

Agenda Report

TO: CITY COUNCIL

DATE: SEPTEMBER 17, 2007

FROM: CITY MANAGER

SUBJECT: Appeal of a Decision by the Historic Preservation Commission to Deny a Certificate of Appropriateness for Installation of French Doors and Balcony at 975 North Hudson Avenue (Washington Square Landmark District)

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the City Council:

1. Acknowledge that the project is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (Article 19, §15331, Class 31, Historical Resource Restoration/Rehabilitation);
2. Find that the design of the newly installed French doors and balcony on the primary elevation of the house at 975 North Hudson Avenue is inconsistent with the City's Design Guidelines for Historic Districts, the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Illustrated Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings; and
3. Based on these findings, affirm the decision of the Historic Preservation Commission to deny a Certificate of Appropriateness for installation of French doors and balcony on the front elevation of the house at 975 North Hudson Avenue.

RECOMMENDATION FROM THE HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

At a public meeting on May 7, 2007, the Historic Preservation Commission reviewed an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness for an after-the-fact approval of new French doors and a balcony on the front elevation of the house at 975 North Hudson Avenue. The Commission voted unanimously to uphold the staff decision to deny the application for a Certificate of Appropriateness.

BACKGROUND

The subject property is located on North Hudson Avenue, north of East Mountain Street and south of Belvidere Street. The house, built in 1922, is a one-story

Mission Revival style bungalow that is contributing to the Washington Square Landmark District. Rectangular in plan, it has a flat roof, smooth stucco coating, and a front façade divided into two bays.

A photograph of the house in the 1992 survey of the Palm Terrace neighborhood depicts the original, multi-paned casement window on the front elevation in the current location of the new French doors and balcony. Later photographs on file (date unknown) indicate that the original window had been removed sometime after 1992 and replaced with an aluminum-framed casement window in a downsized opening; in these photographs the outline of the original window opening is visible on the plastered front wall of the house. The new French doors, installed without a building permit and without a Certificate of Appropriateness, replace the non-original aluminum-framed casement window.

The steel-framed French doors are set beneath a curvilinear Mission-style arch. The opening is larger in size than the original window opening. The balcony, with a scrolled wrought-iron guardrail, is a new feature on the house.

On February 26, 2007, the property owner submitted an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness for retroactive approval of the French doors and balcony. Acting under the provisions of §17.62.090, City staff reviewed the application and denied it on March 28, 2007. On April 3, 2007, the applicant appealed this decision to the Historic Preservation Commission. On May 7, 2007, the Historic Preservation Commission reviewed the application for an appeal and affirmed the staff's decision to deny the Certificate of Appropriateness.

ANALYSIS

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Design Guidelines for Historic Districts support the recognition of each property as a physical record of its time, place, and use. They specify that when necessary replacement elements shall match the original design as closely as possible and—when possible—be substantiated by documentary, physical, or pictorial evidence; alternatively missing features may be replaced with a contemporary but compatible new design.

In this case, the doors and balcony do not comply with the Secretary's Standards and the Design Guidelines because they create a false sense of historical development. The doors also exceed the size of the original window opening, and the arched opening and balcony are new ornamental features that never existed on the front of the house. There is no documentary, physical, or pictorial evidence to justify the design of these new features.

To comply with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and the Illustrated Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings, the opening should be changed to a window that either matches the original (i.e., wood-constructed

multi-light casement) or a new window that is smaller in size than the French doors and compatible in design with the house.

In its review of the application, the Historic Preservation Commission requested the applicant to include the following information as part of a new application for a Certificate of Appropriateness:

- Removal of the two new lanterns and balcony,
- Details of plaster work; to ensure minimal visibility of the patch-work that will be required to reduce the window opening to its original size, and
- Details of a replacement window; to match the original window documented in pictorial evidence on file.

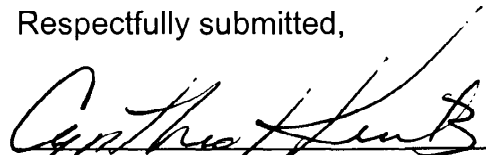
The Commission suggested that this approach would restore the front of the house to its original condition.

The owner contends that the doors and balcony are of high-quality materials and that their design is appropriate to the architectural style of the house.

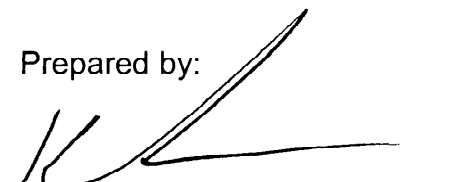
FISCAL IMPACT

Applications for review of a Certificate of Appropriateness are exempt from fees in a landmark district. The Council's action to grant or deny this appeal has no fiscal impact on revenues to the City.

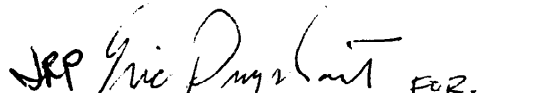
Respectfully submitted,


CYNTHIA J. KURTZ
City Manager

Prepared by:


Kevin Johnson, Planner

Approved by:

JRP  FOR.
Richard J. Bruckner, Director of
Planning and Development
Department

ATTACHMENTS:

- ATTACHMENT A: Application & Taxpayer Protection Form
- ATTACHMENT B: Photographs & Survey Form
- ATTACHMENT C: Site Plan & Elevations
- ATTACHMENT D: Decision Letter from the Historic Preservation Commission