

# Agenda Report

March 23, 2015

**TO:** Honorable Mayor and City Council  
**FROM:** Planning & Community Development Department  
**SUBJECT: DESIGNATION OF 21 EAST HOWARD STREET 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 21 E. Howard Street meets Criterion "C" for designation as a landmark (P.M.C. §17.62.040) because the building is locally significant as the best representation in Pasadena of a Quonset hut, a type of temporary building used in World War II, and retains its integrity;
3. Approve the designation of the property at 21 E. Howard Street as a landmark;
4. Adopt the attached resolution approving a Declaration of Landmark Designation for 21 E. Howard Street, Pasadena, California;
5. Authorize the Mayor to execute the attached Declaration of Landmark Designation for 21 E. Howard Street, Pasadena, California; and
6. Direct the City Clerk to record the declaration with the Los Angeles County Recorder.

## **HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:**

At its regular meeting of January 6, 2015, the Historic Preservation Commission recommended that the City Council approve the designation of 21 E. Howard Street as a landmark under Criterion C of PMC §17.62.040.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

The Pasadena Motorcycle Club Quonset Hut at 21 E. Howard Street is the best remaining example of a Quonset hut in Pasadena and retains its most significant character-defining features; therefore, it qualifies for designation as a landmark under Criterion “C” as a locally significant example of a Quonset hut from World War II.

## **BACKGROUND:**

On November 5, 2014, Dennis Gagnier on behalf of the Pasadena Motorcycle Club, the property owner, submitted an application for landmark designation of the property. The staff evaluated the property according to the landmark criteria in Title 17 of the P.M.C. and determined that the structure qualifies for landmark designation.

### Property Data

- Historical Name: Pasadena Motorcycle Club
- Address: 21 E. Howard Street, Pasadena, CA 91103
- Location: North side of Howard Street, between North Fair Oaks and North Raymond Avenues
- Date of Construction: 1946 (on current site, documented by building permit)
- Original Architect: None
- Original Contractor: Not legible on original building permit
- Original / Present Use: World War II military use / Clubhouse
- Original / Present Owner: United States Government / Pasadena Motorcycle Club
- Lot size: 3,750 square feet
- Building size: 748 square feet

### Setting & Site Description

The site is a small 3,750 square foot lot in a mixed residential and low-intensity institutional neighborhood near North Fair Oaks Avenue. The rectangular lot slopes downward toward the street, and is 37.5 feet in width and 100 feet in depth. The clubhouse building is set back approximately 50 feet from the front property line and five feet from the west side and rear property lines. Between the clubhouse building and the east property line is concrete paving, and the front yard is paved with asphalt.

### Building Features

The building, a Quonset hut, was moved to and erected on the property in 1946, and is an example of the “Quonset hut-Redesign” model (see “Historical Overview” section beginning on page 3 of this report for further discussion of this building type). It is 17 feet in width and 44 feet in length. It consists of an arched roof, four-foot high vertical sides, and arched front and rear walls, all of corrugated steel. Above the intersection of

the arched roof and side walls on both sides of the building, a portion of the roof is raised by stilts to create openings that allow wood panels to be opened from the inside to let in light and air. The front wall has openings that accommodate an upswinging vehicle door at the center and a pedestrian door at the left side. Flanking the garage door are two vertical poles, the left for electrical service, and the right for an overhead light. A small metal sign identifying the Pasadena Motorcycle Club is above the garage door.

### Documented Changes to the Property

Building permit records indicate that the building permit was issued in October 1946 and final inspection was made in August 1947. The Pasadena Motorcycle Club acquired the property from Kenneth Slavin in July 1948. No changes to the property have been documented since the building was built.

The design of this “Quonset hut-Redesign” has some differences from the standard design. Changes were made to the front elevation (originally a pedestrian door flanked by two rectangular windows) to accommodate the current openings. Changes were also made to the roof at the side elevations to create openings for light and air. The 44-foot length of this building is 8 feet longer than the standard 36-foot length.

### Current Conditions, Use, and Proposed Plans

The property, used as a clubhouse, is in fair condition. There are no plans for changes to the building or to the use of the site.

### Quonset Huts

As the United States began its military build-up for World War II, the Navy recognized that there was a lack of structures that could be quickly deployed for housing, storage, and other purposes. The British had already developed and were using the Nissen hut, a semicylindrical, prefabricated structure. However, the structure was too large to ship and it was too difficult to attach the exterior cladding to the frame. The Navy approached the George A. Fuller Company and Stran-Steel, a division of the Great Lakes Steel Corporation to design a prefabricated structure that could be quickly assembled and adapted for any one of 48 purposes including galleys, showers, offices, and mess halls. (Thomas, Adam, Historitecture LLC. Soldiers of the sword, Soldiers of the Ploughshare: Quonset huts in the Fort Collins Urban Growth Area Historic Context and Survey Report, July 2003, Page 7.) The design team was given 60 days and was headed by Peter Dejongh, a Dutch engineer who was likely influenced by the work and philosophy of the Bauhaus movement and the belief that beauty came from function. (Ibid, Page 8.) Furthermore, the build-up for war meant that there was a paucity of resources and the necessity for new technologies. Dejongh’s influence coupled with Fuller/Stran-Steel’s experience with steel led to two innovations that made the Quonset hut possible: the Fuller Company’s nesting of building parts resulting in a smaller

shipping package and Stran-Steel's development of a nail groove that made it simple to attach the outer corrugated metal shell to the frame. The buildings could be packed in a 450-cubic-foot crate and shipped anywhere in the world to be assembled in a few hours. The Quonset hut was a reflection of the culture of wartime design and ingenuity. During WWII, between 150,000 and 170,000 Quonset huts were manufactured.

