

Agenda Report

October 27, 2014

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council
FROM: Planning & Community Development Department
**SUBJECT: DESIGNATION OF THE MULTI-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY AT
833-861 SOUTH ORANGE GROVE BOULEVARD 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 multi-family residential property at 833-861 South Orange Grove Boulevard is significant under Criterion "C" for designation as a landmark (P.M.C. §17.62.040) because it is an intact example of a mid-twentieth-century garden apartment complex;
3. Adopt the attached resolution approving a Declaration of Landmark Designation for 833-861 South Orange Grove Boulevard, Pasadena, California;
4. Authorize the Mayor to execute the attached Declaration of Landmark Designation for 833-861 South Orange Grove Boulevard, 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 5, 2014, the Historic Preservation Commission recommended that the City Council approve the designation of the multi-family residential property at 833-861 South Orange Grove Boulevard as a landmark under Criterion "C" of PMC §17.62.040.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The multi-family residential property at 833-861 South Orange Grove Boulevard qualifies for designation as a landmark under Criterion "C" because it is an intact example of a mid-twentieth-century garden apartment complex.

BACKGROUND:

On May 5, 2014, the Bellegrove Association Board, representing the collective support of all condominium owners on the property, submitted an application for landmark designation of the property. The staff evaluated the property according to the landmark criteria in Title 17 of the P.M.C. and determined that the property qualifies for landmark designation.

Property Data

- Historical Name: Bellegrove Garden Apartments
- Address: 833-861 S. Orange Grove Boulevard, Pasadena, CA 91105
- Location: Southeast corner of South Orange Grove Boulevard and Bellefontaine Street
- Date of Construction: 1958 (documented on original building permit)
- Original Architect: Harold Bissner (843-853 S. Orange Grove Blvd.); Harold Bissner, Jr. (833-841 S. Orange Grove Blvd.); James G. Resh (855-861 S. Orange Grove Blvd.)
- Original / Present Use: Multi-family residence (15 units in three buildings)
- Original / Present Owner: Mrs. Nina Whitlock / Multiple current owners (see Attachment B)
- Lot size: 1.18 acres (source: County Assessor)
- Building sizes: The City does not have precise data on the size of the buildings. Based on what appears to be unit sizes in the City's database, the occupiable square footage and unit count for each building is approximately as follows:
 - 833-841 S. Orange Grove Blvd. – 8,696 square feet (5 units)
 - 843-853 S. Orange Grove Blvd. – 11,193 square feet (6 units)
 - 855-861 S. Orange Grove Blvd. – 8,603 square feet (4 units)

Site Features

The site, a 1.18-acre corner lot, is located at the southwest corner of South Orange Grove Boulevard and Bellefontaine Street. The site is approximately 200 feet in width and between 245 and 265 feet in depth. It has three apartment buildings at the north and west ends of the site (along the two street frontages) and two carports and a garage at the southeast corner of the site. The structures are all within a heavily landscaped setting with Asiatic design characteristics. There are two concrete driveways on the property that provide vehicular access to parking areas. One along the easterly property line leads to the detached carports the other, along the southerly property line, provides access to the garage. Pathways with alternating concrete and pebble concrete panels provide pedestrian access to the site from the adjoining sidewalks as well as between buildings and parking areas.

Building Features

Built in 1958, the two- and three-story condominium buildings have shallowly pitched gable-on-hip roofs covered in composition shingles (originally gravel). The roofs have extended eaves with stucco soffits, some of which transition to open, wood-framed pergolas. The gabled portions have wood screens and projecting outriggers in the gable-ends. The northeast and southwest buildings are rectangular in plan, while the northwest building (at the street corner) is L-shaped. The exterior walls of the buildings are stucco with applied wood accents in rectilinear formations, some of which continue to become posts that support balcony roofs. Horizontal, shallowly-projecting wood components are attached to some exterior walls at the division between floors. Balconies are detailed as solid, stucco-coated walls, which are covered under extensions of the main building roofs, supported by slender steel posts.

The unit entries to the two northerly buildings (the two designed by Bissner and Bissner, Jr.) are open-air covered passages with exterior pathway paving continuing into the passages, while the southerly building's entry vestibules are enclosed with doors and have differing stone paving. Fenestration consists of long horizontal banks of aluminum sliding windows, some of which have been replaced in the original openings. Entry doors are solid with full-height sidelights, many of which have Shoji screens, as well as framed solid-panel transoms. Wide, stacked-course white-painted brick or stone chimneys are attached to exterior walls of the buildings. Ground-level patios are enclosed by concrete block walls, some of which incorporate areas of open concrete screens and patterns of slightly projecting blocks.

Documented Changes to the Property

Permit records do not indicate significant changes to the properties. Evident changes observed by staff include window replacements in existing openings, replacement of door hardware, addition of Shoji screens (in excess of those that are original), and addition of wood HVAC equipment enclosures. These changes and additions are minor and do not affect the integrity of the property.

Current Conditions, Use, and Proposed Plans

The property is currently in good condition. The owners have also applied for Historic Property Contract (Mills Act) concurrently with this application, including a Rehabilitation and Maintenance Plan for the property that will be evaluated by staff.

Historical Overview

Mid-Century Modern Period

Bellegrove Garden Apartments represent the theme "Multi-Family Residential Development" identified in the City's 2007 historic context report, "Cultural Resources of the Recent Past." This theme is described in the context report 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.

