena, CA 91106

Dear Ms. Winder and Historic Preservation Commission,

This is our official appeal of staff's decision to deny Pasadena Historic Landmark status for the 1936-37 courtyard, Holliston Court, 636 North Holliston.

We disagree with staff's conclusion: "in the context of bungalow court development in Pasadena, the late construction date and lack of architectural integrity disqualify this property as a locally significant landmark." We assert that Holliston Court, as one of the last bungalow courtyards built in the city, "relates to patterns of history that extend beyond the doorstep of the immediate neighborhood (**National Register Bulletin 16, Exhibit 0**) and illustrate(s) themes and trends important to the history of its community, State and the Nation." (**NRB, Exhibit 00**). Its simple design illustrates Depression-era architecture built for the working class. To understand the full evolution and demise of the bungalow courtyard, which began in Pasadena, it is important to study and preserve one of the last ones to be built here.

Also, Holliston Court compares favorably to the courtyards which staff contends have more architectural integrity than Holliston. None has all three of the characteristics that make Holliston unique and special — individual cottages, extensive gardens and towering trees.

According to staff's October 25 letter (p1, graph 2), "the staff follows evaluation procedures of National Register Bulletin 16: Guidelines for Completing National Register of Historic Places Forms, which gives specific guidance on determining the integrity and authenticity of historic resources."

First, we will discuss the criteria listed in Bulletin #16 and how that relates to Holliston Court. After that, we will refute in detail staff's conclusions regarding Holliston Court's construction date and perceived lack of architectural integrity.

BULLETIN # 16: THE THREE REQUIREMENTS FOR NATIONAL LISTING

The Bulletin lists three criteria — Historic Significance, Historic Integrity and Historic Context for determining whether a property qualifies for listing (**NRB, Exhibit 1a**).

Bulletin 16 describes **Historic Significance** as the "importance of a property to the

history, architecture, archeology, engineering or culture of a community, State or the Nation.”(Exhibit 1b) One of the ways it is achieved is through “distinctive physical characteristics of design, construction or form.” Holliston Court fits this criteria. With its distinctive physical characteristics --detached, wide-court form -- it is typical of bungalow courtyards. And its individual cottages, whose simple design reflects the severe economic times in which they were built, are generously laid out among lush, oasis-like gardens, which sets bungalow courtyards apart from other multi-family developments that followed it. It is one of the last bungalow courts built in the home of bungalow courts.

“The fact that they were still being built — 20 to 30 years from when they began shows they are a survivor of an old Pasadena tradition,” said Alan Michelson, PhD, a Stanford-trained architectural historian consulted for this project. “And while the superficial stylistic details changed, the significance of this building form with its individual homesteads lingering into the late 1930s cannot be overlooked.”

Bulletin 16 describes **Historic Integrity** as “the authenticity of a property’s historic identity, evidenced by the survival of physical characteristics that existed during the property’s prehistoric or historic period.” (NRB, Exhibit 2)

“Not only must a property resemble its historic appearance, it must also retain physical materials, design features, and aspects of construction dated from the period when it attained significance.”(NRB, Exhibit 3) In other words, it can be identified as originally constructed.

Holliston Court fits the National Register’s Bulletin #16 definition of Historic Integrity, since it retains all its original design features. The 1989 inventory conducted by the city confirms this. “This bungalow court from the late 1930s illustrates the longevity of this housing type, and is a fine and *intact*(my italic) example of local design.”(See Exhibit 3A, Nomination of 636 North Holliston as a Pasadena Historic Landmark)

According to Bulletin 16, **Historic-Context** is “information about historic trends and properties grouped by an important theme in the prehistory or history of a community. Because historic contexts are organized by theme, place and time, they link historic properties to important historic trends.”(NRB, Exhibit 4) Holliston Court clearly fits into the historic trend of building bungalow courts with detached cottages in a wide-court design, amid lush landscaping. And according to that 1989 Inventory, Holliston Court was designated as 1D, possibly eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, as part of a thematic grouping(See Exhibit 3A, Nomination of 636).

THE CONSTRUCTION DATE

We disagree with staff’s statement in Criterion 1 that Holliston Court is not significant because it was constructed in 1937, after the period that the bungalow court property type is considered to have made a significant contribution to the history of Pasadena.

According to Dr. Michelson, the construction date(1936-37)shows that it is one of the last to be built in Pasadena. "Pasadena became world famous for the development of bungalow courts and the protection of the whole record is important — to get a sense of where and when it started and when and why it died," said Michelson. "This is a document of one of the last ones built in Pasadena and its importance cannot be overstated . It transcends local history and is part of a national building trend, part of the nation's architectural heritage."

