



# Agenda Report

October 29, 2018

**TO:** Honorable Mayor and City Council  
**FROM:** Planning & Community Development Department  
**SUBJECT: DESIGNATION OF THE HOUSE AT 901 LAGUNA ROAD 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 Puelicher House at 901 Laguna Road meets Criterion "C" for designation as a landmark pursuant to Pasadena Municipal Code (PMC) Section 17.62.040 because it embodies the distinctive characteristics of a locally significant property type, architectural style and period to the City. It is a locally significant example of an International Style single-family house designed by locally significant architect Boyd Georgi;
3. Adopt the attached resolution approving a Declaration of Landmark Designation for 901 Laguna Road, Pasadena, California;
4. Authorize the Mayor to execute the attached Declaration of Landmark Designation for 901 Laguna Road, 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 17, 2018, the Historic Preservation Commission recommended that the City Council approve the designation of 901 Laguna Road as a landmark under Criterion C of PMC §17.62.040.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

The house at 901 Laguna Road is a distinctive example of International Style residential design in Pasadena designed by significant architect Boyd Georgi and retains the majority of its significant character-defining features. Therefore, the property at 901 Laguna Road qualifies for designation as a landmark under Criterion “C” as a locally significant example of an International Style House designed by Boyd Georgi.

## **BACKGROUND:**

On May 7, 2018, Barbara Lamprecht, on behalf of property owners Adam Katz and Julia Sherman, submitted an application for Landmark designation of the single-family house at 901 Laguna Road. 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.

### **Property Data**

- Address: 901 Laguna Road, Pasadena
- Location: South Side of Laguna Road, between San Remo Road and Hillside Terrace
- Date of Construction Completion: 1960 (source: Original Building Permit)
- Original Architect/Builder: Boyd Georgi (source: Original Building Permit)
- Original / Present Use: Single-family residence
- Property size: 22,220 (source: County Assessor)
- Building size: 1,978 square feet (source: County Assessor)

### **The Site**

The approximately half-acre sized hillside property is located just east of the Poppy Peak Historic District in a hillside area of Pasadena locally known as San Rafael Heights. The property is a generally rectangular shaped lot on the south side of Laguna Road, between San Remo Road and Hillside Terrace. The building is set closely to the street and the property slopes steeply downward to the southwest before facing a wooded glen. At the bottom of the glen is a small stream, which is fed by Thompson Lake to the west. Beyond the stream, the slope rises sharply again to crest at a ridge far above the house. A walkway crosses the small stream and leads to a small accessory structure. The neighborhood is characterized by hilly topography, mature trees, landscape, and gracious single-family houses.

### **Exterior Features of the Building**

The design of the house responds to the unique hilly environmental setting and consists of a roughly T-shape building over three levels. The top (street facing north elevation) level of the house is a long, horizontally oriented, one-story volume that is relatively

close to Laguna Road, which is a narrow street. This level features two sections, divided by the home's recessed front entry which is accessed by a wooden deck offset from the front door. To the east of the entry, the kitchen's north wall is glazed with large windows that are fronted by two narrow horizontally oriented wood panels centered in the windows. Each panel is attached to the west or east end of the space, with an unobstructed open space between them. To the west of the entry is a guest bathroom with a shallow interior sky lit garden and a larger garden. A deck for the west master bedroom's north elevation is hidden from the street with a solid stucco wall. The original back wall of the carport at the east is also a full-height opaque wall, necessary for structural shear purposes (lateral stabilization).

As documented by the applicant, the house once had an unusual feature which has since been removed. A color snapshot shows a Mondrian-like field of horizontal rows of stripes of color and white arranged in four columns, a composition that occupied the broad front of the kitchen window. Each column appears to be about the width of a standard jalousie window, a window type that was popular mid-century for a time before energy and security concerns limited their use. Based on the applicant's conversations with descendants of the original owners, it appears that this feature was not part of the original design, but was later designed and added by the original architect at the owners request to provide for more privacy for the interior space behind it.

