

Agenda Report

TO: CITY COUNCIL

DATE: JUNE 4, 2007

FROM: CITY MANAGER

SUBJECT: DESIGNATION OF 1430 WICKS ROAD ("RAPOR") AS A HISTORIC MONUMENT

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the City Council:

1. Acknowledge that the designation of a historic resource is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act under Class 8, Actions by Regulatory Agencies for Protection of the Environment (CEQA Guidelines, Article 19, §15308);
2. Find that the property (including main house, studio, garage and office) at 1430 Wicks Road is significant under Criterion C for designation as a historic monument (P.M.C. §17.62.040 A) because they are exceptional in their embodiment of the distinctive characteristics of mid-century Modern residential architecture and are an important representation of the work of architect Conrad Buff of the architectural firm of Buff & Hensman, a firm that is significant at the state-wide level. The property is also significant under Criterion B because Conrad Buff, an important figure in the history of the region, designed the house and studio for himself and lived there for a portion of his productive life.
3. Approve the designation of the property at 1430 Wicks Road as a historic monument.
4. Adopt the attached resolution approving a Declaration of Historic Monument Designation for 1430 Wicks Road, Pasadena, California;
5. Authorize the Mayor to execute the attached Declaration of Historic Monument Designation for 1430 Wicks Road, Pasadena, California; and
6. Direct the City Clerk to record the declaration with the Los Angeles County Recorder.

RECOMMENDATION FROM THE HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

On April 16, 2007, at a noticed public hearing, the Historic Preservation Commission voted unanimously to recommend approval of the designation of

1430 Wicks Road as a historic monument under criteria B and C of PMC §17.62.040 A.

BACKGROUND

On March 7, 2007, property owners, Robert and Donna Grossi submitted the application for designation of 1430 Wicks Road as a landmark. The staff and the Historic Preservation Commission have concurred that the property should be designated as a historic monument (a higher level of designation indicating regional, statewide or national significance) due to the integrity of the property and its regional importance as an intact representation of mid-century Modern architecture designed by the architectural firm of Buff & Hensman, a firm that is significant at the state-wide level, as a residence for one of the principals of the firm. The applicants have indicated that they do not object to this change in their original request.

DESCRIPTION

The 0.7-acre property is located on a landlocked parcel south of Wicks Road, accessed by a steep, curvilinear driveway within an easement over the adjacent property to the north (1444 Wicks Road). The site sits at the top of a hill with a view of the city and the rectilinear buildings are oriented with primary elevations facing east. The residence, garage and studio on the site were completed in 1978 and the office was completed in 1986.

The one-story buildings have a symmetrical, boxy form with minimal materials: medium-dash coat stucco, redwood, glass and terracotta tile. The property is divided into four distinct sections which progress as follows from the end of the driveway to the rear of the lot: a 582-square-foot structure containing the garage, studio, entry and staircase (at lower grade with roof terraces), ascending to a pool, loggia, and the 1,860-square-foot main house. Attached to the north side of the garage/studio/entry structure is the 870-square-foot office, originally conceived as an art gallery and also designed by Buff.

A detailed architectural description of the property is attached (Attachment C)

Buff & Hensman, Architects.

Conrad Buff III (1926-1988) and Donald Hensman (1924-2002) formed the firm of Buff & Hensman in Pasadena in 1952. This collaboration, which lasted nearly 40 years between the two USC-trained architects, produced designs for numerous residential, commercial and institutional projects throughout Southern California. The firm's office was located in Pasadena and is responsible for a total of 44 projects in Pasadena (three condominium projects, one office building (a building to house the firm's offices), six remodels/additions and 34 single-family residences).

Over the course of their career, the firm won more than 30 awards from the American Institute of Architects (AIA). Buff also won the AIA's first Outstanding Craftsmanship Award in 1988 for furniture designs, 15 of which are present in the house. The firm designed two houses for the Case Study House Program and a new Governor's Mansion, commissioned by outgoing Governor Ronald Reagan and in which the new Governor, Jerry Brown, refused to live.¹

ANALYSIS

The property at 1430 Wicks Road ("Rapor") is eligible for historic monument designation under Criterion C, (§17.62.040 PMC) which states:

(The property) is exceptional in the embodiment of the distinctive characteristics of a historic resource property type, period, architectural style or method of construction, or is an exceptional representation of the work of an architect, designer, engineer, or builder whose work is significant to the region, State or nation, or that possesses high artistic values that are of regional, statewide or national significance.

Under this criterion, Rapor is significant as an intact example of mid-century modern residential style by the accomplished local architectural firm of Buff & Hensman. The building exhibits architectural integrity (its ability to demonstrate why it is significant) through its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association. It is in its original location and is an excellent and intact example of late Modernism designed by a distinguished regional architectural firm.

The house expresses the influence of Modernism in its use of strong geometric forms, flat roofs and simple detailing. The subtle influence of traditional Japanese architecture is expressed in the use of wood, simplicity of form and integration of buildings with outdoor features. Craftsman influence is expressed in the rich use of wood on both the interior and exterior, earth-tone coloring and art-glass doors. The house is one of few remaining unaltered examples of this pivotal period in the firm's work, when it was transitioning from the post-and-beam style to the heavier, boxy forms of their later work. The council recently designated as a historic monument another house from this period in Buff & Hensman's work: the Narver Residence at 345 Markham Place.

The firm won an AIA honor award in 1982 for Rapor's design and articles about the house were published in Design West Magazine, Sunset Magazine, Los Angeles Times Home Magazine, and Pasadena Magazine.²

¹ Register, Kathy, "Renowned architect Buff dies at 62," Pasadena Star-News, October 11, 1998. & Hensman, Donald, James Steele (ed.); Buff & Hensman; Architectural Guild Press, 2004.

² From plaque attached to the house

The property is also eligible for designation under Criterion B, which states:

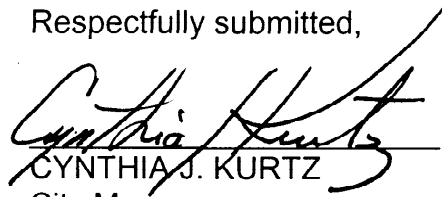
[The property] is associated with the lives of persons who are significant in the history of the region, state or nation.

Properties eligible under this criterion are usually associated with a person's productive life, reflecting the time period when he or she achieved significance. (How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation, National Park Service, Park Service Bulletin #15, 2002). Under this criterion, Rapor is significant as the only house designed by Conrad Buff for himself and his wife. Buff lived in the house from its construction until his death in 1988. The house was designed and built during the firm's productive period.

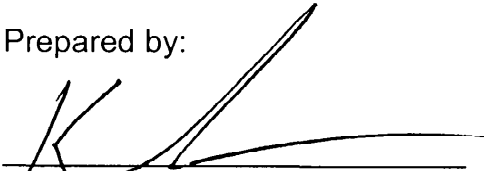
FISCAL IMPACT

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,


CYNTHIA J. KURTZ
City Manager

Prepared by:


Kevin Johnson, Planner

Approved by:

JRP 
Richard Bruckner, Director of Planning & Development

ATTACHMENT A: Application & Taxpayer Protection Form

ATTACHMENT B: Photographs & Excerpts from the Text Buff & Hensman
(Architectural Guild Press, 2004)

ATTACHMENT C: Detailed Architectural Description of Property & Current
Photographs

ATTACHMENT D: Effects of Historic Designation