

# Agenda Report

October 22, 2012

**TO:** Honorable Mayor and City Council  
**FROM:** Planning & Community Development Department  
**SUBJECT: DESIGNATION OF 1383-1399 EAST WASHINGTON BOULEVARD & 1349-1365 N. HILL AVENUE AS A LANDMARK**

## **RECOMMENDATION:**

Staff recommends that the City Council:

1. Find that this action 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 Hill & Washington Apartments building at 1383-1399 E. Washington Boulevard & 1349-1365 N. Hill Avenue meets landmark designation criterion C in P.M.C. §17.62.040(C) because it is a locally significant, intact example of a 1920's-era two-story vernacular masonry mixed-use building, designed by architect B. Gregg Horton;
3. Postpone consideration of landmark designation until January, 2013 when it is anticipated that there will be a new property owner.

## **HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:**

On Monday, May 7, 2012, the Historic Preservation Commission found that the building at 1383-1399 E. Washington Boulevard & 1349-1365 N. Hill Avenue meets the criteria for designation as a Landmark and recommended that the City Council approve the designation of the building as a Landmark under criterion C of PMC §17.62.040(C)(2)(c).

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

The mixed-use building at 1383-1399 East Washington Boulevard is eligible for designation as a Landmark because it is a locally significant, intact example of a 1920's-era two-story vernacular masonry mixed-use building, designed by architect B. Gregg Horton.

Although there is no formal or written policy, it has been staff's practice not to recommend to the City Council approval of landmark designations without the consent of the property owner. In this case, the property is being marketed and is anticipated to be sold by the end of the year. The current owner believes it is more appropriate for the new owner to consider landmark designation. Consequently, staff is recommending that action be continued until January, 2013 when it is anticipated there will be new ownership of the property.

### **BACKGROUND:**

On February 3, 2012, Bridgid Fennell, Historic Preservation Commission representative from the Historic Highlands Landmark District, submitted an application for landmark designation of the property. The application was submitted in conjunction with applications for designation of the buildings at the southwest corner of East Washington Boulevard and North Hill Avenue in response to concerns about the potential sale of these buildings as redevelopment sites.

The staff evaluated the property according to the landmark criteria in Title 17 of the P.M.C. and determined that the building qualifies for designation. The property owners, Robert & Carolyn Spencer, brother and sister, were notified of the application on February 9, 2012, of staff's eligibility determination on March 15, 2012 and of the Historic Preservation Commission's determination on May 8, 2012. In addition, staff sent a letter to the property owner dated June 27, 2012 to request a written indication of support or opposition to the proposed designation.

The property owner did not submit a written response to this request; however, staff spoke with Carolyn Spencer on the telephone and explained the process and the effects of historic designation. Ms. Spencer indicated that she felt that it was not appropriate for her to support or oppose the designation due to the fact that she is attempting to sell the building. She further indicated that it would be more appropriate for the future owner to support or oppose the designation and that no interested parties have indicated intent to demolish or substantially alter the building. On October 16, 2012, Ms. Spencer changed her position and stated that she was opposed to the designation. Staff was unable to reach Mr. Spencer for his position on the matter.

### **Description**

#### **Property Data**

- Addresses: 1383-1399 E. Washington Boulevard & 1349-1365 N. Hill Avenue, Pasadena, CA 91104
- Location: Northwest corner of East Washington Boulevard and N. Hill Avenue
- Date of Construction: 1926 (source: original building permit)
- Original Architect: B. Gregg Horton (source: Pasadena Star-News, March 6, 1926)

- Original/Present Use: Commercial & Residential Mixed-Use
- Original Owner: F.E. Nelson (source: Pasadena Star-News, March 6, 1926)
- Property Size: 37,805 square feet (source: County Assessor)
- Building Size: 24,258 square feet (source: County Assessor)

## **Architectural Description**

### **The Site**

The site includes the two-story, L-shaped main building at the southeast corner of the property, a detached garage behind the building, and a surface parking area on the remainder of the site. The property is within a grouping of buildings that transition from the single-family residential character of North Hill Avenue to the commercial corridor of East Washington Boulevard.

### **Exterior Features of the Building**

The building is L-shaped in plan and has two separate components: a two-story portion along its entire East Washington Boulevard frontage and the southerly portion of the North Hill Avenue frontage and a one-story portion at the northerly end of the North Hill Avenue frontage. These two components read as separate buildings with similar detailing. The building was originally constructed of unreinforced masonry and was seismically reinforced in 2008. The brick is a tan color on the street facades and red on the sides and rear.

The two-story portion of the building has a continuous flat roof with a parapet that terminates in a simple brick detail at the roof edge. Between the second floor window headers and the roofline is a cast stone cornice with an ogee profile. Centered on the façade, below the cornice, is an individual letter sign mounted directly to the brick reads "Hill & Washington Apts." The façade is divided into 10 bays that are separated by engaged pilasters with cast stone caps and concrete bases. Most of the bays are the same width, except that the easterly three bays on the south elevation are narrower than the others due to the presence of a more prominently detailed entry to the corner retail space. On the south elevation, each of the bays has two window openings with wood double-hung divided-light windows at the upper floor and a glazed storefront with display windows and brick bulkheads flanking recessed entries with wood doors with large rectangular lights. The three narrower bays differ in that the two upper windows read as a single opening, each with a pair of windows separated by a mullion and the central entry below has a cast stone door surround with an ornamental header consisting of a central cartouche flanked by scrollwork and row of dentils below.

