

Agenda Report

September 25, 2017

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council
FROM: Planning & Community Development Department
SUBJECT: DESIGNATION OF THE HOUSE AT 701 LINDA VISTA 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 Guidelines §15308: Class 8 - Actions by Regulatory Agencies for Protection of the Environment);
2. Find that the Schonbach House at 701 Linda Vista Avenue meets Criterion "C" for designation as a landmark (P.M.C. §17.62.040) because it embodies the distinctive characteristics of a locally significant property type, architectural style and period and represents the work of an architect whose work is of significance to the City. It is a locally significant example of a Mid-Century Modern style house designed by architect Leland Evison;
3. Adopt the attached resolution approving a Declaration of Landmark Designation for 701 Linda Vista Avenue, Pasadena, California;
4. Authorize the Mayor to execute the attached Declaration of Landmark Designation for 701 Linda Vista 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 August 1, 2017, the Historic Preservation Commission recommended that the City Council approve the designation of 701 Linda Vista Avenue as a landmark under Criterion C of PMC §17.62.040.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The house at 701 Linda Vista Avenue is a distinctive example of the Mid-Century Modern residential architectural style in Pasadena and retains all of its significant character-defining features. Therefore, the property at 701 Linda Vista Avenue qualifies for designation as a landmark under Criterion “C” as a locally significant example of a Mid-Century Modern-style house.

BACKGROUND:

On April 17, 2017, William Meurer, property owner, submitted an application for landmark designation of the property at 701 Linda Vista Avenue. City staff evaluated the property according to the criteria in Title 17 of the P.M.C. and determined that the house qualifies for designation as a landmark.

Property Data

- Address: 701 Linda Vista Avenue, Pasadena, 91105
- Location: Northwest corner of Linda Vista Avenue and Heatherside Drive
- Date of Construction Completion: 1948 (source: Original Building Permit)
- Original Owner: Sanford Schonbach (source: Original Building Permit)
- Original Architect: Leland Evison (source: Original Building Permit)
- Original Builder: Unknown (illegible on Original Building Permit)
- Original / Present Use: Single-family residence
- Property size: 26,188 square feet (source: County Assessor)
- Building size: 2,086 square feet (source: County Assessor)

The Site (Existing Conditions)

The site is a 0.6-acre lot in a heavily wooded hillside setting within the Linda Vista neighborhood of northwestern Pasadena. The site is irregularly shaped and the house is sited at the southeast corner. It was originally accessed via a concrete driveway from Heatherside Drive to an attached carport at the southwest corner of the house. The original driveway remains in place, although concrete paving has been replaced with permeable pavers. A small addition within a portion of the original carport was built in 2015, subsequent to approval of an application for Certificate of Appropriateness. A detached two-car garage was also constructed in 2015 at the northeast corner of the site, with a new driveway leading to the street at that location. The site slopes dramatically and has a series of retaining walls, concrete pathways and steps leading from the street to the house as well as to other usable areas of the site. Paving immediately surrounding the house is brick except for a concrete slab at the main entry. In conjunction with the small carport addition and garage, a master bedroom addition was also built in 2015, extending from the rear of the house.

Exterior Features of the Building

The one-story Mid-Century Modern style house has a simple geometric form with a splayed rectangular plan and attached carport. The longer facades of the house are oriented toward the northeast and southwest; the shorter facades face southeast and northwest. The house has a slightly sloping flat roof covered in rolled asphalt roofing with deep, floating eave overhangs and exposed, tapered rafters. Post-and-beam construction influence is apparent with large tapered beams and posts visible along the entire exterior of the house, including some freestanding posts at patio areas and the carport which sit on small battered-concrete footings. The main entry to the house is on the north side, accessed from a concrete pathway and a series of steps extending from Linda Vista Avenue to the east. The entry is at roughly the center of the north elevation, at the location where the footprint is splayed, and is deeply recessed to create a partially covered porch. The front door is solid wood with combed plywood on the exterior; the entry area also features a wood-framed screen door, a large fluted glass sidelight and a pair of large vision-glass transoms. A rectangular brick chimney is near the entry location. A rear entry is on the south elevation; the door matches the main front door, but lacks the screen door, sidelight and transom. Exterior walls are clad in combed plywood and include large expanses of glazing, some of which extend from the floor to the ceiling. A significant character-defining feature of the house is a custom wood-louver ventilation system above and below certain windows which allow for passive cooling of the house in summer months.

