

Agenda Report

December 5, 2022

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council
FROM: Planning & Community Development Department
SUBJECT: DESIGNATION OF A SINGLE-FAMILY RESIDENCE AT 781 S. GRAND 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 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 single-family residence at 781 S. Grand Avenue meets Criterion C as a landmark pursuant to Pasadena Municipal Code (PMC) Section 17.62.040.D.2 because it embodies the distinctive characteristics of the American Foursquare architectural style;
3. Adopt a resolution approving a Declaration of Landmark Designation for 781 S. Grand Avenue, Pasadena, California;
4. Authorize the Mayor to execute a Declaration of Landmark Designation for 781 S. Grand Avenue, Pasadena, California; and
5. Direct the City Clerk to record the declaration with the Los Angeles County Recorder.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:

On September 20, 2022, the Historic Preservation Commission recommended that the City Council approve the designation the single-family residence at 781 S. Grand Avenue as a landmark under Criterion C of PMC Section 17.62.040.D.2.

BACKGROUND:

The Site

The property is located on an irregularly-shaped lot on the west side of South Grand Avenue, between Bradford and Bellefontaine Streets. Prior to March 2022, the lot sat vacant until the subject single-family residence was relocated to the site.

The single-family residence was previously located at 164 Chestnut Street, however, it was relocated to 781 S Grand Avenue to facilitate development of a new multi-family residential building on the Chestnut Street site. Neither the original Chestnut Street parcel nor the receiver site at 781 S. Grand Avenue is located within a landmark or historic district.

Exterior Features of the Single-Family Residence

The wood frame building is a two-story, asymmetrical single-family residence with an overall box-shaped form, multiple hipped roofs and a front-facing gable designed in the American Foursquare style with Craftsman and Queen Anne influences. The primary façade features a two-story, three-sided, projecting bay with a separate gable-on-hip roof and a covered porch that spans two-thirds of the width of the façade and projects outward, proud of the main façade, with a separate hipped roof supported by square Classical posts. The porch shelters a recessed wood paneled entry door with a glass inset that is treated with wood trim surrounds similar to the treatment of the windows. Other design treatments include a small central dormer with louvered attic vent, clapboard siding, exposed curving rafter tails with rounded ends, double-hung wood windows with screens and simple surrounds, a continuous wood fascia above the first and second floors that serves as window headers, a cobblestone foundation and asphalt shingle roofing.

Documented Changes to the Property

The single-family residence was built in 1904 and became a lodging or rooming house as early as the 1910's but has not been substantially altered on the exterior since its original construction. Most changes to the home are at the rear. A one-story sunroom was added in 1925 and a brick chimney was also added. However, both the sunroom and chimney were demolished when the house was relocated. Interior reconfiguration also occurred, but the residence retained the same footprint. Other than the aforementioned changes, the building has remained untouched for most of its 118 year history.

American Foursquare Style:

The “Late 19th and Early 20th Century Development and Architecture in Pasadena” historic context statement discusses the American Foursquare style as follows:

The American Foursquare house developed in the 1890s as primarily a vernacular style promoted by builders’ magazines and pattern books such as Radford American Houses and Shoppell’s Modern House. The “foursquare” part of the name comes from the style’s box-like floor plan, which is typically divided into four parts. Likewise, its front elevation could also be divided into four nearly equal parts. American Foursquare houses usually had low-pitched, hipped roofs with center dormers and full-width front porches. In contrast to the ornate and picturesque styles of the time, such as Queen Anne, the American Foursquare was a modern style of straightforward volumes... Foursquares are sometimes referred to as Prairie Boxes. Because it was affordable and simple to build, the American Foursquare remained popular for decades, especially with the middle class.

The period of significance for the American Foursquare style is between 1883-1904.

The character-defining features of the American Foursquare style are:

- Two-story configuration
- Simple rectangular forms
- Symmetrical and Asymmetrical front façade
- Clapboard siding exterior (sometimes stuccoed or shingles)
- Low-pitched hipped roofs
- Centrally located dormers
- Substantial front porches
- Double hung wood sash windows
- Shallow overhanging eaves with exposed rafter tails

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.

ANALYSIS:

The building at 781 South Grand Avenue is eligible for designation as a landmark under Criterion C of PMC Section 17.62.040.D.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 building at 781 S. Grand Avenue is significant because it represents an intact example of the American Foursquare residential style with some Craftsman and Queen Anne (Victorian) influences evidenced in the exposed rafters tails and projecting bay form, respectively. 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 has been moved from 164 Chestnut Street to 781 S. Grand Avenue in order to be preserved and, therefore, does not retain integrity of location.
- Design: The building is substantially intact and retains integrity of design. The building retains its character-defining square form, low pitched hipped roof, clapboard siding, central dormer and covered front porch.
- Setting: The setting (and streetscape) has been altered since the building has been relocated. At its original site, the building was surrounded by a mix of residential, commercial, and institutional uses, the new location is primarily comprised of single-family residences. The house does not retain integrity of setting.
- Materials: The building retains its original exterior materials as seen with its clapboard siding, exposed rafters, double-hung wood sash windows and surrounds and horizontal fascia at the first and second floors that are reflective of the American Foursquare construction and style.
- Workmanship: The building retains its exterior materials and features that reflect the craftsmanship of early-20th century and period of significance for the style, and therefore retains its integrity of workmanship.
- Feeling: Although the home has lost its integrity of setting and location, the property retains integrity of feeling as an American Foursquare building through its intact design, materials, and workmanship.
- Association: The building retains its association with the late 19th and early 20th century residential development in Pasadena, irrespective of its new setting. The building continues to convey the American Foursquare style that was popular during its period of significance.

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 its two-story boxy asymmetrical form, low pitched hipped roof, clapboard siding, double hung wood sash windows and surrounds, exposed rafter tails, large covered porch, and asphalt shingle roofing. The removal of the 1925 sunroom addition and the non-original brick chimney along the rear elevation returned the house to its original construction.

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:

The proposed designation qualifies for a categorical exemption pursuant to Section 15308, Class 8 of the CEQA Guidelines. 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,



JENNIFER PAIGE, AICP
Acting Director of Planning & Community
Development Department

Prepared by:

Reviewed by:

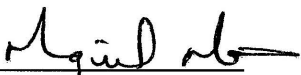


RATHAN DUONG
Senior Planner



KEVIN JOHNSON
Principal Planner

Approved by:



MIGUEL MARQUEZ
City Manager

Attachments (5):

- A. Application & Supplemental Research
- B. Vicinity and Aerial Maps
- C. Documentation
- D. Current Photographs
- E. Effects of Historic Designation