The east elevation of the two-story portion is largely the same design as the eastern end of the south elevation, except that the storefronts do not have entries and there are seven bays rather than ten. The two northernmost bays are also different in that one has a solid brick wall at the base instead of a storefront and the other is narrower; has

transomed entry doors to the apartment units with a cast stone surround, dentils and cornice; and does not have windows in the upper story. An individual-letter sign that reads, "Hill & Washington Apartments" attached to metal strips is incorporated into the door header in the frieze below the dentils and cornice.

The one-story portion of the east elevation is divided into four wide bays in a stepped configuration as the site slopes northward. The roofline terminates in a cast stone cornice with a scrollwork detail at each step. Each bay has a glazed storefront consisting of fixed display windows over a brick bulkhead flanking a recessed entry area (each with two wood doors with large rectangular lights), all of which is surmounted by a divided-light transom.

The side and rear elevations of the building are simpler and more utilitarian in character and have window openings with wood divided-light windows and simpler rear entry doors.

#### Garage & Site Features

A detached garage is at the rear of the site and is a simple flat-roofed structure with a plaster facade. The remainder of the site is surface parking.

#### Documented Changes to the Property

In 1932, a building permit was issued to "enlarge windows on south and east part." In 1936, a building permit was issued to "change storefronts from folding doors to show windows." Based on comparison of the existing building to a photograph published in the March 6, 1926 Pasadena Star-News, the storefront changes did not substantially alter the original storefront configuration. An addition to the rear of the northernmost portion of the building was done in 1960. Visual inspection indicates that some doors may have been replaced and signage has been installed over transom windows. In addition, photographs on file with the Planning Department indicate that the bulkheads were previously colored tiles that remain intact but have been painted black. A few fabric and metal awnings have been added.

#### Current Condition, Use, and Proposed Plans

The property is in good condition and is showing some signs of deterioration. In particular, wood windows and some areas of the exterior brick are weathered and some lettering from the original signage is missing or damaged. Most of the original doors and windows appear to be intact. The property has been under the same ownership for a number of years and is currently available for sale.

## **ANALYSIS:**

The Hill & Washington Apartments Building at 1383-1399 E. Washington Boulevard & 1349-1365 N. Hill Avenue is eligible for designation under Criterion C, (PMC §17.62.040(C)(2)(c)), which states:

[The property] embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, architectural style, period, or method of construction, or represents the work of an architect, designer, engineer, or builder whose work is of significance to the City or, to the region or possesses artistic values of significance to the City or to the region.

Under criterion C, the Hill & Washington Apartments Building is significant as an intact example of a 1920's-era vernacular masonry mixed-use building designed by architect B. Gregg Horton. The building exhibits a high quality of design, was constructed during a period of commercial/industrial expansion to outlying areas of the city and exhibits similar qualities to other vernacular masonry mixed-use buildings constructed elsewhere in the city. The building is a good example of the small body of work of B. Gregg Horton, whose extant designs contribute to the historic character of the City. Further, based on a photograph published in the March 6, 1926 Pasadena Star-News, it retains its original appearance to a high degree, including character-defining features of the style it represents. The building has architectural integrity (its ability to demonstrate why it is significant) through its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship and feeling.

Although the building meets landmark criteria, it has been staff's practice not to recommend to the City Council approval of landmark designations without the consent of the property owner. In this case, the property is being marketed and is anticipated to be sold by the end of the year. The current owner believes it is more appropriate for the new owner to consider landmark designation. Staff is therefore recommending that action be continued until January 2013.

The Pasadena Municipal Code does not allow the Council to deny the landmark approval without effecting future protection of the building. Section 17.62.050.B.3 of the P.M.C. states, "The Council may approve, modify, or disapprove the designation of a historic monument, landmark, historic sign, landmark tree or landmark district."

Further, Section 17.62.050.D.3 of the P.M.C states, "If the Council disapproves an application for designation of a historic monument, landmark...the interim protections shall no longer apply to those properties and a Certificate of Appropriateness shall no longer be required." When a Certificate of Appropriateness is no longer required the City has no authority to review alterations or demolition of the building, unless a discretionary action triggers CEQA.

**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.

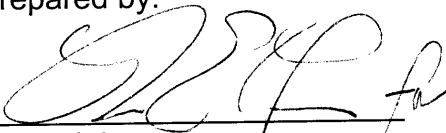
**FISCAL IMPACT:**

Because no action is recommended, there is no immediate fiscal impact.


Respectfully submitted,

*for*   
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Director of Planning & Community  
Development Department

Prepared by:

  
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Planner

Approved by:

*for*   
MICHAEL J. BECK  
City Manager

Attachments (2):

Attachment A – Application Materials  
Attachment B – Photographs