

# Agenda Report

October 17, 2011

**TO:** Honorable Mayor and City Council  
**FROM:** Planning Department  
**SUBJECT: DESIGNATION OF 1621 NORTH LOS ROBLES AVENUE AS A LANDMARK**

## **RECOMMENDATION:**

It is recommended that the City Council:

1. Find 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 1621 North Los Robles Avenue is significant under Criterion "C" for designation as a landmark (P.M.C. §17.62.040) because it is a locally significant example of a transitional Arts and Crafts period house from the early twentieth century with Gothic Revival features and retains a high level of integrity;
3. Approve the designation of the property at 1621 North Los Robles Avenue as a landmark;
4. Adopt the attached resolution approving a Declaration of Landmark Designation for 1621 North Los Robles Avenue, Pasadena, California;
5. Authorize the Mayor to execute the attached Declaration of Landmark Designation for 1621 North Los Robles Avenue, Pasadena, California; and
6. Direct the City Clerk to record the declaration with the Los Angeles County Recorder.

## **HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:**

On Monday, September 19, 2011, the Historic Preservation Commission recommended that the City Council approve the designation of 1621 North Los Robles Avenue as a landmark under criterion C of PMC §17.62.040.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

The main residence at 1621 North Los Robles Avenue qualifies for designation as a landmark under Criterion "C" as an intact, locally significant example of a transitional Arts and Crafts period house from the early twentieth century with Gothic Revival features.

## **BACKGROUND:**

On May 2, 2011, Aurore B. Wright, the property owner, submitted an application for designation of 1621 N. Los Robles Avenue as a landmark. The applicant also submitted an application to enter into a historic property contract (Mills Act). The staff evaluated the property according to the landmark criteria in Title 17 of the Pasadena Municipal Code and determined that the house qualifies for designation.

### **Property Data**

- Addresses: (Pasadena, CA 91104)
  - 1621 N. Los Robles Avenue (main house)
  - 399 Elizabeth Street (bungalow & garage)
  - 1633 N. Los Robles Avenue (ballroom)
- Location: Northwest corner of Los Robles Avenue and Elizabeth Street
- Date of Construction: 1907 (main house), 1915 (bungalow), 1925 (ballroom), documented by building permit
- Original Architect/Designer: Christian M. Hansen (main house), Hans W. Larsen (bungalow and ballroom)
- Original Contractor: Christian M. Hansen (main house), Hans W. Larsen (bungalow and ballroom)
- Original / Present Use: Two detached units and ballroom / Three detached units (LA County record)
- Original/Present Owner: Thomas J. Stocks/Aurore B. Wright
- Property Size: 24,298 square feet
- Building Size: 2,030 (main house), 1,432 (bungalow), 1,087 (ballroom)

### **The Site**

The site, a 24,298 square foot corner lot, is at the northwest corner of Los Robles Avenue and Elizabeth Street. The 1907 main house, located in the southeast portion of the lot, is set back approximately 40 feet from the front property line and 30 feet from the side property line. The 1915 bungalow is in the southwest portion of the lot, at the east side of the only existing driveway on the property, which leads to a detached two-car garage in the northwest corner. The 1925 ballroom building is in the northwest portion of the lot, directly northwest of the main house. Between the main house, bungalow, and ballroom is an above-ground concrete swimming pool, equipment house, and detached covered patio. The remainder of the site is landscaped; arroyo-stone and concrete retaining walls support the elevated site along its perimeter.

