



Agenda Report

October 28, 2019

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council
FROM: Planning & Community Development Department
SUBJECT: DESIGNATION OF THE HOUSE AT 180 SOUTH SAN RAFAEL 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 main residence, attached accessory structure and garage at 180 South San Rafael Avenue 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 building and accessory structures are a locally significant, intact examples of a single-family residence property type built in the Mid-Century Modern style house designed by locally significant architects Whitney Smith and Wayne Williams, and retains integrity;
3. Adopt the attached resolution approving a Declaration of Landmark Designation for 180 South San Rafael Avenue, Pasadena, California;
4. Authorize the Mayor to execute the attached Declaration of Landmark Designation for 180 South San Rafael 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 20, 2019, the Historic Preservation Commission recommended that the City Council approve the designation of the house and accessory structures at 180 South San Rafael Avenue as a Landmark under Criterion "C" of PMC Section 17.62.040.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The house and accessory structures at 180 South San Rafael Avenue 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 building and accessory structures are locally significant, intact examples of a single-family property example of a Mid-Century Modern style house designed by locally significant architects Whitney Smith and Wayne Williams, and retains integrity.

BACKGROUND:

On May 6, 2019, Emma Price, on behalf of property owner Beaver Dam LLC, submitted an application for Landmark designation of the property at 180 South San Rafael 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 under Criterion C because it embodies the distinctive characteristics of a locally significant property type, architectural style and period, and represents the work of an architect(s) whose work is of significance to the City.

Property Data

- Address: 180 South San Rafael Avenue, Pasadena CA 91105
- Location: To the south of Colorado Boulevard, on the east side of San Rafael Avenue, with the Arroyo Seco adjacent to the east.
- Date of Construction Completion: 1959 (source: Original Building Permit)
- Original Owner: R.A. Crowell (source: Original Building Permit)
- Original Architect: Whitney Smith and Wayne Williams (source: Original Building Permit)
- Original Builder: Unknown
- Original / Present Use: Single-family residence
- Property size: 80,590 square feet (source: County Assessor)
- Building size: 3,087 square feet (source: County Assessor)

Site Features

The residence located at 180 South San Rafael Avenue is located on a sloping, wooded, irregularly-shaped flag lot on the west bank of the Arroyo Seco in Pasadena, California. The property is accessed from South San Rafael Avenue and is flanked on all sides by other single-family residential properties. Colorado Boulevard is located to

the north, and the Arroyo Seco is to the east. The house is tucked above San Rafael Avenue, and is only accessible via a long narrow driveway that follows the steep terrain to rise above the street. Attached to the north side of the house is small studio/workshop. On the property to the south of the house is a pool and pool house.

Exterior Features of the Building

The one story house has a generally "L"-shaped plan with a horizontal emphasis and consists of two primary building volumes, and a detached carport with a small enclosed storage area. The main building volumes consist of an east-west oriented double height gabled wing containing the dining/living room with an attached one-story kitchen sub-volume and a north-south oriented one story volume containing the bedrooms and bathroom. The property embodies the character-defining features of expressed post-and-beam Mid-Century Modern architecture, such as simple geometric forms, exterior panels of wood and stucco, rectilinear concrete blocks, full height and clerestory windows, fixed and jalousie windows, expressed post-and-beam construction in wood, flat roofs, a dramatic oversized double height central volume with a pitched roof with exposed wood beams, covered outdoor walkways and little to no exterior ornamentation.

The post-and-beam construction style is immediately apparent as the house comes into view at the top of the driveway. The expansive open carport is constructed of massive horizontal beams that support a flat roof with large eaves that extend to the north to create a covered walkway. The ceiling of the carport and eave soffits are constructed of custom tongue-and-grove wood panels, which are featured throughout the property. The walkway leads to the west and turns into a covered bridge. The bridge has simple post and beam construction and flat roof. The bridge terminates at the north-south building volume and the covered walkway continues to the main entrance at the south elevation. The north-south one story double-height building volume has a shallow-pitched gabled roof, stucco cladding, and fixed and jalousie windows. This volume intersects the primary building volume, which contains the main entrance and consists of an east-west oriented double height gabled wing containing the dining/living room. The east and west elevations feature walls of glass and massive eave overhangs. A smaller attached one-story kitchen sub-volume with a flat roof is located to the south of this building volume. A small studio is attached to the house at the north via an enclosed breezeway.