The report goes on to describe the large concentration of postwar multi-family housing developments along South Orange Grove Boulevard, which were built as a result of a 1948 rezoning of the area, following deterioration of turn-of-the-twentieth-century mansions along the former “Millionaire’s Row” during the Great Depression.

Garden Apartment Building Sub-Type

Under the Multiple Family Residence property type, the 2007 historic context report identifies the “garden apartment building” subtype, which is described 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.

Bellevue Garden Apartments clearly represents this property sub-type, although the arrangement of buildings is oriented to landscaped gardens along the street edge rather than central to the buildings.

Modern Ranch Style

Of the architectural styles identified in the 2007 historic context report, the buildings most closely represent the Modern Ranch Style, which is described as follows:

The Modern Ranch style is characterized by large expanses of glass and minimal exterior detailing applied to Ranch house building form. Characterized by its low, horizontal emphasis and sprawling plan, the Ranch house enjoyed enormous popularity throughout the United States during the late 1950s and 1960s.

Character-defining features of the style that are evident in Bellegrove Garden Apartments include:

- Low, horizontal massing and wide street façade
- Low-pitched hip roof
- Overhanging boxed eaves
- Asphalt shingle roof cladding
- Panels of wood, stucco, and glass
- Large metal-frame windows
- Wide masonry chimney

In addition, the National Register nomination for the Pegfair Estates Historic District, which contains many Modern Ranch single-family houses, states, “After 1955, Contemporary Ranch houses began to exhibit Asiatic motifs in a manner in which they had not done prior.” It goes on to describe Asiatic design features that are evident in Bellegrove Garden Apartments, including “gable-on hip roofs called *Irimoya*, which are modeled after Japanese temple architecture” and “landscape that incorporate[s] boulders and in some cases, Japanese garden lanterns.” The author of the Pegfair Estates National Register nomination, architectural historian Daniel Paul, also prepared the description and significance statement submitted by the applicant for this landmark nomination (see Attachment B). The description outlines a number of other Japanese features that are evident on this property and are evidence of the architects’ implementation of this influence in their design.

ANALYSIS:

The multi-family residential development at 833-861 S. Orange Grove Boulevard (Bellegrove Garden Apartments) is eligible for landmark designation under Criterion “C”, (PMC §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.

The property exhibits the distinctive characteristics of the Garden Apartment Building subtype of the Multiple Family Residence property type, as described in the City's historic context report, "Cultural Resources of the Recent Past," (Historic Resources Group & Pasadena Heritage, 2007). The registration requirements in the historic context report state:

Multiple family residences that would qualify under this theme would include a multi-story structure that is a good example of a period architectural style and/or of the work of a significant architect or designer, or a single-story structure that is a good example of its period form. These property subtypes would usually meet local or California Register registration requirements under Criterion C (3) as an individual resource.

In order to qualify under Criterion C (3) as a good example of an architectural style and/or of the work of a significant designer, the property would display most of the character-defining features of its style...It must retain high integrity of design, materials and setting 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.

The property exhibits the essential character-defining features of the Garden Apartment Building sub-type of the Multiple Family Residence property type as described above. The property has architectural integrity (its ability to demonstrate why it is significant) through its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship and feeling, as follows:

- Location: The buildings are in their original location.
- Design: The buildings retain their form, plan, space, structure, and style, as described above.
- Materials: The buildings have most of the original materials used in their construction. Minor alterations that have been made do not affect their integrity.
- Workmanship: The building demonstrates the defining characteristics of a distinct architectural movement in the City's history.
- Feeling: The property clearly expresses the characteristics of mid-twentieth-century multi-family residential architecture in Pasadena.

The property was previously evaluated in 2002 as part of a Citywide historic resources survey of multi-family residential buildings and was assigned a status code of 7N, which indicated that further research was required to determine if the property was eligible for historic designation. As stated in the documentation form that was prepared at that time

(see Attachment A), this was largely because in 2002, the building was not yet 50 years old and, therefore, did not qualify for listing in the National Register.

COUNCIL POLICY CONSIDERATION:

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

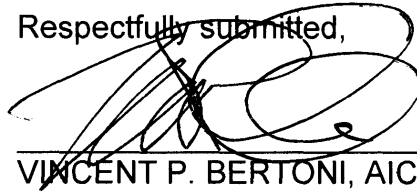
ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

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:

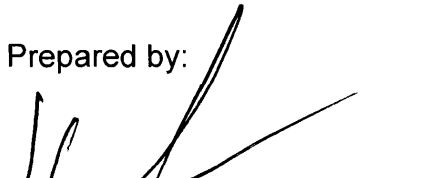
In some instances, owners of designated historic properties may apply to the City for a Historic Property Contract (Mills Act), which allows an alternative and often lower property tax assessment. The City Council reviewed the projected loss of property tax revenue from this program in 2002 when it adopted 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,



VINCENT P. BERTONI, AICP
Director of Planning & Community
Development Department

Prepared by:



Kevin Johnson
Senior Planner

Concurred by:



Leon E. White
Principal Planner

Approved by:



MICHAEL J. BECK
City Manager

Attachments (3):

- A. Vicinity Map & Historical Documentation (Sanborn Maps, Assessor Records, Building Permits)
- B. Application & Supporting Documentation Including Photographs
- C. Effects of Landmark Designation