

Agenda Report

April 12, 2010

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council
FROM: Planning & Development Department
**SUBJECT: DESIGNATION OF 841 EAST WASHINGTON BOULEVARD
(WASHINGTON THEATER) AS A LANDMARK**

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 (CEQA Guidelines §15308: Class 8 - Actions by Regulatory Agencies for Protection of the Environment);
2. Find that the property at 841 East Washington Boulevard is significant under Criterion "A" for designation as a landmark (P.M.C. §17.62.040) in the areas of social history and entertainment/recreation due to its influence in the development of the North Lake-Washington area in the 1920s and its combination of theater, commercial/office and residential uses—and under Criterion "C" because it embodies the characteristics of the Spanish Colonial Revival style in a theater and as a work of architect Clarence L. Jay;
3. Approve the designation of the property at 841 East Washington Boulevard as a landmark;
4. Adopt the attached resolution approving a Declaration of Landmark Designation for 841 East Washington Boulevard, Pasadena, California;
5. Authorize the Mayor to execute the attached Declaration of Landmark Designation for 841 East Washington Boulevard, Pasadena, California; and
6. Direct the City Clerk to record the declaration with the Los Angeles County Recorder.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:

On Tuesday, February 15, 2010, the Historic Preservation Commission recommended that the City Council approve the designation of 841 East Washington Boulevard as a landmark under both criterion A and C of PMC §17.62.040.

BACKGROUND:

On November 24, 2009, Pasadena Heritage and Dale Trader filed an application for designation of 841 E. Washington Boulevard (also known as 839-853 E. Washington

Boulevard) as a landmark. On December 31, 2009 the staff determined that the property is eligible for landmark designation under Criterion "A" and Criterion "C."

The theater and attached apartment building are unoccupied and have been vacant since 1989. In 2005 the City worked with the owners on a rehabilitation proposal that included financial assistance, using redevelopment funds, and listing the property in the National Register to take advantage of the rehabilitation tax credit. The City recently issued a building permit for seismic retrofitting of the entire building.

At the public hearing with the Historic Preservation Commission, the owners, Gagik and Jacqueline Buickian, expressed support for the application for landmark designation of the property.

COUNCIL POLICY CONSIDERATION:

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

Description:

The building was completed in 1924 and designed by the architect Clarence L. Jay and H.M. Patterson (associate architect) in the Spanish Colonial Revival style. It consists of three main components: a two-story, retail/office volume of approximately 9,500 square feet that also contains the theatre foyer and lobby; a 900-seat theater of approximately 11,500 square feet; and a three-story, residential wing of approximately 16,000 square feet with 30 apartments.

The two-story retail/office component is the most architecturally distinctive portion of the building. The front façade is symmetrically organized with three arched openings on either side of the semi-enclosed foyer. The foyer itself is paved in colored terrazzo, expressing stylized floral designs and geometric borders (one of only three surviving examples of colored terrazzo paving from the 1930s in the city). Above the arcaded openings, a stepped molding extends across the façade separating the first and second stories. The second-story has nine wood-casement windows, separated by panels covered with applied fluted pilasters. The building also has a clay-tiled roof and decorative wooden corbels supporting the extended eaves.

Attached at the rear is the three-story apartment building. Plain in appearance and rectangular in plan, this building has unreinforced masonry walls and a flat roof. The exterior walls have a smooth stucco finish and are punctuated with deeply recessed window openings, multi-light steel casement windows.

The application for landmark designation does not extend to the interior. By code, interior designations are restricted to the historic monument category of landmark and in those cases only to public or semi-public spaces with regional, state-wide, or national significance.

Alterations

In 1937 the theater façade, marquee, and ticket booth were redesigned in a Streamline Moderne style with more classically inspired ornament. The front arches were closed in above the spring line and stuccoed over. Flush, rectangular display windows with decorative patterns of colored opaque glass in stainless-steel frames replaced the original arched windows. The theater and shop walls were clad in Vitrolite panels, neon accents were added to the marquee, and the pilasters were added between the second story windows, obscuring the original decorative medallions. Most of these alterations have been reversed. More recently, the original plaster coating on the arcaded base was removed and the structural (rendered) brick wall was exposed and sandblasted. A significant alteration to the apartment wing has been the removal of the original recessed entryway facing Prime Court (on the east). This opening has been entirely infilled.

Clarence L. Jay (1888-1983)

After completing coursework at Washington University in St. Louis, Clarence L. Jay accepted his first professional position with a New York-based architectural firm. In 1918 he moved back to his native Southern California and in 1925, Jay began operating his own office out of one of the spaces in his own recently completed Washington Theater. He was the designer of a number of notable local-area buildings, including the Mountain View Cemetery Mausoleum, the Las Encinas Hospital Administration Building, and the YMCA in Glendale.

Analysis:

The property at 841 East Washington Boulevard is eligible for designation under Criterion A, (§17.62.040 PMC):

It is associated with *events* that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of the history of the city, region or state.

The theatre complex signaled the beginning of a decisive period of growth for the Washington-North Lake area. It helped to establish a new commercial center and marked the development of the vicinity into an urban neighborhood and a major business district.

The property at 841 East Washington Boulevard is also eligible for designation under Criterion C, (§17.62.040 PMC):

The building complex embodies 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 city, or that possesses high artistic values that are significant to the city.

The Washington Theater embodies the distinct characteristics of an architectural style and is the product of a local architect with a significant body of work in the region.

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:

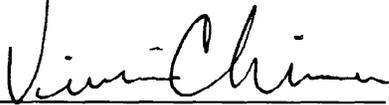
Designation of this property does not affect revenues to the City. In some instances, though, owners of designated properties may apply to the City for Historic Property Contract, which allows an alternative and often lower property tax assessment. The City Council reviewed the projected loss of property tax revenue from this program in 2002 when it adopted a local Historic Property Contract (Mills Act) ordinance. A historic designation may improve opportunities for grants, tax credits, and other funding sources to support rehabilitation of the building.

Respectfully submitted,



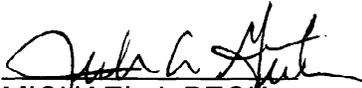
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Approved by:



MICHAEL J. BECK
City Manager

Attachments:

- Attachment A – Site Plan and Current Photos
- Attachment B – Part One – Historic Certification Application