

PASADENA HERITAGE

651 South St. John Avenue, Pasadena, California 91105 626 441-6333

December 4, 2009

Mayor Bill Bogaard and Members of the City Council
City of Pasadena
100 North Garfield Avenue
Pasadena, California 91109

Dear Mayor Bogaard and Council Members:

On behalf of Pasadena Heritage, I am writing to express our support for the decision of the Design Commission regarding properties on South Arroyo Parkway and urge you to uphold that decision.

For good and thoughtful reasons, city ordinances prohibit the demolition of existing buildings unless there is an approved project that will replace them. However, under the city's Earthquake Hazard Reduction Ordinance, exceptions can be made to this policy. With regard to the buildings at 499, 501, 503 and 523 South Arroyo Parkway, the owners requested consideration for an exception, wishing to clear the large site. No replacement project has been proposed, and development of the site is not currently under consideration.

The request for an exception can be made for unreinforced masonry buildings that do not have historic significance, and approval was initially given by staff for the demolition of all four buildings. However, with more thorough investigation, it was realized that there had been some confusion regarding these properties, their construction type and their historic evaluation.

Thanks to the diligence of Design Commissioners, city staff members, Pasadena Heritage volunteers and others, all four properties were carefully re-evaluated, and solid conclusions were reached by the Design Commission in October that allow for the demolition of two of the buildings, but the retention of the other two.

After a lengthy site visit and detailed review at the Design Commission, it was verified that one building (501) should not have been considered for demolition at all since it does not meet the city's criteria for exemption. It is, in fact, a reinforced masonry building and therefore is not eligible for an exemption to the "no demolition" ordinance.

In addition, two of the buildings -- 501 (discussed above) and 523 -- were designed by noteworthy Pasadena architects and deserved reconsideration of their historic significance. After

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more thoroughly researching the buildings, Pasadena Heritage concluded, and the Design Commission unanimously agreed, that the buildings at 501 and 523 both meet criteria that make them eligible for local landmark listing (status code 5S3). That determination and change in status code, adopted by the Design Commission, make both buildings ineligible for demolition at this time.

Both 501 and 523 have long been productive as retail and/or business establishments on South Arroyo Parkway and continue to be functional buildings. 501 is in need of some minor repairs but is very sound and habitable. 523 is a simple but charming brick building that has seen some alterations, but retains its character-defining features. According to architects and engineers who are experts in unreinforced masonry, it could be reinforced at a reasonable cost. If returned to use, it could generate revenue that would pay for its rehabilitation in a relatively short time.

In conclusion, there is no rationale for allowing the demolition of the buildings at 501 and 523 South Arroyo Parkway. With no project proposed and no plans for the site, there is no justification for the demolition of these historic resources. The other two buildings (499 and 503) are unreinforced masonry and of no historic significance, so they do indeed meet the criteria for an exemption and could be demolished at this time at the council's discretion.

Thank you for considering our views on this matter.

Sincerely yours,

(signed)

Susan N. Mossman
Executive Director