



Agenda Report

November 5, 2018

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council
FROM: Planning & Community Development Department
SUBJECT: DESIGNATION OF THE CONDOMINIUM BUILDING AT 1000 CORDOVA STREET ("WHISPERING WATERS") 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 Whispering Waters condominium building at 1000 Cordova Street meets Criterion C for designation as a landmark pursuant to Pasadena Municipal Code (PMC) Section 17.62.040 because it embodies the distinctive characteristics of a locally significant property type, architectural style and period and represents the work of a builder whose work is of significance to the City. It is a locally significant example of a multiple family residential building in the mid-century modern style built by builder/developer Lionel V. Mayell;
3. Adopt the attached resolution approving a Declaration of Landmark Designation for 1000 Cordova Street, Pasadena, California;
4. Authorize the Mayor to execute the attached Declaration of Landmark Designation for 1000 Cordova Street, Pasadena, California; and
5. Direct the City Clerk to record the declaration with the Los Angeles County Recorder.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:

At its regular meeting of August 21, 2018, the Historic Preservation Commission recommended that the City Council approve the designation of 1000 Cordova Street as a landmark under Criterion C of PMC §17.62.040.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The condominium building at 1000 Cordova Street is a distinctive example of a garden multiple family residential building in the mid-century modern style built by builder/developer Lionel V. Mayell and retains most of its significant character-defining features. Therefore, the property at 1000 Cordova Street qualifies for designation as a landmark under Criterion "C" because it embodies the distinctive characteristics of a locally significant property type, architectural style and period and represents the work of a builder whose work is of significance to the City.

BACKGROUND:

On June 20, 2018, Nancy Holt, with unanimous support of the Whispering Waters Association Board of Directors, submitted an application for Landmark designation of the building at 1000 Cordova Street. City staff evaluated the property according to the criteria in Title 17 of the P.M.C. and determined that the building qualifies for designation as a landmark. The application is supported by 21 of the 30 condominium owners in the building (70%) – see petition signatures in Attachment A. At the Historic Preservation Commission meeting, two condominium owners expressed opposition to the designation (one of whom had previously signed the petition; 7%). The remaining seven condominium owners did not sign the petition in support of the designation, but have not expressed written or verbal opposition prior to the completion of this report (23%).

Property Data

- Address: 1000 Cordova Street, Pasadena, CA 91106
- Location: South side of Cordova Street, entire block between South Mentor and Catalina Avenues
- Date of Construction Completion: 1961 (source: Original Building Permit)
- Original Owner: Mayell Pasadena Enterprises (source: Original Building Permit)
- Original Architect: None; Engineer Paul J. Toien (source: Original Building Permit)
- Original Builder: Mayell Pasadena Enterprises (Source: Original Building Permit)
- Original / Present Use: Multiple-Family Residence
- Property size: 25,994 square feet (source: Los Angeles County Assessor)
- Building size: 37,384 square feet; 30 residential units (source: Building Description Blank)

The Site

The property is located on an irregularly shaped lot on the south side of Cordova Street, on the entire block between South Mentor and Catalina Avenues, which is a stretch of Cordova Street that curves northward from west to east. The subject building is

stepped against the curve into two main building volumes, joined by a central vertical circulation core connected to the street by a bridge and stair. A series of pools, originally filled with water and incorporating lighting and fountains, but now filled with soil and gravel, occupy a varying-depth setback from Cordova Street. The areas outside of the pools, as well as the setback areas along the two side streets, are landscaped. A low concrete retaining wall lines the edge of Cordova Street, lowering to a curb at the eastern end of the block and landscaping along the side streets aligns with street grade. Portals at the southern end of the property on both side streets provide vehicular access to a subterranean parking structure, adjacent to which are short paths and stairs which lead to secondary pedestrian access points to the first floor of the building and, separately, to the subterranean parking structure.