The original plans for the house, which are in the current owner's possession (see excerpts in Attachment A), indicate a pending trademark for "Evison House for Better Living." It is unclear at this time whether this was a specific name for this particular house or a branding effort on the part of the architect. Staff is continuing to research this, but has not found any information at this time.

Documented Changes to the Property

Other than the additions previously described, the house is largely intact on the exterior. The exterior combed plywood was likely stained originally but has been painted. One pair of windows on the south elevation has been replaced with an inoperable leaded and stained glass window.

Current Condition, Use, and Proposed Plans

The exterior of the house is currently in good condition and it is used as a single-family residence. No significant additional changes to the property are proposed. The owner has also submitted a concurrent application for the Historic Property Contract (Mills Act) program.

Historical Overview

Mid-Century Modern Style

Mid-Century Modern describes the postwar iteration of the International Style in both residential and commercial design. The International Style was characterized by geometric forms, smooth wall surfaces, and an absence of exterior decoration. Mid-Century Modern represents the adaptation of these elements to the local climate and topography, as well as to the postwar need for efficiently built, moderately-priced homes. In Pasadena, this often meant the use of wood post-and-beam construction. The Mid-Century Modern house or office is characterized by its clear expression of structure and materials, large expanses of glass, and open interior plan. Local practitioners of the style included prewar International Style architects like Rudolph Schindler, Richard Neutra, Gregory Ain and Harwell Hamilton Harris, as well as second generation Modernists like Ray Kappe, Buff & Hensman, Ladd & Kelsey, Carl Maston, A. Quincy Jones, Whitney Smith, and Wayne Williams. Architects such as John Lautner incorporated geometric and sculptural forms, embracing a more expressionistic or organic version of the style. Richard Neutra's Perkins House at 1540 Poppy Peak Drive (1955) and Buff & Hensman's Dubnoff Residence at 1150 La Loma Road (1965) are both excellent residential examples of Mid-Century Modernism in Pasadena.

Character-defining features of Mid Century Modern Houses are:

- One or two-story configuration
- Simple geometric forms
- Expressed post-and-beam construction, in wood or steel
- Flat roof with wide overhanging eaves and cantilevered canopies
- Unadorned wall surfaces
- Exterior panels of wood, stucco, brick or stone
- Flush-mounted metal frame full-height and clerestory windows
- Exterior staircases, decks, patios and balconies
- Little or no exterior decorative detailing

Architect-Designed Houses

The 2007 Cultural Resources of the Recent Past Historic Context Report discusses architect designed houses in this style from the time period. The term "architect-designed" is used to distinguish high-style, site specific single-family residences from the simpler tract houses that proliferated primarily in large-scale residential developments during this period. The major defining architect-designed residential architecture in postwar Pasadena include those residences inspired by the tenets of the Case Study House Program; the post-and-beam architecture practiced by the teachers and graduates of the University of Southern California School of Architecture; and the Modernist variation of the ranch house.

There are concentrations of architect-designed residential properties from the period, which occur primarily along the Pasadena's western and southern edges, where the subject property is located. These areas, composed largely of single family residences, occupy hilly terrain that had not been previously developed; this resulted in site-specific designs that responded to the unique circumstances of hillside development and were made possible by new technologies developed during and after the War. The area west of the 210 and 710 Freeways on both sides of the Arroyo also contain substantial numbers of houses from the period, particularly in the southwest corner of the city. Many of these are infill properties in previously developed neighborhoods. In some cases, these lots were created by subdividing large estates, for example in the Hillcrest Neighborhood as well as along the Arroyo on lots previously occupied by the Adolphus Busch estate and Busch Gardens.

