

Agenda Report

April 12, 2010

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council
FROM: Planning & Development Department
SUBJECT: DESIGNATION OF 401 EAST WASHINGTON BOULEVARD AS A LANDMARK

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the City Council:

1. Acknowledge that the designation of a historic resource is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA Guidelines §15308: Class 8 - Actions by Regulatory Agencies for Protection of the Environment);
2. Find that the property at 401 East Washington Boulevard is significant under Criterion "C" for designation as a landmark (P.M.C. §17.52.40) because it embodies the distinctive characteristics of the Arts and Crafts movement, generally retains its integrity, and is one of the few remaining large houses on Washington Boulevard from the early twentieth-century on a spacious open site;
3. Approve the designation of the property at 401 East Washington Boulevard as a landmark;
4. Adopt the attached resolution approving a Declaration of Landmark Designation for 401 East Washington Boulevard, Pasadena, California;
5. Authorize the Mayor to execute the attached Declaration of Landmark Designation for 401 East Washington Boulevard, Pasadena, California; and
6. Direct the City Clerk to record the declaration with the Los Angeles County Recorder.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:

On Tuesday, February 15, 2010, the Historic Preservation Commission recommended that the City Council approve the designation of 401 East Washington Boulevard as a landmark under criterion C of PMC §17.62.040.

BACKGROUND:

On October 8, 2009, five local residents (Dale Trader, Mike O'Brien, June Takenouchi, Robert Tait and Bob Kneisel) filed an application for designation of 401 E. Washington Boulevard as a landmark. On October 21, 2009, the staff determined that the property is eligible for landmark designation under criterion "C" and sent a letter with this finding

to the applicants and to the property owner, Olga Sepulveda. Ms. Sepulveda supports the application for designation of her property.

COUNCIL POLICY CONSIDERATION:

The General Plan – Objective 6: Promote preservation of historically and architecturally significant buildings and revitalization of traditional neighborhoods and commercial areas.

Description:

The California Arts and Crafts style building was constructed in 1909 as a single-family house for Clara and Anthony Schaub. In 1944, the 16-room wooden-framed house was converted to an apartment house with eight units. The attic (third) floor of the house was rebuilt in 2007 after a fire. The building remains in use as an eight-unit apartment house.

Site Design

The building at 401 E. Washington Boulevard, which is set back 65 feet from the street, sits prominently above Washington Boulevard on a half-acre site. Bordering the sidewalk is a low retaining wall, one-hundred feet in length. A concrete driveway borders the property on the east, leading to a non-contributing (not original) garage shed in the rear. The front yard is primarily an open lawn with some mature trees and hedges at the western edge. A semi-circular walkway leads from the driveway to the front entrance of the building. The surroundings, in a RM-32 zone, are multi-unit residential dwellings. With its deep setback and imposing scale, evocative of buildings that once lined portions of Washington Boulevard in the early twentieth century, 401 E. Washington Boulevard is atypical of buildings in the area and one of the few large Arts and Crafts era houses to have survived in this neighborhood.

Building Design

Rectangular in plan, the two-and-a-half story, 5,797 square-foot building is oriented to Washington Boulevard. It has a cross-axial gabled roof, set parallel to the street, with a center cross gable— flanked by recessed dormers—on both the south and north elevations. The extended rooflines have open rafters and large knee braces. The front elevation is a symmetrical three-bay composition. Wide concrete steps connect the raised full-width porch to the front walkway. The open porch has scored concrete flooring and a pergola-like roof supported by four Tuscan columns. Originally the front entry to the house was aligned with the centerline of the front steps; the existing off-center entry and paired windows is a later alteration (presumably dating from conversion of the house to apartments). On the first and second floors, the end bays of the house have wide tri-partite windows with a fixed center light bordered by casements with leaded-glass tracery. The center bay of the second floor has a polygonal bay with three windows. The most distinctive windows on the side elevations are the paired sash set between sunken wooden panels and within curving return walls—a signature feature borrowed from the tradition of Shingle Style architecture.

The first floor of the house—on all four sides—has a heavy coating of cement plaster. The upper portions of the house have an exterior sheathing of wooden shingles. The shingles wrap the outer edges of the dormers and the primary walls of the house. The roof is finished with composition shingles.

Stylistically, the building is eclectic. Its design belongs to two traditions identified with the Arts and Crafts movement in California: the English Arts and Crafts and the Anglo-American Colonial.¹ The pronounced overhang of the roof, the ornamental detailing of the rafter tails, the combination of a plaster base with shingled walls, the pergola-like roof on the porch, the broad low-pitched rooflines, and the leaded glass link the building to the English Arts and Crafts. The boxy form, the symmetry of the front elevation, and the columned front porch denote the influence of the Anglo-American Colonial Revival.