Exterior Features of the Building

As stated above, the building is divided into two building blocks, roughly rectangular in plan, joined at the center by a vertical circulation core. It is four stories high overall, with some portions being three stories and the circulation core extending slightly higher than the main building volumes. The roof is flat with extended canopies and a simple, stepped cornice at the edge. The entire exterior is coated in heavy-dash-coat stucco and the primary north elevation of the building is characterized by alternating areas of stacked projecting balconies of varying lengths accessed by large aluminum sliding-glass doors set against solid wall areas with stacked flush, horizontally oriented window openings with thin-framed aluminum sliding and fixed windows. The painted-metal balcony railings on this elevation are one of the most distinctive features of the building and consist of framed rows of circles and semi-circles. A second distinctive feature on this elevation is the circulation core which incorporates open, covered walkways with railings matching the balconies, a large panel of geometric breeze blocks attached to which is a painted metal sign that reads "Whispering Waters" and a floating glass elevator. A backless bench is set at the edge of an open walkway along the front of the circulation core. The side elevations are more austere as they lack balconies and consist of stucco walls with stacked rectangular window openings with aluminum sliding windows. The rear (south) elevation consists of continuous projecting stacked open walkways with simpler metal railings and posts, exterior stairs, aluminum windows and solid entry doors with diamond-shaped brass plates at the doorknobs. Other building details include a projecting concrete ledge marking the first floor level, exposed square painted-metal downspouts, an hourglass-shaped unpainted metal light fixture near the main entrance, square soffit light fixtures at the balconies, metal mesh security gates at the main entrance, translucent privacy panels with circular metal detailing matching the balcony railings adjacent to the elevator doors at each level, and translucent panels separating adjoining balconies.

Documented Changes to the Property

The property has undergone minimal exterior alterations since it was originally completed in 1961. Windows and sliding doors were replaced in unit 401 (penthouse

level, eastern end of building) in 2009. Also in 2009, the pools were altered by lowering the coping and installing soil and gravel within them. Staff understands that at that time, this was done as a measure to improve the appearance of the front yard in a manner that was determined by the homeowners association board to be more cost effective than restoring the pools as they were originally designed. At that time, the pools had been empty for many years, apparently due to waterproofing issues. Central air conditioning units are seen on many balconies with conduit encased in metal similar to the downspouts running along the building exterior. Many of the entry doors on the rear (south) elevation have non-original screen doors.

Current Condition, Use, and Proposed Plans

The exterior of the building is currently in good condition and it continues to be used as a multiple family residence. No significant changes to the property are proposed at this time.

Historical Overview

Cultural Resources of the Recent Past Historic Context

The period of development between 1935 and 1965 is documented in the City's 2007 historic context report "Cultural Resources of the Recent Past." The report identifies significant themes and events in the development of Pasadena during this period as well as property types, architectural styles, influential practitioners, important buildings and registration requirements. The historic context developed in this report outlines the seeds of Modernism emerging in Europe in the 1920's and, although a few Modernist houses were built in America during the 1920's, it became more prevalent following a 1932 exhibition on the International Style in New York. World War II and the emergence of new technology at Caltech and NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory stimulated the local economy and created a need for low-cost housing. The Case Study House Program was one important effort aimed at developing prototypical housing that could be adapted for multiple sites, but in practice became a showcase for architects to design high-style, site-specific works. Experimental work in Pasadena included a contest by the Better Housing Bureau of Pasadena which resulted in the construction of a low-cost model home designed by Theodore Pletsch and built directly across from City Hall and the development of the "airform" or "bubble" house designed by architect Wallace Neff. These and other efforts resulted in "the discovery that a good house could be made of inexpensive materials, that outdoor living was important to the quality of life, and that formal spaces such as separate dining rooms are expendable when space is limited." Federal Housing Administration (FHA) programs also resulted in the development of large-scale residential neighborhoods that included planning for street and parks as well as buffers of commercial areas and multi-family dwellings along major arterials.

Multiple Family Residential Development Theme

The “Cultural Resources of the Recent Past” historic context report identifies a theme of Multiple Family Residential Development, which is described as follows:

In the years immediately preceding and following the Second World War, local trends in residential development and design began to shift dramatically. While the overwhelming majority of residential development in Pasadena prior to 1935 was in the form of the detached single-family house, the postwar period is marked by a proliferation of multiple family dwellings. This was largely in response to the overall housing shortage that created a need for higher density to accommodate the influx of new residents.

Multiple family housing in Pasadena from this period tends to range from two to four-stories in height, with some integration of the indoor and outdoor spaces, and a remarkable quality of design. Postwar multiple family housing also included modern conveniences such as elevators, improved mechanical systems, up to date appliances, central air conditioning, outdoor balconies, and newly available prefabricated components such as steel frame windows and sliding glass doors.

Many apartments in Pasadena are noteworthy for their attempts at combining modern materials, techniques, and floor plans with various revival styles, Asian influences, or Ranch styles.

