



**PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT**

**STAFF REPORT**

**DATE:** JANUARY 17, 2023

**TO:** HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

**FROM:** JENNIFER PAIGE, AICP, DIRECTOR OF PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

**SUBJECT:** APPLICATION FOR DESIGNATION AS A LANDMARK  
731 EAST WASHINGTON BOULEVARD

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**RECOMMENDATION:**

It is recommended that the Historic Preservation Commission:

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 pertaining to Actions by Regulatory Agencies for Protection of the Environment such as designation of historic resources.
2. Find that the former drive-in market building at 731 East Washington Boulevard meets Criterion C for designation as a landmark pursuant to PMC Section 17.62.040.D.2 because it embodies the distinctive characteristics of a locally significant property type, architectural style, and period, and it represents the work of an architect whose work is of significance to the City; and,
3. Recommend that the City Council approve the designation of the property at 731 East Washington Boulevard as a landmark.

**BACKGROUND:**

On November 18, 2022, Greg Crawford, on behalf of property owner 731 East Washington Blvd., LLC, submitted an application for landmark designation of the property under Criterion C (see Attachment A). City staff evaluated the property according to the criteria in PMC Section 17.62.040 and determined that the former drive-in market building on the property 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 it represents the work of an architect whose work is of significance to the City. The building, which exhibits many of the

character-defining features of the Art Deco architectural style, was designed by architect Glenn Elwood Smith and represents the context of early automobile-related properties in Pasadena.

Previous to the current application submittal, on December 15, 2009, Dale Trader submitted an application requesting landmark designation for the subject property. In response, staff determined that the property was eligible for designation under Criterion C in PMC Section 17.62.040 because it “embodies a number of distinctive characteristics of an architectural style (Art Deco) and as a property type is a rare example of an intact early automobile-related drive-in market. It is also a work of architect Glenn Elwood Smith, who was responsible for the designs of a number of important institutional buildings as well as a large number of period revival residential structures.” At a public hearing held on September 20, 2010, the Historic Preservation Commission unanimously disapproved the application due to opposition from the former property owner and the fact that the property was well maintained and did not face any immediate threats. The building was also surveyed in 1992 and found to be eligible for landmark designation (see Attachment D for records of these previous determinations).

## **DESCRIPTION:**

### Property Data

- Address: 731 East Washington Boulevard, Pasadena California 91104
- Location: Northwest corner of the intersection of Rutan Way and East Washington Boulevard
- Date of Construction Completion: 1930 (source: Original Building Permit)
- Original Owner: Arthur J. Shaw (source: Original Building Permit)
- Original Architect: Glenn Elwood Smith (source: Original Building Permit)
- Original Builder: Cedric E. Brown (source: Original Building Permit)
- Original Use: Drive-in market
- Present Use: Auto repair shop
- Property size: 8,499 square feet (source: County Assessor)
- Building size: 3,795 square feet (source: County Assessor)

## **Architectural Description:**

### Setting

The surrounding area consists of a mix of uses including residential, commercial, institutional, and recreational properties. Commercial and institutional uses are concentrated along the East Washington Boulevard thoroughfare, while single and multiple-family residences flank the north-south roadways in the vicinity. Washington Park and the Washington Square Landmark District are located south of the subject property on the opposite side of East Washington Boulevard. The Normandie Heights Landmark District is near the property to the northwest and the individually designated Washington Theater and Oversen Building are west of the property. The architectural styles most represented on the same block as the subject property include Mid-Century Modern and Vernacular Commercial.

### The Site

The subject property is a rectangular parcel with vehicular access from the east and south through gated entrances adjoining Rutan Way and East Washington Boulevard. A paved parking area occupying the east portion of the property separates the building from the Rutan Way street frontage. The building directly abuts the sidewalk paralleling East Washington Boulevard and extends north along the western edge of the site. See Attachment C for photographs of the site.

### Exterior Features of the Building

The building on the property has an L-shape plan and is composed of reinforced masonry coated in plaster. It has a flat roof surrounded by a low parapet that is minimally articulated along the east elevation. Along the east-facing elevation, six individual bays are separated by Art Deco-style decorative engaged pilasters. The southernmost bay has been infilled with bricks, metal-sash windows, and a personnel entrance, but retains its original outline. Each drive-in bay has an articulated plaster frame detail. The south end of north-south wing terminates in a tower that appears to have been reduced in height through previous remodeling, although documentary evidence of this has not been found. Although the tower may have been modified, it retains two sets of cast concrete chevrons and chamfered corners just below the roof edge. The concrete chevrons are clad in painted tiles. Additional openings on the south have been infilled with bricks and non-original window fenestration.