Alterations

Most of the alterations to the building date to its conversion to apartments. At that time, it appears as though the original front entry was removed. Presumably the original front entry aligned with the front steps and the polygonal bay on the second floor and had a door with sidelights and a transom. Replacing the original openings are two double-hung windows and just to the east of these windows is a single-leaf door. A second door opening is at the western end of the front porch. The loss of the front entry is disfiguring to the building because it removed the visual centerpiece of a symmetrical composition and introduced under-sized openings and a small off-center door in its place. Because this alteration removed a major character-defining feature of the building and replaced it with an inappropriate grouping of windows and a door, it does not meet the threshold in Standard #4 (Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation) for evaluating changes to a historic property: "Most properties change over time; those changes that have acquired significance in their own right shall be retained and preserved." The 1944-era changes have not acquired significance.

It also appears that a two-story wing was added to the house as part of the 1944 conversion to apartments, though, as with the front entryway, there is no permit history to document these alterations. Because this addition is recessed behind the façade of the building, it has a less-than-significant effect on the overall integrity of the house and understanding of its original design and massing.

An unfortunate recent alteration occurred during the reconstruction of the attic-level interior and roof after a fire in 2007. At that time, the dimensions and fenestration of the original window opening in the center gable—on the front elevation—changed from the original condition as documented in photographs on file with the Planning and Development Department. The original opening was larger than the existing, and it had

¹ Lauren Bricker, Janet Tearnen, Robert Winter, *The Residential Architecture of Pasadena, CA, 1895-1918: The Influence of the Arts and Crafts Movement*. (Multiple Property Documentation Form, National Register of Historic Places, 1998), 12-13.

three windows. The reconstructed opening is smaller, and it has two windows instead of three. This change does not comply with Secretary of the Interior's Standards. In the future, it may be possible to reverse this change by slightly lengthening the opening and replacing the two existing windows with three. The restoration of this original window would significantly enhance the integrity of the building and restore the façade to the appearance which it has had since 1944 and for most of its history.

William Bryant Edwards (1874-1948)

A native of Lynn, Massachusetts and a resident of Pasadena for nearly 50 years, Edwards was a building contractor, an architect, and, for 18 years, a building appraiser for the City's Assessing Department. He began working in Pasadena as early as 1900 and during the ensuing decade received many commissions—mostly in Pasadena and Altadena—to design bungalow “cottages” and some small commercial buildings. For several years, he had offices in the Boston Building (35 N. Raymond). Records of his work as an architect trail off after 1912, and it appears as though he subordinated his architectural practice to his work as a building appraiser.

ANALYSIS:

The property at 401 East Washington Boulevard is eligible for designation under Criterion C, (§17.62.040 PMC):

[It] embodies the distinctive characteristics of a historic resource property type, period, architectural style or method of construction, or is an exceptional representation of the work of an architect, designer, engineer, or builder whose work is significant to the city, or that possesses high artistic values that are significant to the city.

The house has characteristics from two strands of the Arts and Crafts movement—the English and the American English Colonial. It also has features such as the recessed attic windows set within curved sidewalls that predate the Arts and Crafts movement in California.

In its current condition, the house is significant because of its scale, its relatively intact condition, and its open elevated site enclosed by a stone wall. In a setting with low-scale apartments and a range of building types, 401 E. Washington Boulevard is visually imposing and a significant example of Arts and Crafts era houses that once predominated this neighborhood.

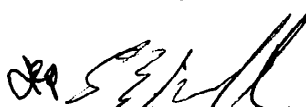
ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

Class 8 exemptions consists of actions taken by regulatory agencies, as authorized by state or local ordinance, to assure the maintenance, restoration, enhancement, or protection of the environment where the regulatory process involves procedures for the protection of the environment.

FISCAL IMPACT:

Designation of this property does not affect revenues to the City. In some instances, though, owners of designated properties may apply to the City for Historic Property Contract, which allows an alternative and often lower property tax assessment. The City Council reviewed the projected loss of property tax revenue from this program in 2002 when it adopted a local Historic Property Contract (Mills Act) ordinance.

Respectfully submitted,



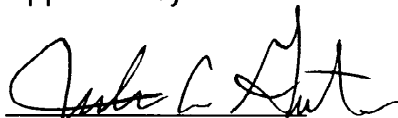
STEVE MERMELL
Assistant City Manager

Prepared by:



Emily Stadnicki
Senior Planner

Approved by:



for
MICHAEL J. BECK
City Manager

Attachments:

Attachment A – Map and Site Plan

Attachment B – Photograph