Leland Evison, Architect (1901-1963)

Leland Evison is a noted architect from the mid-century modern period who designed a number of buildings in Pasadena. He was educated at the University of Southern California and Art Center College of Design and prior to opening his own firm in 1945, worked for architects Myron Hunt and Wayne McAllister. As with many architects of this period, Evison also experimented with prefabrication and one of his ideas, the "Prefabricated Solar House" was published in *Arts and Architecture* Magazine in 1947 (see Attachment B). The house at 701 Linda Vista Avenue was published in *Progressive Architecture* in 1948. Staff has attempted to locate this publication but has been unsuccessful as of the date of this report.

ANALYSIS:

The Schonbach House at 701 Linda Vista Avenue is eligible for designation as a landmark under Criterion C of PMC Section 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.

Under Criterion C, the house at 701 Linda Vista Avenue is significant because it is a locally significant, intact example of the Mid-Century Modern property type, designed by Leland Evison. The registration requirements in the City's 2007 Cultural Resources of the Recent Past Historic Context Report state:

In order to qualify under Criterion C (3), this property type would display most of the character-defining features of its style. It must retain high integrity of design, materials and workmanship 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 building has a high level of architectural integrity (its ability to demonstrate why it is significant) through its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship and feeling, as follows:

- Location: The building and other site features are in their original locations.
- Design: The building retains its form, plan, space, structure, and style, as described above. The design of the house embodies the defining characteristics of a distinct architectural movement and the design quality of the architects' work, which is evident in the siting of the house, roofline with extended eaves and large expanses of glazing.
- Setting: The residential neighborhood and heavily wooded setting is intact.
- Materials: The building has virtually all of the original exterior materials used in its construction.
- Workmanship: The building exhibits workmanship through details such as the tapered posts, beams and window details and wood-louver vent system.
- Feeling: The property clearly expresses the characteristics of the Mid-Century Modern architectural style.

Integrity of association does not apply to the house because it is not associated with a significant event or the life of a significant person. Based on the above, the property retains sufficient integrity to qualify for designation as a landmark under Criterion C. The house retains all of its original character-defining features, including one-story configuration, simple repeated geometric forms, expressed post and beam construction, flat roof with wide overhanging eaves, unadorned wall surfaces of combed plywood and full-height and clerestory windows. All minor alterations to the house, including the replacement of a pair of windows and construction of additions are compatible with the original structure.

Contributing features to this designation include the main house, heavily wooded setting and original site features including concrete paths, retaining walls, floating bridge and steps.

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:

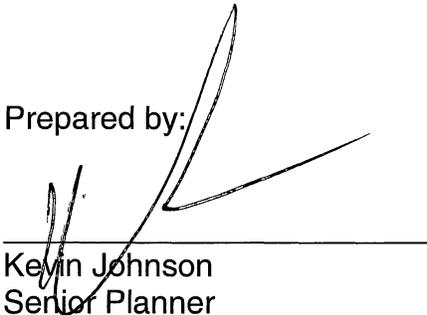
In some instances, owners of designated historic properties may apply to the City for a Historic Property Contract (Mills Act), which allows an alternative and often lower property tax assessment. The City Council reviewed the projected loss of property tax revenue from this program in 2002 when it adopted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



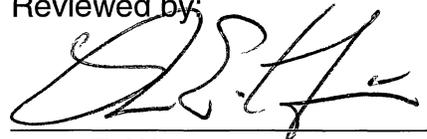
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Attachments: (4)

- Attachment A – Application Materials
- Attachment B – Vicinity Map & Historical Documentation
- Attachment C – Photographs
- Attachment D – Effects of Landmark Designation