

# 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

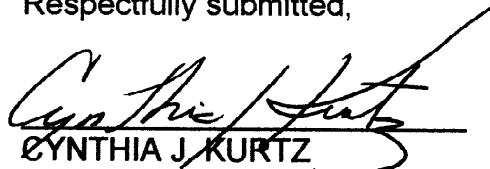
owner has amended the original plans to repair and preserve the six units on the front of the lot, demolish the rear unit and detached garages at the rear of the property, and replace the two structures with a new four-unit apartment building and fourteen covered parking spaces.

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 designation<sup>1</sup> 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.

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<sup>1</sup> "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.