

Agenda Report

September 8, 2014

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council
FROM: Planning & Community Development Department
SUBJECT: DISCUSSION OF BUNGALOW COURT HISTORIC PRESERVATION CONCERNS

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that the City Council receive the report and direct staff to bring the issue of bungalow court preservation to the Historic Preservation Commission and Planning Commission to develop a strategy and recommendations for further protection of historic bungalow courts.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Bungalow courts are historic resources, many of which are protected by the City's historic preservation ordinance and state CEQA law. Action may be necessary to further assess potential threats of demolition and to provide education about financial incentives or other programs available to bungalow court owners to conduct rehabilitation projects.

In addition, historic bungalow courts, particularly those that have not been rehabilitated and may be in deteriorated condition, are also a source of affordable housing that should be maintained. Any efforts to encourage rehabilitation should be closely reviewed with the Housing Department to ensure that existing affordable housing stock is not lost and these properties remain affordable.

BACKGROUND:

Pasadena is generally attributed as the birthplace of the bungalow court, a form of historic multi-family housing that involves groupings of small one-story individual houses or duplexes oriented around a common landscaped courtyard, usually on one property. Developed from 1909 through 1942, bungalow courts evolved from transient, seasonal use to permanent residences and appeared in many architectural styles. Having a wide variety of character and appearance, the city's inventory of bungalow courts is significant as a regional type of low-density multi-family housing that combined the individual privacy of a single residence with shared community space.

At the May 19, 2014 City Council meeting, Councilman Tornek expressed concerns regarding development pressures that may be causing the City's historic bungalow courts to be threatened with demolition. Design & Historic Preservation staff has conducted studies of bungalow courts on three occasions in 1983, 1994 and 2010. Resulting from these studies, the City's online database of historic properties lists 116 bungalow courts remaining in existence in the City, 44 of which have a historic designation, with 36 others being undesignated but eligible for historic designation. The remaining bungalow courts include 22 that have been determined to be ineligible for historic designation due to alterations and 14 that require further study to verify integrity or evaluate bungalow courts built after 1942.

ANALYSIS:

Demolition

To determine whether the City's historic bungalow courts are threatened with demolition, staff developed a comprehensive list of all 116 remaining bungalow courts and their historic designation status and compared existing residential unit count to allowable residential units based on the Zoning designation of the property. The 44 bungalow courts that currently have a historic designation would require Historic Preservation Commission and Design Commission review of any proposal to demolish a historic bungalow court and construct a new, denser residential project. The review authority could deny a project that it deemed to have an adverse impact on the historic resource.

Of the remaining 36 bungalow courts that are eligible for historic designation but are not designated, 11 are five or more units below the allowable residential densities on their respective properties and, as such, may be considered threatened by development pressures. Any proposed new development that would have a potential impact on a historic bungalow court would require preparation of environmental documentation pursuant to state CEQA requirements and would most likely require preparation of an Environmental Impact Report. The cost, time and uncertainty associated with this process may be considered a disincentive that would serve to protect eligible but undesignated bungalow courts; however, demolition is not prohibited. These are the bungalow courts that are of particular concern.

The 22 bungalow courts that are ineligible for historic designation and the 14 bungalow courts that require further study are not currently considered historic resources and could, therefore, be demolished with the appropriate study, CEQA clearance and required permits.

Serial Alterations

Another concern regarding bungalow courts is the possibility of inappropriate alterations being conducted that, in the aggregate, could impact a property's eligibility for historic

designation. If major or minor exterior alterations are proposed to be made to any of the 44 designated bungalow courts, an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness would be required and, if the project is determined to be inappropriate, the review authority could deny the application. However, an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness is only required for major alterations to the 36 eligible but undesignated bungalow courts and, therefore, minor alterations can be made without this review. Minor alterations include replacement of windows and doors in existing openings, changes to the setting, replacement of non-original features and minor additions on secondary elevations, among others. Although more major alterations would require review of an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness, if the review authority determines the project to be inappropriate, issuance of the Certificate of Appropriateness could be delayed for up to 180 days, but it could not be denied. The intent of the delay period is to allow the City to work with the applicant to identify alternatives that would be more appropriate.

Building Deterioration

Another concern that staff has observed is the level of deterioration that is evident in some historic bungalow courts, although the extent of this has not been fully assessed at this time. Deterioration that staff has observed includes water damage and dry rot of original exterior siding or shingles, windows, doors and exposed rafters or other wood detailing as well as failing roofs, eaves and porches. Although financial incentives are available to assist property owners with rehabilitation efforts, awareness of these incentives and technical capacity of some owners to take advantage of them is relatively low. Although there are consultants that would be able to assist owners, fees for their services are generally high. Education of bungalow court property owners of these available options is needed to ensure that they are aware of financial incentives that may allow them to embark on rehabilitation projects.

Potential Condominium Conversion

Some bungalow courts had been converted to condominiums many years ago. This may be seen as offering greater protection of the buildings with oversight of multiple owners and a homeowner's association; however, current parking requirements are an obstacle that would prevent most bungalow courts from doing this. In the past there had been an effort to modify the City's parking requirement to allow historic bungalow courts to have fewer parking spaces than typically required in order to encourage conversion to condominiums without having to dedicate more space for parking. This effort was not realized and has not been pursued further, but may be a method for encouraging preservation of bungalow courts that may be threatened with demolition.

Next Steps

Possible strategies to present to the Historic Preservation Commission and Planning Commission include:

- Potential financial and/or development incentives that would encourage the preservation of these buildings (e.g., reduced fees for improvements to these structures, modification of development standards in exchange for preservation, etc.)
- Conduct further study of the 22 bungalow courts that were determined ineligible for historic designation and the 14 bungalow courts that require further study to determine if any of these courts would now be considered to be eligible for historic designation.
- Conduct outreach to owners of properties that have been determined eligible for historic designation to encourage submittal of applications to designate their properties as historic.
- Establish a limitation on the number of building permits that may be issued for minor projects affecting historic resources within a given time period.
- Develop an educational outreach program to inform owners of historic resources of financial incentives that may allow them to pursue rehabilitation projects, including the Historic Property Contract (Mills Act) program and Federal Rehabilitation Tax Credits.
- Revive the City's previous effort to study the possibility of modifying the City's parking requirement to allow historic bungalow courts to have fewer parking spaces than required by current Zoning Code requirements in order to encourage condominium conversions without having to dedicate additional space for parking. As part of this effort, consult with the City's Housing staff to determine the effect this may have on the City's affordable housing stock.

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:

This report is for information only; no action is proposed that would be subject to environmental review.

FISCAL IMPACT:

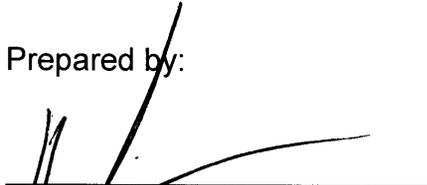
This report is for Council direction only and will not result in any fiscal impact.

Respectfully submitted,



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