Multiple Family Residence Property Type, Garden Apartment Building Subtype

The “Cultural Resources of the Recent Past” historic context report identifies the Multiple Family Residence property type, with three subtypes: the Bungalow Court Subtype, the Duplex/Triplex/Fourplex Subtype and the Garden Apartment Building Subtype. Whispering Waters is an example of the latter subtype, which is described in the report as follows:

The garden apartment building was the dominant multi-family housing type in Southern California from the mid-1940s through the 1960s. A higher-density configuration, these properties contain multiple units within a two- or three-story structure, arranged around a common patio or landscaped courtyard. These buildings typically feature a central lobby and common stairwells and corridors. Larger buildings may have an L-shaped or U-shaped plan around a central patio, often with a swimming pool. Garden apartment buildings may be arranged in groups of two or more, creating a complex within a large green space. Garages are detached to the rear. In Pasadena, this property subtype is most often associated with the Minimal Traditional, Mid-Century Modern or Vernacular Modern styles.

Registration requirements for this property type indicate that resources that would qualify for designation would be a good example of a period architectural style and/or of the work of a significant architect or designer. It would display most of the character-

defining features of its style and retain integrity of design, materials and setting. Alterations should not significantly change the historic appearance.

Mid-Century Modern Style

Mid-Century Modern describes the postwar iteration of the International Style in both residential and commercial design. The International Style was characterized by geometric forms, smooth wall surfaces, and an absence of exterior decoration. Mid-Century Modern represents the adaptation of these elements to the local climate and topography, as well as to the postwar need for efficiently built, moderately-priced homes. In Pasadena, this often meant the use of wood post-and-beam construction. The Mid-Century Modern house or office is characterized by its clear expression of structure and materials, large expanses of glass, and open interior plan. Local practitioners of the style included prewar International Style architects like Rudolph Schindler, Richard Neutra, Gregory Ain and Harwell Hamilton Harris, as well as second generation Modernists like Ray Kappe, Buff & Hensman, Ladd & Kelsey, Carl Maston, A. Quincy Jones, Whitney Smith, and Wayne Williams. Architects such as John Lautner incorporated geometric and sculptural forms, embracing a more expressionistic or organic version of the style. Richard Neutra's Perkins House at 1540 Poppy Peak Drive (1955) and Buff & Hensman's Dubnoff Residence at 1150 La Loma Road (1965) are both excellent residential examples of Mid-Century Modernism in Pasadena.

Character-defining features of the Mid Century Modern style are:

- One or two-story configuration
- Simple geometric forms
- Expressed post-and-beam construction, in wood or steel
- Flat roof with wide overhanging eaves and cantilevered canopies
- Unadorned wall surfaces
- Exterior panels of wood, stucco, brick or stone
- Flush-mounted metal frame full-height and clerestory windows
- Exterior staircases, decks, patios and balconies
- Little or no exterior decorative detailing

Lionel V. Mayell (1897-1978)

The "Cultural Resources of the Recent Past" historic context report includes Lionel V. Mayell as a significant practitioner of this period, whose work is described as follows:

Lionel V. Mayell was a prolific builder of well-executed Modernist apartment buildings in Pasadena during the 1950s and 1960s. Mayell's family came to Los Angeles in 1909. He studied Greek at Occidental College and law at Stanford University. While at Stanford, Mayell became interested in the construction business, particularly in the co-operative

apartments being built in the East. In 1922 he completed his first co-op apartment house, located in Long Beach, that he both financed and built. By 1929 his projects totaled \$10 million. In 1977, biographer Helen Kooiman Hosier called Mayell the “father of the own-your-own apartment concept, today known around the world as the condominium.” Mayell retired from the construction business in 1966 and moved to San Bernardino.

Mayell’s other developments in Pasadena include Orange Grove Manor at 164-180 S. Orange Grove Boulevard (1949); the apartment building at 707 S. Orange Grove (1950); Capri Aire Apartments at 660 S. Orange Grove Boulevard (1951); the apartment building at 1691 San Pasqual Street (1962); Plaza del Arroyo apartments at 101 N. Grand Avenue; and Villa San Pasqual at 1000 San Pasqual Street (1954, a designated landmark). The historic context report also states, “At Whispering Waters, Mayell expanded on the garden apartment theme that he had explored at Villa San Pasqual and other multi-family dwellings, and took the concepts of modern indoor/outdoor living and connection with nature to a high-rise building.”

ANALYSIS:

The Whispering Waters building at 1000 Cordova Street is eligible for designation as a landmark under Criterion C of PMC Section 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.