The original Quonset hut design ("T-rib Quonset") was 16 feet wide by 36 feet long and used a continuous arch so that the wall and roof were one continuous structural member. The semicircular arches were set four feet apart attached with bolts and tied to a concrete slab or grade-beams. The design was further refined throughout the war to adapt to the Navy's functional needs. The curvature of the roof created unusable space so Dejongh and his team created a new U-shaped frame. The new supports met the floor at a 90-degree angle, rose vertically for 4-feet then arched into a barrel-shaped roof. (Ibid, Page 9.) The new interior allowed for counters and shelving along the periphery walls without the loss of floor space. The new design was termed the "Quonset hut – redesign." More prototypes were developed during the war and in total, the Navy approved 86 different interior layouts and a 40-by-100 foot warehouse model. (Ibid, Page 9.)

After the war, manufacturers recognized that a domestic market existed for the huts to be used for storage, housing, commercial buildings, and light industry. The open floor plan huts were adapted for a wide range of uses including single-family homes, movie houses, hay barns, churches, repair shops, and small businesses. One of the largest purchasers of the Quonset huts was universities and colleges which lacked sufficient housing for returning veterans and their families.

### **ANALYSIS:**

The Pasadena Motorcycle Club Quonset Hut at 21 E. Howard Street is eligible for designation under Criterion C, (PMC §17.62.040.C.2), 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 this criterion, the Pasadena Motorcycle Club Quonset Hut is significant as the best representation in Pasadena of a Quonset hut, a type of temporary building used in World War II and subsequently adapted for housing various permanent uses. It is a highly important building type related to both military architecture and the architecture of the early-postwar era. During World War II, between 150,000 and 170,000 Quonset huts were manufactured and shipped around the world. The Quonset hut was used as a mobile temporary building that could be used for nearly any wartime program, including housing, storage, manufacturing, and recreation. After the war, surplus

Quonset huts were sold to the public for around \$1,000 each. The Quonset hut as a building type was a modern, affordable, adaptable, “building-in-a-box” that allowed people to construct homes or businesses with minimal cost and effort. The Quonset hut at 21 E. Howard Street appears to be the last World War II-era Quonset hut in the City of Pasadena that retains its integrity.

The building has a high level of architectural integrity (its ability to demonstrate why it is significant) through its design, materials, workmanship, association, and feeling, as follows:

- Design: The building retains its most significant design characteristics that identify it as a Quonset hut, in this case the “Quonset hut-Redesign” model with 4-foot vertical sidewalls and arched roof running the length of the building, and vertical front and rear walls with openings. The alterations (front wall openings, side openings created by raising a portion of the roof, and 8 feet of additional length) appear to be common for Quonset huts and some may have been made during military use. With these alterations the building still retains its form that identifies it as a Quonset hut.
- Materials: The building retains the original materials used in its construction, notably the corrugated steel roof and siding.
- Workmanship: The building’s workmanship is evident in the design and modular construction of its constituent parts.
- Association: The building is associated with World War II as it was probably used for wartime programs during the war. It is also associated with the period of development immediately after the war, during which many surplus buildings were used for various functions while more permanent building stock was being developed.
- Feeling: The building expresses the characteristics of a temporary, portable building from World War II.

Because the historical resource is a portable building, the location and setting do not affect its integrity.

There is one other known Quonset hut in Pasadena at 1446 E. Walnut Street, but the length of that Stran-Steel model was cut from 48 to 24 feet, and additional buildings were added to the rear, diminishing its integrity.

**COUNCIL POLICY CONSIDERATION:**

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

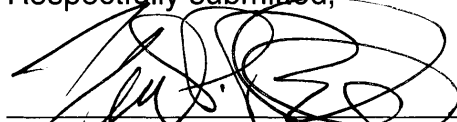
**ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:**

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:**

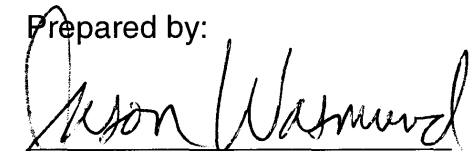
In some instances, owners of designated historic properties may apply to the City for a Historic Property Contract (Mills Act), which allows an alternative and often lower property tax assessment. The City Council reviewed the projected loss of property tax revenue from this program in 2002 when it adopted the local Mills Act ordinance. As a result of this program, the reduced property tax amount which comes out of the City's local share amount from the State, is a small fraction of the City's overall property tax revenue.

Respectfully submitted,

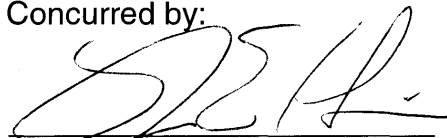


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Attachments: (4)

- Attachment A – Vicinity Map
- Attachment B – Application Materials
- Attachment C – Photographs
- Attachment D – Effects of Landmark Designation