

Agenda Report

November 19, 2018

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council
FROM: Planning & Community Development Department
SUBJECT: DESIGNATION OF THE HOUSE AT 817 RIO GRANDE STREET 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 and there are no features that distinguish this project from others in the exempt class and, therefore, there are no unusual circumstances;
2. Find that the house and detached garage at 817 Rio Grande Street meet landmark designation criterion C in 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. The house and detached garage are a locally significant, intact example of an Arts and Crafts period California Bungalow, and retain integrity;
3. Adopt the attached resolution approving a Declaration of Landmark Designation for 817 Rio Grande Street, Pasadena, California;
4. Authorize the Mayor to execute the attached Declaration of Landmark Designation for 817 Rio Grande Street, 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 3, 2018, the Historic Preservation Commission recommended that the City Council approve the designation of the house and garage at 817 Rio Grande Street as a Landmark under Criterion "C" of PMC Section 17.62.040.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The house and detached garage at 817 Rio Grande Street qualify for designation as a Landmark under Criterion “C” because they embody the distinctive characteristics of a locally significant property type, architectural style and period. The house and detached garage are a locally significant example of an Arts and Crafts period California Bungalow, and retain integrity.

BACKGROUND:

On February 22, 2018, property owner Joanne Casserly, submitted an application for Landmark designation of her house located at 817 Rio Grande Street. City staff evaluated the property according to the criteria in Title 17 of the P.M.C. and determined that the building qualifies for designation as a landmark under Criterion C.

Property Data

- Address: 817 Rio Grande Street
- Location: North Side of Rio Grande Street, between North El Molino Avenue and North Lake Avenue
- Date of Construction Completion: 1913 (source: Original Building Permit)
- Original Architect: None (source: Original Building Permit)
- Original Builder: Charles M. Urton (Source: Original Building Permit)
- Original / Present Use: Single Family Residence
- Property size: 8,220 square feet (source: County Assessor)
- Building size: 1,078 square feet (source: County Assessor)

Site Features

The property is an 8,220 square- foot rectangular shaped lot located on the north side of Rio Grande Street between North El Molino Avenue and North Lake Avenue. The building is sited on the property a short distance from the street, aligned with the average setback of the rest of the developed properties on the same street. The lot size and spatial arrangement of structures on the property is very similar to the general development pattern of the neighborhood. A driveway located on the east side of the house provides the principal access to the property and does not have a separate walkway. The property is also developed with a detached one-car garage structure at the terminus of the driveway.

Exterior Features of the House and Garage

This one-story California Bungalow features an asymmetrical irregular plan, a low-pitched cross-gabled roof with extended eaves and exposed rafters and beams. The front-facing offset-gabled front porch spans approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ of the width of the front elevation and is supported by stuccoed half-height piers with paired wood posts. The

cross-gabled rear volume features a 45-degree, three-sided projecting bay. The rear gable-end has an attic vent with vertical and horizontal wood slats. On the west side of the house, large wood members project towards the west, and appear to have been part of a larger structure such as an attached arbor or porte-cochere, which has since been cut back, possibly due to wood rot or insect damage. The permit records are unclear as to what may have been in this location. . The front porch is also notable for its elaborate decorative wooden gable detailing composed of heavy wooden members in an ascending stepped pattern with a slightly Asiatic design influence. This element of craftsmanship, along with what was a possibly an attached arbor on the west side, exhibits a higher level of craftsmanship that is not typically seen in smaller one-story bungalows in this area of Pasadena. Other character-defining features of this house include alternating wide and narrow painted wood clapboard siding (which flares out at the exposed stucco foundation), a tapered stuccoed chimney on the east side of the house adjacent to the driveway, a wide wooden front door with a glass panel, and what appear to be original casement and double-hung wood windows with continuous wood moldings emphasizing strong horizontal lines.

The detached one-car garage appears to maintain its original appearance with character-defining features similar to the main dwelling. It has alternating wide and narrow clapboard exterior walls, a low-pitched, vented front-facing gable roof with extended eaves, including exposed rafters and beams and what appear to be the original carriage style doors.

Documented Changes to the Property

The property has undergone few major exterior changes since it was originally built in 1913. It appears the house and garage have been painted several times, and there is evidence of some deterioration to some of the exterior cladding materials and exposed wood members on the house, as well as minor changes to the front porch. The concrete porch piers and low wall are clad in stucco, which may have been an alteration. It is unclear from the permit records what the original materials were. The fascia boards around the roof have also been replaced. The mature landscaping at the front porch obscures some visibility of the details of the porch which makes a full analysis difficult. The clapboard siding on the house appears to have been replaced or repaired at some point. When comparing the wood siding of the house to the garage, there is a clear distinction in texture of the wood materials and the craftsmanship of the construction, although this may be a result of other factors such as paint. Although the original porch piers, wall cladding, and fascia boards may have had minor alterations, the house appears to retain the original exterior building form and materials.

