

# Agenda Report

September 26, 2016

**TO:** Honorable Mayor and City Council  
**FROM:** Planning & Community Development Department  
**SUBJECT: DESIGNATION OF THE HOUSE AT 895 SOUTH MADISON AVENUE  
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) pursuant to Section 15308 Class 8 of the CEQA Guidelines pertaining to Actions by Regulatory Agencies for Protection of the Environment;
2. Find that the primary structure, detached garage and front yard decorative retaining wall at 895 South Madison Street are significant under Criterion "C" for designation as a Landmark (Pasadena Municipal Code (P.M.C) Section 17.62.040(C)(2)(c)) because they embody the distinctive characteristics of a locally significant property type, architectural style and period as well as the work of a locally significant architect. The main house with detached garage and retaining wall, is an intact example of a the two-story Arts & Crafts period house (Swiss Chalet style) and designed by locally significant architect Joseph J. Blick, and retains integrity;
3. Adopt the attached resolution approving a Declaration of Landmark Designation for 895 South Madison Avenue, Pasadena, California;
4. Authorize the Mayor to execute the attached Declaration of Landmark Designation for 895 South Madison Avenue, 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 July 19, 2016, the Historic Preservation Commission recommended that the City Council approve the designation of the house at 895 South Madison Avenue as a Landmark under Criterion "C" of PMC Section 17.62.040.

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

The house at 895 South Madison Avenue qualifies for designation as a Landmark under Criterion "C" because the main house with detached garage and retaining wall is an intact, locally significant example of a two-story Arts & Crafts period house (Swiss Chalet style) designed by locally significant architect Joseph J. Blick, and retains integrity.

### **BACKGROUND:**

On May 5, 2016, then-property owner Judith Blumenthal submitted an application for landmark designation of the property at this address. City staff evaluated the property according to the criteria in Title 17 of the P.M.C. and determined that the building, detached garage, and the decorative front yard retaining wall qualify for designation as a landmark. The property has since sold to the current owner, Karen Otamura, who is in agreement with the designation.

### **Property Data**

- Address: 895 South Madison Avenue, Pasadena, 91106
- Location: West side of South Madison Avenue, between Fillmore Street and Alpine Street
- Date of Construction Completion: 1912 (source: Assessor's Records)
- Original Owner: Phillip A. Stone (source: Assessor's Records)
- Architect: Joseph J. Blick (source: Permit Records by John Ripley)
- Original/Present Use: Single Family Residence/Single Family Residence
- Property Size: 13,987 square feet (source: County Assessor)
- Building Size: 3,544 square feet (source: County Assessor)

### **Site Features**

The .32-acre parcel contains a two-story house, garage, swimming pool, and gazebo. The house is sited near the center of the lot and a private alley behind the property provides access to the detached garage. A sloping topography necessitated the installation of a decorative retaining wall in the front yard for the subject property and adjacent properties on the west side of South Madison Avenue. The main residence is set back significantly from the street, in close alignment with the main residences on adjacent properties to the north and south. There is a distinct order and regularity to the front yard setback and the transition from the public realm to the private realm. The garage is situated at the northwest corner of the property. A pool and gazebo sit

between the house and garage. The consistency of the front setback along the street creates narrow side yards between residences on adjacent parcels, and coupled with the change in grade from the street, the secondary elevations are difficult to see from the public right of way. However, the primary elevation is distinctly prominent and visible from the public right-of way, as is the west-facing elevation of the house and garage which would be visible from the rear via the private alley.

### Main House Features

The main residence is two stories with a basement. It is vertically oriented with a shallow east-facing gable. The exterior is clad in smooth textured, painted wood shingles and accented with half-timbering. The first floor features a deemphasized main entry with a cut-out porch. It is accessed through a pair of ten-light, wooden doors, sheltered by an offset porch shifted toward the southern half of the façade. A scored concrete landing provides a base for two pairs of large dimensioned square wooden columns with caps which are further connected to each other and a large horizontal beam through highly crafted wooden joinery. These columns, horizontal members and an additional shingle-clad wooden pier support the flat porch roof with deck accessible through door openings at the second story. The porch also features wide eaves treated with detailed tongue and groove at the soffit.