The south elevation, although not visible from the street, contains many character defining features and appears to have been intended to serve as the primary elevation. This elevation embraces the natural character of the trees and stream facing the rear of the house and features a complex arrangement of solids to voids. A large glass box, containing the living room, projects south approximately 18 feet beyond the rest of the house and appears to float above the slope. This volume separates the street-level volume into two sections: the private wing of three bedrooms and two bathrooms to the west, and the more public and functional wing consisting of the kitchen, dining room, and garage to the east. Lower Level 1, immediately below, includes an original office and workshop designed for original client and owner Richard Puelicher. Across the adjacent recessed stair landing (leading from the dining area to the Lower Level I deck below) to the west, a small later addition is tucked below the dining room, also on Lower Level 1. This later addition is characterized by small, incompatible clerestory windows and contains a bathroom. Apart from a solid stucco shear wall defining the rear of the carport, this bathroom is the only other opaque wall on this level of the elevation.

The eastern end of Lower Level I, below the living room, also contains an open wood staircase leading from the living room to a large deck now containing barbeque equipment, while a wooden bridge from the southern end of the eastern deck crosses the stream and leads to a triangular-shape viewing station lined with benches. The viewing station is a tranquil resting point for observing the house. Several supporting round steel columns supporting the main structure and the lengths of concrete block retaining walls are also visible from the viewing station.

The western end of the street level south façade does not include a lower deck, and each southern wall of the two master bedrooms (connected in the middle by a small foyer) and the master bathroom is a full-height glass wall opening out to a shallow wood deck. Full-height stucco “fins” that project into the deck protect the bathroom user’s privacy. The overall composition is united by two means: the use of paint color (white and black) and the use of framing members doubling as an artistic arrangement of lines and planes. The structural framing members consists of three sizes: nominal 6x12 (horizontal) beams; 6x6 (vertical) posts, and 3x6 (horizontal) window dividers. Supporting the vertical loads above, the large, long beams are painted black. Separated by a four-foot offset in height between the street level volume and the living room and another four-foot offset again from the living room to Lower Level I, the organization interlocks the three volumes together. Another flight of stairs leads to Lower Level 2, and a later addition of a deck and a one-room office with tall windows on the south and east elevations.

The composition and use of wooden decks, staircases, and walkways at various levels of the Puelicher House are important character-defining features. They reference comparable designs of nearby exemplary Modern houses in Pasadena such as the Norton House (Buff and Hensman, 1954), which also has extensive wooden decks, bridges, and walkways above the same stream running from Thompson Lake.

#### Documented Changes to the Property

The property has undergone several changes since construction was completed in 1960 and several alterations to the exterior are apparent. However, the two recorded building permits do not reflect these alterations. The original building permit for a residence and carport was issued by the City of Pasadena November 24, 1958. The second permit, dated October 1958, was issued for the construction of reinforced retaining walls.

On the north, street-facing elevation, the following alterations have occurred: the original partially enclosed carport was altered by the addition of incompatible garage doors; a stationary panel (sidelight) on the front entryway was altered from a single light of glazing to a shorted and divided section with three panels, the middle being stained glass; the “colored field” obscuring visibility of the kitchen was removed, and the two principal beams articulating the top of the walls were originally white and have now been painted black. Although this last alteration is considered minor, it diminishes the strong International Style identity intended by Georgi.

Other alterations to the south, rear facing elevation, are also apparent. These alterations include small additions, and alterations to the decks and open staircases.

#### Current Condition, Use, and Proposed Plans

The exterior of the building is currently in fair condition and it is used as a single-family residence. The applicants have applied for a Mills Act contract and have submitted

plans indicating an extensive restoration plan, including restoration or replacement of inappropriate alterations with more appropriate design solutions. All proposed changes to the property are currently being reviewed through the Category 2 review process.