Generally, in order to qualify under Criterion C, a property type would display most of the character-defining features of its style. It must retain high integrity of design, materials and workmanship that convey its period of construction. While most buildings undergo alteration over time, these alterations should not significantly change the historic appearance of the building.

Under Criterion C, the Whispering Waters building at 1000 Cordova Street is significant because it is a locally significant, intact example of a multiple-family residential building in the Mid-Century Modern style, built by Lionel V. Mayell. It displays most of the character-defining features of the style as described above, with the addition of a significant feature in the pools along the north side of the site. The building has a high level of architectural integrity (its ability to demonstrate why it is significant) through its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship and feeling, as follows:

- Location: The building and other site features are in their original locations.

- Design: The building retains its original form, plan, structure, and style, including its exterior stucco cladding, original fenestration, roof form, entry and circulation features, pools and landscaping.
- Setting: The surrounding setting of multiple-family residential buildings near the South Lake Avenue commercial district is largely intact.
- Materials: The building retains its original exterior materials.
- Workmanship: The building retains the majority of its exterior materials and features that reflect the craftsmanship of mid-20th century multi-family residential design and construction, and therefore retains integrity of workmanship.
- Feeling: The property clearly expresses the characteristics of the mid-century modern architectural style and evokes the feeling of the mid-twentieth-century garden apartment building described in the Cultural Resources of the Recent Past Historic Context Report.

Based on the above, the property retains sufficient integrity to qualify for designation as a landmark under Criterion C. The building retains all of its original character-defining features, including four-story configuration with subterranean parking, simple geometric forms, flat roof with projecting canopies, projecting balconies with decorative railings, stucco exterior wall coating, aluminum windows and sliding doors, elaborately detailed entryway and associated pools and landscaping. The alterations that have been made to the building, including replacement windows in one unit and infill of pools with soil and gravel are minor, reversible, and do not significantly change the appearance of the original structure.

Analysis of Significance Under Criteria A & B

The submitted application suggests that the property may also be eligible for designation under Criteria A and B, which state, respectively: "It is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of the history of the City, region, or State;" and "It is associated with the lives of persons who are significant in the history of the City, region, or State."

According to National Register Bulletin 15 (NRB15), "How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation," a property may be considered significant under Criterion A if it is associated with "a pattern of events or a historic trend that made a significant contribution to the development of a community, State or the nation." It goes on to state that, "mere association with historic events or trends is not enough, in and of itself, to qualify under Criterion A: the property's specific association must be considered important as well. For example, a building historically in commercial use must be shown to have been significant in commercial history." NRB15 indicates that "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." It also states, "architects, artisans, artists and engineers are often represented by their works, which are eligible under Criterion C. Their homes and studios, however, can be eligible

under Criterion B, because these usually are the properties with which they are most personally associated.”

The application includes documentation indicating that the building is an early example of an “own-your-own” apartment building, now known as condominiums, which continue to be a very common type of multi-family residential development in Pasadena. The application also demonstrates that Lionel Mayell was instrumental in bringing this concept, which was already common on the east coast, to the west. Whispering Waters was his second-to-last project and one of several that he completed over his career that demonstrated the success of this type of development. However, based on the information provided, the specific influence of Whispering Waters to the proliferation of condominiums in Pasadena or in the region, state or nation cannot be determined. As such, at this time, staff does not believe that there is sufficient evidence to support a determination of the building’s eligibility under Criterion A.

Although Mayell was the developer and builder of the project, he did not live or maintain an office in the building. It was also built at the end of his productive life. As such, he is not personally associated with the building and it would therefore not be eligible for designation under Criterion B. The association of the building with Mayell’s activities as the developer/builder of the building is addressed in Criterion C.

COUNCIL POLICY CONSIDERATION:

The General Plan Land Use Element – Guiding Principle 2: “Pasadena’s historic resources will be preserved. Citywide, new development will be in harmony with and enhance Pasadena’s unique character and sense of place. New construction that could affect the integrity of historic resources will be compatible with, and differentiated from, the existing resource;” and Goal 8: “Preservation and enhancement of Pasadena’s cultural and historic buildings, landscapes, streets and districts as valued assets and important representations of its past and a source of community identity, and social, ecological, and economic vitality.”

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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Approved by:



STEVE MERMELL
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Attachments: (4)

Attachment A – Application including narrative report, historical documentation, 2005 photographs, original floor plan and board and owner support petitions

Attachment B – Vicinity Map

Attachment C – Current Photographs

Attachment D – Effects of Historic Designation