

PASADENA HERITAGE

651 South St. John Avenue, Pasadena, California 91105 626 441-6333

February 19, 2010

Mayor Bill Bogaard and Members of the City Council
City of Pasadena
100 North Garfield Avenue
Pasadena, California 91109

Dear Mayor Bogaard and Council Members:

On behalf of Pasadena Heritage, I am again writing to express our support for the Design Commission's decision regarding the properties at 501 and 523 South Arroyo Parkway. We respectfully urge you to uphold that decision.

We understand that the owner of the property has appealed the decision of the Design Commission, and that you will consider this appeal on Monday, February 22, 2010. We further understand that city staff supports the Commission's new designation for the building at 501 South Arroyo Parkway, but opposes the change in designation for 523 South Arroyo Parkway. We were disappointed by this recommendation and ask that you uphold the Design Commission's full decision recognizing that both buildings are worthy of status code of 5S3.

Our letter of December 4, 2009, is attached and includes important background on this issue. Please refer to it for a discussion of the initial request by the applicant, and staff's approval, to demolish four older buildings on South Arroyo Parkway. We would only restate that there is no project proposed for this site, and that demolition is not permitted for any building when there is no approved replacement project, with very rare exceptions.

At present, the applicant apparently is proceeding to repair and lease the two buildings at 501 and 522 which we were happy to learn, and which further demonstrates that they are perfectly functional buildings that continue to provide benefits to both the owner and community by their continued presence and use. Two other buildings (499 and 503) on this same large site have been confirmed to be unreinforced masonry, have been seriously altered, and have no discernable historic significance, so they are not at issue here.

After carefully reviewing and studying the two buildings in question, along with the Design Commission and several historic preservation experts who volunteered their time to assist us, Pasadena Heritage determined that both of the buildings were noteworthy. They were both designed by prominent Pasadena architects and represent the early development of South Arroyo

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Parkway. They both retain their important historic features and are in good condition. The building at 501 had been erroneously categorized as an unreinforced masonry building but is, in fact, a reinforced concrete building and should never have been considered for demolition! The alterations to 523, as described in the staff report, to not seriously affect its integrity. Similar changes can be seen in buildings throughout Old Pasadena and elsewhere that are still considered eligible or have received historic designations, including National Register listing. The Design Commission agreed.

The applicant appears to be arguing now that changing the status code on these buildings to one step higher on the scale (potentially eligible for landmark listing) might complicate future development or trigger environmental review. Since the history, original design features and architectural credentials of these buildings have now been documented, they will deserve review if and when a future project is proposed that might impact them. Given the size of the site, there will undoubtedly be other considerations that would require environmental review, and it would be premature to consider any of these questions at this time. The historic buildings at 501 and 523 South Arroyo Parkway will certainly deserve our careful consideration when there is an actual project and not just a large vacant parcel on gateway street to replace them. In the meantime, please support the thorough and careful consideration given to these issues by the Design Commission and uphold their decision.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,
(signed)

Susan N. Mossman
Executive Director

Attached: letter of December 4, 2009

From: Carrie Chasteen <cechasteen@yahoo.com>
Date: February 22, 2010 8:18:00 AM PST
To: mjomsky@cityofpasadena.net
Subject: 501 and 523 Arroyo Seco Pkwy

Dear Mayor Bogaard and Council Members:

I urge you to support the decision of the Design Commission giving proper recognition to the historic buildings at 501 and 523 South Arroyo Parkway. Both these buildings were designed by prominent Pasadena architects, are in good condition, and are important examples of the history of South Arroyo Parkway. These buildings are some of the last remaining examples of this type and method of construction along this vital transportation corridor, and should remain to preserve the commercial architectural history of the city. Please deny the appeal by the property owner who intends to demolish them and leave us with a large vacant parcel for years to come.

Thank you,
Carrie Chasteen
288A E. Howard St.

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