COMPARISON WITH OTHER COURTS

Staff lists four other courts which it contends have "a high degree of architectural integrity" and are "more outstanding examples of the bungalow court property type." We visited these courtyards and found them to be very similar in style to Holliston Court (**Photo Exhibit 1**), but with no more architectural integrity and in each case lacking all the features that make Holliston special — including detached cottages, towering trees, and extensive gardens.

595 East Washington(1940) — Like Holliston Court, it is a wide court design with separate units, topped with shallow hipped roofs. While Holliston Court windows contain 6/1 sash windows, theirs are a less ornamented 2/2. It also has a recently built Craftsman-style gate with a pergola, which is anachronistic to the building's period, diminishing its historic integrity. (**Photo Exhibit 2**)

454-470 East Washington(1941) — It is mainly composed of triplexes which are stucco and with shallow hipped roofs. With the exception of its bay windows, its design is very similar to Holliston Court and it contains the same 6/6 windows. However, it lacks the huge trees and extensive gardens, as well as freestanding cottages, that give Holliston Court its special appeal. (**Photo Exhibit 3**)

899 South Marengo(1940) — It consists of duplexes and triplexes with double-hung multi-paned windows, similar to those of Holliston Court. Its pared down Colonial Revival style is reminiscent of Holliston. Except for a cupola and a simple arched entryway, it is very similar in design to Holliston. It does have four large trees in the center of the courtyard. (**Photo Exhibit 4**)

70-92 Avenue 64(1937) — A wide court design, it is composed of triplexes with shallow hipped roofs and curving walkways similar to that of Holliston Court. Although it has faux porch columns and casement windows, the courtyard lacks the huge trees and individual cottages that make Holliston Court special. (**Photo Exhibit 5**)

Because these courtyards either lack large swaths of green space(454-470 East Washington), are duplexes(Marengo) or triplexes(454-470 East Washington, Marengo, Avenue 64), or lack towering trees (Avenue 64), we strongly assert that these courtyards are no more outstanding — in fact, we argue they are less distinguished as examples of the bungalow court property type of the late 1930s to early 40s.

Individual cottages are an important element of bungalow court design — they are miniature houses and give tenants/owners a piece of the American Dream at affordable prices/rents. They should not be compared to duplexes or triplexes, which amount merely to attached courtyard housing.

Further, staff states that the late construction date disqualifies Holliston Court. However, three of the four other courtyards staff cites were built after Holliston. If staff is asserting the others are significant, and Holliston is not because of its date, then these are contradictory statements.

We also disagree with staff's conclusion that Holliston Court's "simple execution and lack of design details" make it devoid of "high artistic values."

The unadorned style is typical of Depression-era architecture built for the working class, according to Michelson, who penned his thesis on architecture of the 1930s. Its lack of ornamentation reflects the depth of the economic crisis, he said. For economic and psychological reasons, "Designers didn't want to be ostentatious. The style became less important than the indoor/outdoor space and fluid interior space," Michelson said.

Using staff's definition, all modern architecture would be insignificant due to its simple design. Staff is applying earlier elements of a previous style built during economically prosperous times to this style which has been pared down due to the economic deprivation in which it was built. What makes them simple, differentiates them from the previous style. Consider that Craftsman style is pared down, compared to the highly-ornamented Victorian style. Staff is not using objective style-neutral criteria.

Holliston Court's architecture is Minimalist in the way composers Steven Reich's or John Cage's music is Minimalist — and therefore represents a specific style of music, a record of its time and place.

Musical compositions in the Minimalist style have no less integrity or importance in the context of musical history than the highly-ornamented style of Baroque composer J.S. Bach. The same can be said of architecture.

Even if the Commission concludes that Holliston Court is "devoid of high artistic values," we note that the National Historic Landmarks criteria, Appendix B (NRB, Exhibit 5) says that even if its integral parts are not sufficiently significant by the reason of historical association to warrant individual recognition, they qualify if they "collectively compose an entity of exceptional historical or artistic significance, or outstandingly commemorate or illustrate a way of life or culture."

We assert that Holliston Court outstandingly commemorates or illustrates a way of life or culture by contributing to the full understanding of bungalow court history. Holliston Court

illustrates the culture of the Depression, through its simple design that shows it was intended as housing for the working class. It also illustrates California's culture, by way of its fluid indoor-outdoor space and communal gathering places. Holliston Court's close relationship with the outdoors typifies the best of Southern California architecture.

