

# Agenda Report

January 14, 2013

**TO:** Honorable Mayor and City Council  
**FROM:** Planning & Community Development Department  
**SUBJECT: APPEAL OF DECISION: DENIAL OF 552 ELDORA ROAD AS A LANDMARK**

## **RECOMMENDATION:**

Staff recommends 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 552 Eldora Road does not meet the criteria for designation in P.M.C. §17.62.040 as a landmark;
3. Deny the designation of the property at 552 Eldora Road as a landmark.

## **HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:**

On Monday, November 5, 2012, the Historic Preservation Commission denied the designation of the property at 552 Eldora Road as a Landmark.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

The property at 552 Eldora Road does not qualify for designation as a landmark. Although the house is a nice example of New England Colonial Revival architecture that contributes to a landmark district eligible for designation, it does not meet the individual landmark designation criteria, including Criterion B for association with the life of Shirley Sargent under the National Register guidelines. The Historic Preservation Commission decided that upholding the denial of the landmark designation would be fitting as the significance of Shirley Sargent's writing of books did not develop on the property of 552 Eldora Road, but in her northern California home.

## **BACKGROUND:**

On March 9, 2012, Gary Prezeau, the property owner, submitted an application for designation of 552 Eldora Road as a landmark. Concurrent with the application, the

applicant also submitted an application for Historic Property Contract (Mills Act). Staff evaluated the property according to the landmark criteria in Title 17 of the P.M.C., and on April 24, 2012, determined that the house does not qualify for designation. The property owner appealed the staff decision, and on November 5, 2012 the Historic Preservation Commission denied the designation. On November 14, 2012, the property owner appealed the Historic Preservation Commission decision to the City Council.

### Property Data

- Address: 552 Eldora Road, Pasadena, CA 91104
- Historic Name: Shirley Sargent House
- Location: South side of Eldora Road between El Molino Avenue on the east and Los Robles Avenue on the west
- Date of Construction: 1923, documented by building permit
- Original Architect/Designer: Foss Design & Construction
- Original Contractor: Foss Design & Construction
- Original / Present Use: Single-family residence
- Original/Present Owner: Arthur W. Saunders/Gary Prezeau
- Property Size: 8,052 square feet
- Building Size: 1,980 square feet

### Site & Building Features

The site, an 8,052 square foot lot, is at the south side of Eldora Road between El Molino Avenue and Los Robles Avenue, in a neighborhood of single-family residences. The house, built in 1923 by Foss Design & Construction, has some distinctive characteristics of the New England Colonial Revival architectural style including a two-story symmetrical massing and fenestration pattern, boxed eaves, pairs of multi-paned double-hung sash windows with shutters, and a porch roof supported by Ionic columns that extends across the front elevation. It lacks the clapboard siding that is typical of the style. A detached two-car garage is at the southwest corner of the property with driveway access to Eldora Road at the west side of the lot.

### Original Occupants

The house was built for Arthur W. Saunders who lived there until 1937. The Sargents, including Shirley Sargent, author, and her father, Robert C, surveyor, lived at the house from approximately 1940-1960. Later inhabitants include Jessie Moorman and Janice Smith.

### Shirley Sargent

Shirley Sargent (July 12, 1927—December 3, 2004) was a historian of the Yosemite area. Between 1955 and 1998, she wrote over 20 books, the majority histories and the remainder fiction. Although she grew up in Pasadena, a significant part of her childhood

was spent in the Yosemite area. While living with her parents at 552 Eldora Road in Pasadena, she operated the Topsy-Turvy Nursery School at the house from 1949 until 1951, when she moved to the duplex at 530 N. El Molino Avenue where she continued to operate the school until approximately 1961. During this time, she continued to spend her summers in the Yosemite area. In 1961, she moved there permanently and by 1964 had built a house on a property in Foresta, known as “Flying Spur,” where she spent the bulk of her writing career. The house was burned in the 1990 Yosemite A-Rock Fire but was rebuilt. She continued to live there until she moved to her parents’ old home in Mariposa, before her death in 2004.

### **ANALYSIS:**

The property at 552 Eldora Road is not eligible for landmark designation under the criteria in the Pasadena Municipal Code. In reaching this conclusion, staff applied the methodology for evaluating the significance of historic properties in guidelines of the National Register of Historic Places, published by the National Park Service, and the criteria in the Pasadena Municipal Code. As required by P.M.C. §17.62.040.A, staff used the document “How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation, National Park Service, Park Service Bulletin #15, 2002” to evaluate the subject property. Staff also evaluated the building according to the historic context report, *Residential Period Revival Architecture and Development in Pasadena, 1915-1942*, including the list of properties and districts accompanying that report.

Pasadena Municipal Code §17.62.040.C.2 describes the criteria for designation as a landmark:

“A landmark may be the best representation in the City of a type of historic resource or it may be one of several historic resources in the City that have common architectural attributes that represent a particular type of historic resource. 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, region or state.
- b. It is associated with the lives of persons who are significant in the history of the city, region or state.
- c. It 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.
- d. It has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important locally in prehistory or history.”