### **The Main House**

Built in 1907, the two-story, 2,030 square-foot house is rectangular in plan with an Arroyo-stone foundation, walls of clapboard and shingles, and a second story that is comprised of a side-gabled roof with front-facing dormers. The arroyo-stone foundation is evident around the entire perimeter of the house and rises about two feet to form the walls of the front porch. A wide, flared siding board forms the transition between the foundation and the clapboard siding above. Wall areas above the main roof are clad in

shingles of varying width. The front porch, inset at the southeast corner of the house, has a projecting curved bay with a curved roof that extends east toward Los Robles Avenue and a pergola (partially enclosed later by roofing and glass on two sides) that extends south toward Elizabeth Street. It is accessed by concrete steps flanked by Arroyo-stone wing walls. Two plain stucco chimneys, not expressed in the exterior wall, extend through the roof near the north elevation. Roof gutter drainpipes on three elevations (most notably the center of the front elevation) have decorative brackets. Pairs and groups of windows have a horizontal emphasis. The most distinctive double-hung windows have an upper sash that includes two Gothic-arched panes contained within a semicircular arched frame. Other upper sash and casement designs have four vertical panes with truncated lozenge or diamond panes. The gabled roof has boxed eaves with returns and an arch at each gable.

#### The Bungalow

Built in 1915, the one-story, 1,432 square foot bungalow is rectangular in plan and has a concrete foundation, shallowly sloped front gabled roof and front porch with exposed beams, battered plaster porch piers and chimney, and groupings of wood fixed and casement windows. The house is clad in wood shingles above and clapboard siding with alternating wide and narrow weathering below. The multi-light wood front door appears to be original. The bungalow is a contributing building.

#### The Ballroom

Built in 1925, the one-story, 1,087 square foot ballroom building is L-shaped in plan and has a concrete foundation, gabled tile roof, a flat semicircular front porch roof supported by two pairs of columns, and inswing casement and double-hung windows. The ballroom is a contributing building.

#### Garage & Site Features

A detached two-car garage is behind the bungalow in the northwest corner of the lot. It has one of its original sliding doors and gable vent features that match the bungalow. Like the bungalow, it is a contributing building.

An above-ground concrete swimming pool, built in 1930, is between the main house and the bungalow. It is currently enclosed by a fence. A tile-roofed equipment house is adjacent to the west side of the swimming pool. A detached roofed patio structure is between the swimming pool and the main house. A small concrete pond is north of the main house and east of the ballroom. These structures are not contributing.

A short Arroyo-stone retaining wall is adjacent to the sidewalk at Los Robles Avenue and a portion of Elizabeth Street. A concrete retaining wall continues along Elizabeth Street. A parallel short concrete retaining wall is set back from the arroyo stone wall at the portion of the property overlooking the intersection. The Arroyo-stone retaining wall appears to have been built concurrently with the main house and is a contributing feature.

### Documented Changes to the Property

A notable early alteration to the main house was the replacement of the original front living room window grouping (three windows, the center window having two Gothic arched panes within a semicircular arched frame) with a new grouping of three windows (a large fixed single-light window flanked by two transomed casement windows). The original window configuration is shown in several c. 1912 photographs. This original window grouping appears to have been salvaged from the front elevation and is now installed on the street-facing south elevation of an early one-story addition to the south side of the house (still extant) which did not appear in the original building footprint but occurred before 1930 (shown in the 1930 Sanborn map). At an unknown date, the front porch pergola was partially enclosed with a roof and glass on two sides. A small, more recent gable-roofed addition with shingle siding and aluminum windows was also made to the rear elevation at the second story.

### Current Conditions, Use, and Proposed Plans

Some minor deterioration of the exterior of the main house including eave damage is apparent. The ballroom and swimming pool equipment building also have minor deterioration (peeling paint). The bungalow and garage are currently in excellent condition and won a 2011 Preservation Award for the owner's efforts to rehabilitate the house after years of neglect. The main house, bungalow, and ballroom are used as three separate residential units. The swimming pool, pool equipment building, and detached roofed patio structure may be demolished in the future. The property owner has submitted an application to enter into a historic property contract (Mills Act) and intends to make repairs to rehabilitate the main house.

### Christian M. Hansen

Christian Martin Hansen, born in August 1863 in Germany, emigrated to the United States with his wife Alma in 1890. By 1893, they lived in Pasadena where he began working as a carpenter. By 1910 he was a well-recognized house builder with an office at 16 South Raymond Avenue. Between 1904 and 1917, he built 37 houses in Pasadena, mostly in the Craftsman style. He was known to work with Reginald Johnson, Joseph J. Blick, Frohman & Martin, and Charles and Henry Greene, though most of his houses have no attributed architect—he designed these himself based on pattern books and magazines.