### 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.

#### *Pasadena Style & the USC School of Architecture*

The 2007 Cultural Resources of the Recent Past Historic Context Report addresses the impact of the USC School of Architecture on Pasadena. The term "Pasadena" or "USC style" Modernism was coined by architectural historian Esther McCoy, and reflects the profound impact that graduates of the University Of Southern California School of Architecture, many of whom lived and worked in Pasadena, had on the architectural landscape of the region. However, the majority of the architects working in Pasadena during the postwar period are not well known outside of the city. Probably the most successful in reaching some level of acclaim were the firms of Buff, Straub & Hensman; Smith & Williams; and Ladd & Kelsey. These were just some of the cadre of innovative Modernist architects who came out of the USC School of Architecture and designed thoughtful and original designs in Pasadena during the postwar period. Pasadena's Mid-century Modern residential architecture, therefore, is characterized not by individual genius, but by the collective excellence of the architects who worked there after the War.

#### *Boyd Georgi (1914-1999)*

Boyd Georgi had strong personal and professional ties to Pasadena and Altadena. Georgi attended Pasadena Junior College and began his architectural studies at USC's School of Architecture in 1931 and joined the architectural fraternity Alpha Rho Chi. In 1934, he was the student president of the College of Architecture, and was part of the first class to graduate from the College in 1936. The year before, he won the prestigious Newcomb Prize for design. Georgi attended the university not during the heady days of Modern architecture and landscape architecture under the renowned Dean Arthur Gallion but under the leadership of the less well known Dean Arthur Weatherhead, who sought architectural problems that were relevant to American life

rather than to fanciful design problems. Other notable examples of Georgi's significant works are the Noyes School in Altadena (1919 Pinecrest Drive, Altadena), the Altadena Public Library (600 Mariposa Street, Altadena), his personal residence on Skyview Drive in Altadena and the Lodge at Camp Chaquita in the Angeles National Forest (3697 North Fair Oaks Avenue, Altadena).

### **ANALYSIS:**

The building at 901 Laguna Road 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

Under Criterion C, the building at 901 Laguna Road is significant because it is a locally significant, intact example of an International style single-family residence, designed by Boyd Georgi. 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. Although some alterations have been made, they are reversible.
- Setting: The single-family neighborhood, unique hillside topography and mature landscaping are 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 International style design and construction, and therefore retains integrity of workmanship.
- Feeling: The property clearly expresses the characteristics of the International architectural style and evokes the feeling of Mid-Century development Pasadena.
- Association: The property at 901 Laguna Road retains integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship and feeling, and therefore continues to

convey its association with Mid-Century International style 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 building retains all of its original character-defining features, including three-level configuration, simple geometric forms, flat roofs, unadorned wall surfaces, full height glass walls, generous wood decking, viewing station and recessed entryway. Although several alterations to the building have been made, they are reversible and a restoration and rehabilitation plan has been prepared which will ensure future changes are done in a sensitive and compatible manner. Contributing features to this designation include the main building and decks, attached carport, rear bridge and viewing station.

**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.”

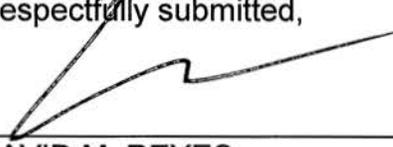
**ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:**

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,



---

DAVID M. REYES  
Director of Planning & Community  
Development Department

Prepared by:



---

Rodrigo Pelayo  
Assistant Planner

Reviewed by:



---

Leon E. White  
Principal Planner

Approved by:



---

STEVE MERMELL  
City Manager

Attachments: (4)

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

RESOLUTION NO. \_\_\_\_\_

**A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PASADENA  
ADOPTING A DECLARATION OF LANDMARK DESIGNATION OF 901  
LAGUNA ROAD, PASADENA, CALIFORNIA**

WHEREAS, the City Council has found that 901 Laguna Road meets criterion "C", as set forth in Section 17.62 040(C) of the Pasadena Municipal Code, and

WHEREAS, the property at 901 Laguna Road is significant because it embodies the distinctive characteristics of a historic resource property type, period, architectural style or method of construction, or represents the work of an architect, designer, engineer, or builder whose work is significant to the City or to the region, or that possesses high artistic values that are significant to the City or to the region, and

WHEREAS, the application for Landmark designation is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to State CEQA Guidelines Section 15308, and

WHEREAS, Barbara Lamprecht, on behalf of the property owners, Adam Katz and Julia Sherman, submitted the application for landmark designation; and

WHEREAS, the City Council may designate a Landmark and evidence such approval by adopting a declaration executed by the Mayor pursuant to Subsection 17.62.050 (C) of the Pasadena Municipal Code.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED by the City Council of the City of Pasadena that the attached declaration of Landmark designation for 901 Laguna Road is hereby adopted.