The northern portion of the first floor features a bay of four, wood framed, casement operating windows with six, single pane, true-divided lights sashes with decorative muntin profile. The second story is distinguished from first by a flare and horizontal band that runs around the entire residence. The porch roof deck at the second floor is accessed through a pair of doors on the second floor and features a traditional, square wooden picket guardrail. The window and door openings on the second story of the primary elevation are similar to those on the first floor, casement operating window sashes with six, true divided lights and doors with ten-light configurations. The front-facing gable is vented, and immediately beneath the vent is a narrow, horizontally oriented grouping of four wood windows. The eaves of the gable roof are wide, with tongue and groove applied at the soffit and rounded extended rafter tails supporting them on the secondary elevations. On the primary elevation, the eaves are supported by large triangular wooden brackets and shielded by a decorative fascia.

### Detached Garage Features

The garage features many of the same character defining features that distinguish the main residence, and was likely constructed at the same time as the main residence. It is located at the northwest corner of the property, and is oriented with its garage door toward the private alley behind the residence. The garage is clad in the same smooth textured wood shingles as the main residence. It features window and door openings with original window sashes and door panels. The roof eaves are wide and treated with the same tongue and groove wood siding at the soffit while being supported by exposed rafters expressed through a rounded fascia. The garage door has been replaced with an inappropriate metal door, and a tool room was added to the garage in 1931, though the

addition was constructed sensitively. The garage has retained enough of its original historic features to be a contributing structure to the landmark designation.

#### Decorative Front-Yard Retaining Wall

The poured-in-place concrete retaining wall with decorative cap at the street edge is a contributing element to the designation. The retaining wall is required due to the slope on the site. Similar treatments exist along properties on the west side of the South Madison Avenue, each with a distinct relationship to the main residence.

#### Documented Changes to the Property

A permit search revealed several minor alterations that have occurred to the property since its construction, a bathroom addition in the 1920's, and a tool room that was added to the garage in the 1930's. A permit to construct a swimming pool was obtained in 1957, and the chimney was rebuilt in 1988. A permit to construct a gazebo was obtained in 2002.

#### Current Conditions, Use, and Proposed Plans

The property is intact and in very good condition. The property was recently sold and the new owner will continue to occupy the single family residence. The previous owner concurrently submitted an application to the Historic Property Contract (Mills Act) program along with this individual landmark designation, and the new owner has agreed to proceed with the application.

#### Historical Overview

##### *History of the Neighborhood & Site*

The Oak Knoll neighborhood was subdivided in 1886 as part of the 1880's Southern California land boom, and was laid out with curving streets that followed the topography of the area's canyon rims; this street pattern contrasted with the usual grid-like plan of earlier subdivisions. At the turn of the century, Oak Knoll was marketed as an exclusive residence district and attracted the attention of the wealthy. Development of Oak Knoll continued into the 1930's, and the area is equally well-known for its Arts and Crafts period and period revival-era residences.

##### *The Arts and Crafts Period*

The Arts & Crafts movement began in England around the year 1860 as a response to industrialization and mass production of goods. Its focus was one of promoting manual craftsmanship rather than machine production, which was believed to result in a harmonious society where producers and consumers could take pride in their work and, thereby, enhance their lives. Works were simple and designed to show evidence of construction methods. William Morris is widely cited as being the movement's primary

proponent in England, with his Red House (1859 by Phillip Webb) being one of the earliest pieces of English Arts & Crafts architecture. The movement included many other forms of craft including printmaking, decorative objects, wallpaper, textiles, furniture and stained glass.

In America, Elbert Hubbard and Gustav Stickley, who both organized Arts & Crafts guilds, were the movement's primary proponents. Stickley's magazine *The Craftsman* was influential in spreading the ideals of the movement throughout the country. The American Arts & Crafts architectural movement was centered in three primary locations: Oak Park, Illinois; Berkeley and Pasadena, each drawing on local materials. In Pasadena, the primary architectural tenet of the movement was to enhance the connection between house and landscape. This was achieved through large roofed front porches, use of wood exterior cladding materials and other locally available materials such as stones from the Arroyo Seco, elimination of ornament, and planning of the house around natural features of the site (contours, trees, etc.). Architectural details were frequently handcrafted by local artisans.