### **ANALYSIS:**

The property at 1621 North Los Robles Avenue is eligible for landmark designation under Criterion "C", (§17.62.040 PMC):

[The property] embodies the distinctive characteristics of a historic resource property type, period, architectural style or method of construction, or represents the work of an architect, designer, engineer, or builder whose work is significant to the City or to the region, or that

possesses high artistic values that are significant to the City or to the region.

Under this criterion, the main house at 1621 North Los Robles Avenue is significant as a unique example of a transitional Arts and Crafts period house with some Gothic Revival features. Overall, the house has a high level of architectural integrity in its design, materials, and workmanship. Character-defining Arts and Crafts design features include a prominent Arroyo-stone foundation and front porch wall, a sweeping side-gable roof with dormers that comprises the second story, an inset front porch with pergola, transomed windows at the front porch, and square porch piers. The boxed eaves with returns, and the arched eave motif at each gable are distinctive features not typically found on Arts and Crafts period houses. Together with the arched second-story window with Gothic arched window panes at the front elevation, the curved front porch bay and roof, and the flared siding board capping the foundation, these distinctive features create a harmonious design. Workmanship is exemplified by the Arroyo-stone foundation, the decorative downspout brackets, the Gothic arched window panes and frames, and the curved front porch bay. The property retains nearly all of its original materials. The only notable alterations are the replacement of the front living room window (an early alteration to a more explicitly Craftsman design), a one-story addition to the south elevation that occurred before 1930, the roofing and partial enclosure of the front porch pergola with glass, and a small second-story addition at the rear elevation. None of these alterations harm the overall integrity of the house.

This transitional house has a mix of features from the Arts and Crafts movement and features that predate the Arts and Crafts movement in California. Its harmonious combination of eclectic design elements from the Arts and Crafts and earlier periods make it a notable historic resource. The house is listed in the City's 1998 historic resources survey of the Arts and Crafts period as having individual significance.

Staff also evaluated the other buildings and structures on the property. The restored 1915 bungalow and garage exhibit features of the California Bungalow; although they lack the individual distinction of design and workmanship of an individual landmark in that style, they have distinctive craftsman detailing and are on the same property as the eligible main house. They contribute to the significance of the property because they are part of the residential compound developed by the original owner, and have the feeling of being part of an early twentieth century integrated development of buildings and open spaces. The 1925 ballroom has minimal features associated with the Italian Period Revival style, but it also contributes to the significance of the property because it was built by the original owner as part of the compound for entertainment purposes with the feeling of being part of the integrated development of buildings and open spaces. The swimming pool and equipment building lack distinction, are not well integrated into the development, and do not contribute to the significance of the property. None of the resources on the property have an association with significant events or with the lives of persons who are significant in the history of the City, region, or State.

**COUNCIL POLICY CONSIDERATION:**

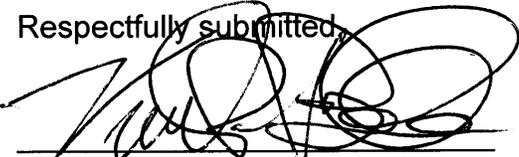
The General Plan – Objective 6: Promote preservation of historically and architecturally significant buildings and revitalization of traditional neighborhoods and commercial areas.

**ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:**

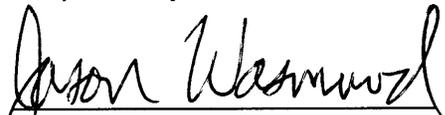
Class 8 exemptions consists of actions taken by regulatory agencies, as authorized by state or local ordinance, to assure the maintenance, restoration, enhancement, or protection of the environment where the regulatory process involves procedures for the protection of the environment.