Current Conditions, Use, and Proposed Plans

The exterior of the building is currently in fair to good condition and it is in use as a single-family residence. No significant changes to the property are proposed at this time.

Historical Overview

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 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 trim, and the planning of the house around natural features of the site (contours, trees, etc.). Architectural details were frequently handcrafted by local artisans.

The Arts and Crafts period of significance in Pasadena is 1895-1918. The character-defining features of early 20th Arts and Crafts period bungalows are:

- One or one-and-a-half story configuration
- Large front porches made of concrete, brick, or stone bases and piers.
- Gabled rooflines with shallow overhanging eaves
- Wall surfaces of cladding in shingles or horizontal siding, or stucco
- Wooden windows and doors

Character-defining features are those visual aspects and physical features or elements constructed during the property's period of significance that give the building its character. In general, a property that retains its character defining features continues to convey its significance and therefore retains integrity as an historic resource. Removal or alteration of just one character-defining feature does not necessarily alter the integrity of an historic resource. Impacts to historic integrity can result from a single major change or from many incremental changes over time.

Charles M. Urton

Charles M. Urton was a local builder and has been documented as the builder of several homes in Pasadena during the Arts and Crafts Period. Little is known about

him, although a review of the City's records indicates he worked closely with several notable prominent architects, including Reginald D. Johnson (636 Prospect Boulevard) and J. Cyril Bennet (530 E. Claremont Street, 511 S. Marengo Avenue). He is also listed as the builder of record for 1141 N. Michigan Avenue. Mr. Urton was a resident of Pasadena and lived at 735 Rio Grande Street. He was noted in the trade publication "Southwest Builder and Contractor" from July 6, 1917 as having been awarded a contract for masonry, carpentry, and sheet metal work and other general work for the erection of a two-story residence and chapel in Santa Barbara for Major J. H. Pershine. He was also awarded a contract for the construction of a residence in Montecito for R.W. Reeves designed by Reginald Johnson.

ANALYSIS:

The building at 817 Rio Grande Street 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.

Generally, in order to qualify under Criterion C, a 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.

Pasadena has a rich inventory of properties from the Arts and Crafts period and there is a more rigorous standard for determining significance under Criterion C. Individual properties typically must demonstrate higher levels of craftsmanship or architectural excellence, or be associated with a significant architect or builder in order to be distinguished from the many other buildings from the period.

Under Criterion C, the building at 817 Rio Grande Street is a locally significant, intact example of a vernacular California Bungalow built during the Arts and Crafts period. 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 the majority of its form, plan, space, structure, and style, including its simple massing, exterior brick cladding, original fenestration and exterior materials, roof form, entryway and basement.
- **Setting:** The single-family residential neighborhood, including many other similar, but not as significant, Craftsman style bungalows is intact.
- **Materials:** The building retains a majority of its original exterior materials.

- Workmanship: The building retains the majority of its exterior materials and features that reflect the craftsmanship of early-20th century Arts and Crafts movement, and therefore retains integrity of workmanship. In addition, the decorative porch and gable vent features of this particular property demonstrate a more significant level of individual craftsmanship not found in the immediate vicinity or on other properties of similar size and style elsewhere in the City.
- Feeling: The property clearly expresses the characteristics of the Arts and Crafts style and evokes the feeling of the Arts and Crafts residential boom in Pasadena.
- Association: The property at 817 Rio Grande Street retains integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship and feeling, and therefore continues to convey its association with Arts and Crafts era single-family residential development in Pasadena.

Based on the above, the property retains sufficient integrity to qualify for designation as a landmark under Criterion C. The house and garage retain all of their original character-defining features and all interior alterations are not publicly visible and therefore are compatible with the original structures.

Although smaller California Bungalows rarely feature the level of craftsmanship that elevate the individual properties to the level of Landmark designation, the design of this particular house contains features that exhibit a higher level of craftsmanship which elevate the property to being worthy of individual Landmark designation (primarily the craftsmanship of the front porch exposed beams, exhibiting an Asiatic influence on the design). Contributing features to this designation include the house and the garage.

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.”

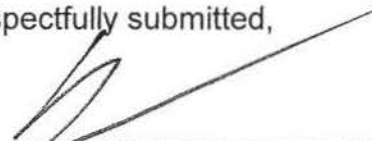
ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

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,



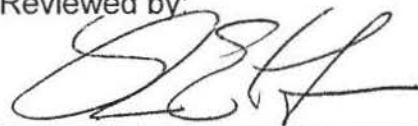
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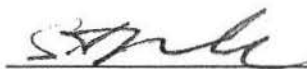
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Leon E. White
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STEVE MERMELL
City Manager

Attachments: (4)

- A. Vicinity Map
- B. Application & Historical Documentation
- C. Current Photographs
- D. Effects of Historic Designation