According to the City's context report entitled "The Residential Architecture of Pasadena, CA, 1895-1918: The Influence of the Arts and Crafts Movement:"

"The Swiss or Bavarian chalet was a style that enjoyed considerable popularity in the design of the bungalow and the two-story Arts and Crafts period house. As fundamentally an architecture of stained wood, in which wide overhanging eaves and balconies helped integrate the outdoors as part of the living space, the style was well-suited to the goals of the Arts and Crafts movement. The two-story chalet was easily adapted to steep sites, and many of the finest examples are constructed in San Francisco. Several groupings of two-story Swiss chalet houses have been identified in Pasadena. A number of ubiquitous features of the California bungalow are also derived from the chalet. In contemporary bungalow books, so-called flat-roofed chalets are characterized by front-facing, low-pitched gable roofs terminating wide front porches."

The two-story Arts and Crafts period house has the following character-defining features, as described in "Residential Architecture in Pasadena 1895-1918: Influence of the Arts and Crafts Movement" (1998):

- Rectangular or complex plan
- Larger than one- or one-and-one-half-story bungalow
- Horizontal lines
- Low-pitched gabled roofs with wood or composition shingles
- Wide eaves with exposed rafters
- Sometimes shed or gabled dormers

- Full-width front porches, sometimes limited to entry area only, supported by battered or straight-sided stone or wood piers
- Foundations, chimneys and retaining walls of Arroyo stone

### **ANALYSIS:**

The main residence, garage, a decorative retaining wall at 895 South Madison Avenue are eligible for designation under Criterion C, (PMC Section 17.62.040(C)(2)(c)), which states:

[The property] is exceptional in the embodiment of the distinctive characteristics of a historic resource property type, period, architectural style, or method of construction, or that is an exceptional representation of the work of an architect, designer, engineer, or builder whose work is significant to the region, State, or nation, or that possesses high artistic values that are of regional, State-wide or national significance.

The main residence and garage constitute an exceptional example of the Swiss Chalet sub-type of an Arts & Crafts period structure. It features many of the character-defining features of the property type including an asymmetrical facade presentation, a wide, front gable with extended eaves and exposed rafters, wood shingle siding, deemphasized main entrance, second story balcony, multi-light casement windows, and ornamentation that includes a vented gable and half-timbering. The house was designed by a locally significant architect, Joseph J. Blick, recognized as an accomplished practitioner of Arts and Crafts period residential architecture.

It has architectural integrity (its ability to demonstrate why it is significant) through its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship and feeling, as follows:

- Location: The main residence and garage are in their original location.
- Design: The main residence and garage feature many of the character defining features of a Swiss Chalet Arts & Crafts style including asymmetrical facade presentation, a wide, front gable with extended eaves and exposed rafters, wood shingle siding, deemphasized main entrance, second story balcony, multi-light casement windows, and ornamentation that includes a vented gable and half-timbering.
- Setting: The original setting remains relatively unchanged since the development of the property and the district surrounding it. Setbacks, tree canopy, decorative retaining wall are all still intact.
- Materials: The property has a high degree of integrity as demonstrated by the original main entrance and windows frames and sashes throughout. Smooth textured shingles and decorative wood joinery are also evident throughout.
- Workmanship: The porch supports at the main entrance, the guard railing at the entrance and the second story porch, the exposed rafters, tongue and grove at

the soffit, the ornate fascia and trim are all examples of distinct workmanship. The building demonstrates the defining characteristics of a distinct architectural movement and the craft of the architect, Joseph J. Blick.

- Feeling: The property very clearly expresses and evokes the same feeling that pervaded when the property was developed.

Based on the above, the property retains sufficient integrity to qualify for designation as a landmark under criteria C.

#### **COUNCIL POLICY CONSIDERATION:**

The General Plan Land Use Element – Guiding Principle 2: “Pasadena’s historic resources will be preserved. Citywide, new development will be in harmony with and enhance Pasadena’s unique character and sense of place. New construction that could affect the integrity of historic resources will be compatible with, and differentiated from, the existing resource;” and Goal 8: “Preservation and enhancement of Pasadena’s cultural and historic buildings, landscapes, streets and districts as valued assets and important representations of its past and a source of community identity, and social, ecological, and economic vitality.”

#### **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,



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Attachments (4):

- A. Vicinity Map & Historical Documentation (Building Description Blank; Sanborn Map)
- B. Application & Attachments
- C. Current Photographs
- D. Effects of Historic Designation