Documented Changes to the Property

The exterior of the house is largely intact. A building permit was issued in 2018 to replace the original metal and glass fixed and jalousie windows and glass and metal doors with appropriate replacement glass and metal windows and doors. A Category 2 Certificate of Appropriateness was issued in October of 2018 approving minor alterations to the primary elevation and the more visible south elevation. The approved alterations are summarized below.

West Elevation (front facing)

- Enclose the existing open breezeway between the main building and existing studio with full height glass doors/windows
- Add 320 square feet to the existing attached studio
- New fixed window with painted solid panel below to match existing conditions
- New glass door in the existing location of a partial height window

South Elevation (side elevation)

- Change heights of solid painted panels from 44" to 36"
- New fixed glazing with solid painted panel below in existing door opening (to accommodate kitchen remodel)
- Replace solid panel with new clerestory windows at south façade of master bedroom
- At southwest corner, replace solid panel with new louvered/jalousie windows with fixed transom window above and solid painted panel below

Additional similar compatible changes to accommodate the interior remodel were made to the east and north elevations, however these elevations are considered secondary elevations and the alterations were not subject to the Category 2 review.

Current Conditions, Use, and Proposed Plans

The exterior of the house is currently in excellent condition and it is used as a single-family residence. No significant additional changes to the property are proposed at this time.

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.

The City's 2007 Cultural Resources of the Recent Past Historic Context Report identify the character-defining features of Mid Century Modern Houses as:

- 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

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 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.

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.

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 includes 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 conditions 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.

Whitney Smith and Wayne Williams (1949-1973)

The highly successful collaboration of South Pasadena-based architectural firm and partnership of Whitney Smith and Wayne Williams produced numerous award-winning projects, including private residences, schools, community buildings, and recreational facilities. Both architects were trained at the USC School of Architecture. The firm's work is renowned for its use of wood, which inspired architectural historian Esther McCoy to identify and write about a "Pasadena School" of architecture. Their Community Facilities Planners Building at 1414 S. Fair Oaks Avenue in South Pasadena (1958) received an Award of Excellence from the Pasadena & Foothill Chapter of the American Institute of Architects in 1959, and is listed by the Southern California Chapter of the AIA as one of the most significant examples of Los Angeles architecture constructed between 1947 and 1967. Residential projects designed by Smith and Williams include the house at 945 Hillcrest Place (1952); the house at 1049 La Loma Road (1952); the Lavenant Residence 300 S. Holliston Avenue (1953); and the Salet House (1957).

The Japanese-inspired Crowell House at 949 S. San Rafael Avenue (1952), commissioned by the same owners as 180 South San Rafael Avenue, has been called "one of Pasadena's best 1950s houses." Commercial projects include the concrete Blaisdell Medical Building at 547 E. Union Street (1952); and the sophisticated International Style Friend Paper Company at 100 W. Green St. (1965), with landscape design by Eckbo, Dean & Associates.

ANALYSIS:

The house at 180 South San Rafael 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 180 South San Rafael Avenue is significant because it is a locally significant, intact example of the Mid-Century Modern property type, designed by Whitney Smith and Wayne Williams. 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 remains on its original site.
- **Design:** The building retains its form, plan, space, structure, and style, including its irregular plan, asymmetrical composition, complex massing of two wings, very low-pitched gable roof with wide tongue and groove soffits, and exterior cladding. The design of the house embodies the defining characteristics of a distinct architectural movement and the approved alterations of the attached studio and kitchen have minimal visual impact on significant original design features.
- **Setting:** The residential neighborhood and expansive ground 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 mid-20th century Mid-Century Modern residential design and construction, and therefore retains integrity of workmanship.
- **Feeling:** The property clearly expresses the characteristics of the Mid-Century Modern architectural style.
- **Association:** The property at 180 South San Rafael Avenue retains integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship and feeling, and therefore continues to convey its association with mid-20th century residential development and design in Pasadena.

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, and retains its form, plan, space, structure, and style, including its irregular plan, asymmetrical composition, complex massing of two wings, very low-pitched gable roof with wide tongue and groove soffits, and exterior cladding. The design of the house embodies the defining characteristics of a distinct architectural movement and the approved alterations of the attached studio and kitchen have minimal visual impact on significant original design features. All alterations to the house are compatible with the original structure and were approved through the Category 2 review process. Contributing features to this designation include the house and attached adjacent site features including the workshop/studio and carport.

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