Staff’s determination is based upon the following conclusions:

Criterion B – According to National Register criteria, properties eligible under this criterion are usually associated with a person’s productive life, reflecting the time period when he or she achieved significance, as follows:

*Several steps are involved in determining whether a property is significant...under Criterion B. First, determine the importance of the individual. Second, ascertain the length and nature of his/her association with the property under study and identify the other properties associated with the individual. Third, consider the property under Criterion B, as outlined below.....Properties eligible under Criterion B are usually those associated with a person's productive life, reflecting the time period when he or she achieved significance. In some instances this may be the person's home; in other cases, a person's business, office, laboratory, or studio may best represent his or her contribution. Properties that pre- or post-date an individual's significant accomplishments are usually not eligible.... properties associated with an individual's formative or later years may also qualify if it can be demonstrated that the person's activities during this period were historically significant or if no properties from the person's productive years survives.*

For the first step, the importance of Shirley Sargent as a California writer and historian has been established above. For the second step, the 552 Eldora Road property is associated with her early life, but not associated with her significant work. Sargent lived and worked at 552 Eldora Road in Pasadena between approximately 1940 and 1951. Between 1951 and 1961, she lived and worked at 530 N. El Molino Avenue in Pasadena. During these times, she spent most of the summers in the Yosemite area, and in 1961, she moved there permanently. By 1964 she settled on the “Flying Spur” property in Foresta until shortly before her death in 2004.

In the third step of the evaluation, the Pasadena house is associated with Shirley Sargent’s formative years and early adulthood but predates the period of her most significant work for which she is recognized. The Flying Spur property in Foresta is the one place that is most strongly associated with her productive life. According to Sargent’s biographer, “This was the most famous and most beloved of her residences, and where she was to live for more than three decades. It is difficult to overemphasize the historical, practical, symbolic, and emotional importance of Flying Spur to Shirley Sargent.” (p. 49, Shirley Sargent: Yosemite Historian, Fernando Penalosa, 2006.)

The applicant argues that because the original house at Flying Spur burned down in the 1990 fire, the rebuilt structure postdates most of Sargent’s significant work; therefore the structure no longer survives and properties from her formative years should be considered. However, the Flying Spur property survives, with a rebuilt house. Sargent in fact continued her work (her last published work was in 1998) at the same location in the new house. Based on the information above, it is clear that the significance of Flying Spur to Shirley Sargent is the location and not the particular house structure. According to the National Register criteria, a property retains integrity of association “if it is the place where the event or activity occurred and is sufficiently intact to convey that

relationship to an observer.” The Flying Spur property with the rebuilt house retains its integrity because it still conveys to the observer that it is Shirley Sargent’s house and where she did her significant writing. Flying Spur is the property that continues to best represent her contributions, which is the chief consideration in comparing properties.

Growing up at 552 Eldora Road in Pasadena, Shirley Sargent developed coping strategies to deal with dystonia. In his appeals to the Historic Preservation Commission and City Council, the applicant argues that Sargent should be recognized by Pasadena because she learned how to deal with her disability in Pasadena before her successful writing career. The applicant’s appeal included a suggestion to review the disability activist portion of her life in comparison to the life of disability activist Ed Roberts who attended and graduated from UC Berkeley. Often called the “father of the disability rights movement,” Ed Roberts devoted his career to disability advocacy. Staff did not find evidence that Shirley Sargent had achievements in the area of disability advocacy that are comparable to those of Ed Roberts, and no evidence was found that Sargent was directly involved in disability advocacy that resulted in specific improvements for the lives of disabled people while living in Pasadena.

Although her disability is a personal circumstance that adds a great deal of interest to her life story, her formative years at 552 Eldora Road are not themselves historically significant, based on the National Register criteria of association, as they are not associated with the significant work for which she is recognized. Therefore, this property does not meet the National Register criteria of association and does not meet Criterion B.

Criterion C – Within the context of the City, the house is not an exceptional example of the Colonial Revival style because there are more elaborate examples (with e.g. a detailed pediment, fanlights, elliptical windows, and/or cornice) in Pasadena.

The builder, Foss Design and Construction, is not listed as an architect in the Residential Period Revival Architecture and Development in Pasadena 1915-1942 context report, which lists all of Pasadena’s notable architects associated with the Period-Revival era. The house is not an example of the prolific local firm’s best work, which includes the Rankin House at 210 S. Orange Grove Boulevard, a Mediterranean four-plex at 775 E. California Boulevard, and a Craftsman at 257 S. Hudson Avenue. The firm’s work is typically associated with the Arts and Crafts period prior to 1915.

Lastly, the property as an individual example does not possess high artistic values when compared to other Colonial Revival houses in the City of Pasadena.

Criterion D – There are no known or likely archeological resources on the site. It is not at the location of likely early pre-historic habitation.

**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:**

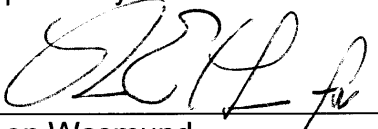
In some instances, owners of designated properties may apply to the City for Historic Property Contract, which allows an alternative and often lower property tax assessment. The City Council reviewed the projected loss of property tax revenue from this program in 2002 when it adopted a local Historic Property Contract (Mills Act) ordinance.

Respectfully submitted,



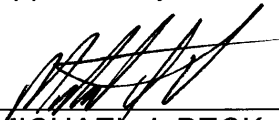
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Attachments:

- Attachment A – Vicinity Map
- Attachment B – Application Materials
- Attachment C – Decision Letter
- Attachment D – Appeal Application to Historic Preservation Commission
- Attachment E – Shirley Sargent Biography: Selected Pages
- Attachment F – Photographs
- Attachment G – Appeal Application to City Council