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

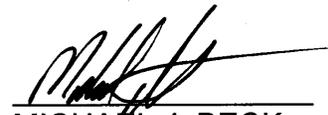
Designation of this property does not affect revenues to the City. In some instances, though, owners of designated properties may apply to the City for Historic Property Contract, which allows an alternative and often lower property tax assessment. The City Council reviewed the projected loss of property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

Respectfully submitted,  
  
\_\_\_\_\_  
VINCENT P. BERTONI, AICP  
Director of Planning

Prepared by:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Jason Wasmund  
Assistant Planner

Approved by:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
MICHAEL J. BECK  
City Manager

Attachments:

- Attachment A – Detailed Description
- Attachment B – Application Materials (including historical photographs)
- Attachment C – Photographs (current)

**RESOLUTION NO. \_\_\_\_\_**

**A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PASADENA  
ADOPTING A DECLARATION OF HISTORIC LANDMARK DESIGNATION OF  
1621 NORTH LOS ROBLES AVENUE, PASADENA, CALIFORNIA**

WHEREAS, the Historic Preservation Commission has found that 1621 North Los Robles Avenue meets criterion "C", as set forth in Section 17.62.040(c) of the Pasadena Municipal Code; and

WHEREAS, the property at 1621 North Los Robles Avenue is significant because it embodies the distinctive characteristics of a historic resource property type, period, architectural style or method of construction, or represents the work of an architect, designer, engineer, or builder whose work is significant to the City or to the region, or that possesses high artistic values that are significant to the City or to the region; and

WHEREAS, the application for Historic Landmark designation is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to State CEQA Guidelines Section 15308; and

WHEREAS, Aurore B. Wright, the property owner, submitted the application for landmark designation; and

WHEREAS, the City Council may approve a recommendation from the Historic Preservation Commission to designate a Historic Landmark and evidence such approval by adopting a declaration executed by the Mayor pursuant to Subsection 17.62.050 (c) of the Pasadena Municipal Code.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED by the City Council of the City of Pasadena that the attached declaration of Historic Landmark designation for 1621 North Los Robles Avenue is hereby adopted.

Adopted at the \_\_\_\_\_ meeting of the City Council on the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2011 by the following vote:

AYES:

NOES:

ABSENT:

ABSTAIN:

---

MARK JOMSKY, CMC, City Clerk

Approved as to form:



Theresa E. Fuentes  
Assistant City Attorney

**DECLARATION OF HISTORIC LANDMARK DESIGNATION FOR:**

1621 NORTH LOS ROBLES AVENUE  
PASADENA, CALIFORNIA

Pursuant to the provisions of Section 17.62.050 of the Pasadena Municipal Code, the City Council of the City of Pasadena by this declaration hereby designates as a Historic Landmark certain real property described as:

Real property in the City of Pasadena, County of Los Angeles, State of California, described as follows:

THAT PART OF BLOCK "L" OF THE SUBDIVIDED LANDS OF J.H. PAINTER AND B.F. BALL, AS PER MAP RECORDED IN BOOK 4, PAGE 549 OF MISCELLANEOUS RECORDS, DESCRIBED AS FOLLOWS:

BEGINNING ON THE EAST LINE OF SAID BLOCK "L" 360 FEET NORTH OF THE SOUTHEAST CORNER OF SAID BLOCK; THENCE NORTH ON SAID EAST LINE 135 FEET; THENCE WEST AT RIGHT ANGLES 180 FEET; THENCE SOUTH AT RIGHT ANGLES 135 FEET; THENCE EAST AT RIGHT ANGLES 180 FEET TO THE BEGINNING.

APN: 5838-010-008

Under Pasadena Municipal Code Section 17.62.090, all work affecting designated Historic Landmarks, except ordinary maintenance and repair, such as but not limited to new construction and additions, exterior alterations, relocation, and demolition, is subject to review by the City of Pasadena.

DATED: \_\_\_\_\_

ATTEST:

CITY OF PASADENA  
A municipal corporation

\_\_\_\_\_  
Mark Jomsky, City Clerk

By: \_\_\_\_\_  
Bill Bogaard, Mayor