THE DEVELOPER'S PROPOSAL WILL COMPROMISE ITS HISTORIC INTEGRITY

According to Bulletin 16, Historic Integrity consists of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association. (**Exhibit 3, Exhibit 6a**) It is the qualities of setting, defined as the quality of the integrity, as it applies to the physical environment of a historic property (**NRB, Exhibit 6b**) and feeling, defined as a quality of integrity through which a historic property evokes the aesthetic or historic sense of past time and place, (**NRB, Exhibit 6c**), that will be severely compromised by the proposed demolition of Cottage #7 and replacement with a modern, two-story four-unit building in the center of the courtyard U.

The proposal, if allowed to proceed, would destroy the integrity of this detached, enclosed wide-court court and diminish courtyard housing within the city, whose garden character is the most noticeable and important quality of Pasadena neighborhoods (City of Gardens Ordinance, Nomination of 636, Exhibit 26a) And this kind of courtyard was used as a model for the City of Gardens ordinance, according to former senior city planner Ann Scheid, author of "Historic Pasadena."

While in the 1930s there were more than 400 courtyards, today there are fewer than 100, with only a third of those receiving protection through listing on the National Register of Historic Places. It is time to protect the remaining courtyards, which are vulnerable to demolition and the City should start with this one by designating it as a Pasadena Historic Landmark.

THIS PROPOSAL VIOLATES THE CITY OF GARDENS ORDINANCE & THE TREE PROTECTION ORDINANCE AND WILL DESTROY THE PARK-LIKE SETTING

The City of Gardens ordinance recognizes the importance of trees. It states, "where mature, healthy trees already exist on a site, their retention is encouraged." (Nomination of 636, Exhibit 31a). However, the developer's proposal calls for destroying a number of Native Species trees and relocating **every remaining tree** — including city-protected Specimen Trees of Coral(2), and Camphor — on the property! (**Developer's Tree Inventory, Exhibit 7**)

These trees proposed for relocation do not interfere with construction of any buildings. They cool the bungalows by at least 15 degrees during the summer and supply a year-round chorus of jays, acorn woodpeckers and squirrels. There is no reason to move them and it is doubtful that these trees, including the towering Camphor and avocado trees, which exceed 50 feet in height, would survive a move.

The trees proposed for destruction include a Black Walnut (in the back, on the raised

patio). It is one of 13 Native Species earmarked for protection “because they help maintain native populations of birds, insects and other animals and promote better environmental conditions.”(Nomination of 636, tree photographs, Exhibit 27, Tree Protection Ordinance, Exhibit 28a)

An arborist hired by the developer mistakenly has labeled this as a xylosma congestum, or shiny xylosma (**Developers Tree Inventory, Exhibit 7**) . However according to a horticulture expert at the Los Angeles Arboretum and former senior planner Scheid, this a Black Walnut tree. It has been giving us and the resident squirrels walnuts for the past seven years and we have the shells to prove it!

The proposed demolition will also mean the end of a Victorian Box Tree on the south side of Cottage #7. Specimen trees, as this Victorian Box “enhance the beauty of the City of Pasadena.”(Nomination of 636, Tree Protection Ordinance, Exhibit 28d). Also gone will be a huge Acacia tree on the south side of Cottage #7 and a rose garden behind Cottage 6.

The city’s Tree Protection Ordinance was approved “in recognition of the significant aesthetic, environmental, and economic benefits to the community provided by trees and to increase the tree canopy in Pasadena.”(Nomination of 636, Exhibit 28f) The trees of Holliston Court are of sufficient size to merit protection by the Tree Protection Ordinance(Nomination of 636, Exhibits 28i, j, Protected Tree List, diagram of protected trees on property).

The setting of Holliston Court is just as important — if not more important — than the buildings themselves. Once this urban oasis is gone — to cram more buildings onto the property by destroying Native Species and large shade trees and inexplicably uprooting and replanting towering, mature trees that are happy where they are and not in the way of development — it will be gone forever, along with the wildlife. The huge trees contribute much to the magic of Holliston Court and they add tremendous economic value to the property!

Further, removing large trees, as the Black Walnut and replanting a bunch of small trees will in no way make up for the loss of the large tree canopy.

For these reasons we believe Holliston Court is worthy of the highest degree of protection — Pasadena Landmark status. Buyers of the cottages, once they are converted to condominiums, will be willing to pay a premium to live in a park-like setting. And the developer will be able to make a substantial profit by leaving all the cottages and gardens intact.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to discussing this further at the January 18 meeting.

Attachments:
Exhibits 0-7, Photo Exhibits 1-5, Letters 1-3