Adopted at the \_\_\_\_\_ meeting of the City Council on the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2018 by the following vote:

AYES:

NOES:

ABSENT.

ABSTAIN.

\_\_\_\_\_  
MARK JOMSKY, CMC, City Clerk

Approved as to form:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Theresa E. Fuentes  
Assistant City Attorney

**DECLARATION OF LANDMARK DESIGNATION FOR:**

901 LAGUNA ROAD  
PASADENA, CALIFORNIA

Pursuant to the provisions of Section 17 62 050 of the Pasadena Municipal Code, the City Council of the City of Pasadena by this declaration hereby designates as a Landmark certain real property described as:

(See attached Exhibit A)

Under Pasadena Municipal Code Section 17.62.090, all work affecting designated Landmarks, except ordinary maintenance and repair, such as but not limited to new construction and additions, exterior alterations, relocation, and demolition, is subject to review by the City of Pasadena.

DATED: \_\_\_\_\_

ATTEST

CITY OF PASADENA  
A municipal corporation

\_\_\_\_\_  
Mark Jomsky, City Clerk

By: \_\_\_\_\_  
Terry Tornek, Mayor

**EXHIBIT A**  
**LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

THE LAND REFERRED TO HEREIN BELOW IS SITUATED IN THE CITY OF PASADENA, COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES, STATE OF CALIFORNIA, AND IS DESCRIBED AS FOLLOWS:

THE NORTHERLY 100 FEET, MEASURED AT RIGHT ANGLES TO THE NORTHWESTERLY LINE OF THOSE PORTIONS OF LOTS 78 AND 79 OF SAN RAFAEL HEIGHTS TRACT 8, SHEET 4, IN THE CITY OF PASADENA, COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES, STATE OF CALIFORNIA, AS PER MAP RECORDED IN BOOK 16 PAGES 86 AND 87 OF MAPS, IN THE OFFICE OF THE COUNTY RECORDER OF SAID COUNTY, DESCRIBED AS FOLLOWS:

BEGINNING AT A POINT IN THE NORTHEASTERLY LINE OF SAID LOT 78 DISTANT NORTH 54° 11' 40" WEST 62.20 FEET FROM THE MOST EASTERLY CORNER OF SAID LOT 78; THENCE SOUTH 32° 11' 40" WEST 260.08 FEET; THENCE SOUTH 56° 11' 40" EAST 34.33 FEET; THENCE NORTH 33° 48' 20" EAST 50.00 FEET, MORE OR LESS TO A LINE BEARING NORTH 56° 11' 40" WEST, AND PASSING THROUGH A POINT IN THE SOUTHEASTERLY LINE OF THE LAND DESCRIBED IN THE DEED TO ROBERT LADD GIFFORD AND WIFE, RECORDED AS INSTRUMENT NO. 365 IN BOOK 14094 PAGE 59, OFFICIAL RECORDS, OF SAID COUNTY, ON APRIL 7, 1936, DISTANT THEREON SOUTH 38° 07' 30" WEST 230.82 FEET FROM THE NORTHEAST LINE OF SAID LOT 79, THENCE SOUTH 56° 11' 48" EAST 289.47 FEET TO SAID SOUTHEASTERLY LINE; THENCE NORTH 38° 07' 30" EAST 230.92 FEET TO THE NORTHEAST LINE OF SAID LOT 79; THENCE NORTH 60° 13' 40" WEST 287.00 FEET TO THE MOST NORTHERLY CORNER OF SAID LOT 79; THENCE NORTH 56° 11' 40" WEST 62.20 FEET TO THE POINT OF BEGINNING.

APN: 5716-004-014