The east-west leg of the building at the northeast corner has a higher parapet accented with decorative, chevron relief details, painted tiles, and chamfered corners. A saw-toothed parapet motif appears near the extreme northeast corner of the building. The south and east sides of this wing each feature a bay opening matching those described above. The opening on the east side has been infilled. See Attachment C for photographs of the building.

### Documented Changes to the Property

The exterior of the building is largely intact. See Attachment B for historical documentation and building permits. The exterior changes identified through research and visual analysis include:

- Roof replacement (not visible behind parapet)
- Possible modification of roofline and tower height
- Infill and reconfiguration of storefront openings and installation of aluminum-sash windows and doors and brick infill walls at the south east corner volume and southernmost market bay
- Installation of modern garage doors within original market bays

### Current Conditions, Use, and Proposed Plans

The exterior of the building is currently in good condition and it is used as an auto shop. The applicant has proposed to rehabilitate and adapt the building into a mixed-use residential and office space.

## **Historical Overview:**

### Early Automobile-Oriented Properties

The building on the subject property originally served as a drive-in market. During the 1920s and 1930s, new property types emerged in Pasadena in response to widespread use of the automobile, among them automobile showrooms, gas stations, and drive-in laundries and markets. Very few drive-in markets have survived to the present day. One of the last extant examples of this property type is a designated landmark known as Hens Teeth Square at 2057 North Los Robles Avenue, designed in 1930 by architect Theodore Pletsch.

The subject property, though it originally served as a market, appears to have been converted into an automobile servicing garage by the early 1940s.<sup>1</sup> The first commercial garage in Pasadena was built in 1902 for Mrs. Estelle G. Jennings, followed by the Pasadena Garage Company in 1903. Garages, filling stations, and car “laundries” proliferated throughout the city by the 1930s. Many incorporated elements of the various Period Revival or early Modernist architectural styles popular at the time into their designs. Some establishments that were operated by national companies adopted standardized, recognizable designs to attract customers. The former drive-in market on the subject property is a unique, rare surviving example of a stylized early automobile-related building rendered in the Art Deco architectural style.<sup>2</sup>

### Art Deco Architectural Style

The subject building is reflective of the Art Deco architectural style. The SurveyLA “L.A. Modernism, 1919-1980” sub-context<sup>3</sup> discusses the history of the Art Deco style:

Of the various related responses to Modernism, Art Deco was among the shortest lived, its zenith cut short by the onset of the Great Depression. It was also the most lavish and resplendent of this family of architectural styles. Its gilded, glitzy aesthetic left an indelible imprint on the built environments of cities across the nation, and particularly in Los Angeles, between the mid-1920s and mid-1930s.

The advent of the style that eventually became known as Art Deco is generally traced to the International Exposition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts, which was held in Paris in 1925 and marked the style’s formal debut to an international audience. But even prior to the exposition, a cadre of American architects were designing buildings that broke from the orthodoxy of the Beaux Arts tradition and exhibited influence from such works as Bertram Goodhue’s Nebraska State Capitol (1922-32) and Eliel Saarinen’s never-

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<sup>1</sup> “Pintarelli Automotive Service,” *Metropolitan Pasadena Star-News*, December 1, 1941, 11.

<sup>2</sup> Teresa Grimes, “Early Auto-Related Properties in Pasadena, California,” National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, January 2, 1996, passim.

<sup>3</sup> Although the City of Pasadena has developed the “Residential Period Revival Architecture and Development in Pasadena” historic context and the “Cultural Resources of the Recent Past Historic Context Report,” neither discusses the Art Deco style, which was developed at the transition of the two contextual periods. SurveyLA provides an in-depth overview of the style within the context of Los Angeles; describes the character-defining features of the style; and outlines criteria for evaluating examples of the style for historical designation.

constructed design for the Chicago Tribune Tower (1922). The very earliest examples of the Art Deco style tended to amalgamate elements of these influential commissions – and especially Saarinen’s – with features associated with the Gothic Revival style. Traditional elements associated with the latter such as elaborate cornices and heavy ornamentation were replaced with the clean lines, abstract motifs, and prevailing sense of verticality that rendered Saarinen’s submission so influential and enraptured architects across the nation. Both the American Radiator Building in New York City (1924) and the Pacific Telephone Building in San Francisco (1924-25) were landmark buildings based on Saarinen’s design and were early examples of the Art Deco style in the United States. Notably, the former was designed by Howells and Hood, architects of the winning entry of the Tribune competition.

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With respect to architecture, the Art Deco style was expressed through a common set of characteristics that represented a balance of industrial technology and artistic sensibilities. Buildings designed in the style exhibited a strong vertical orientation, appearing as if they were jutting freely up into the sky. They were often composed of multiple stepped volumes, which augmented this prevailing sense of verticality and also added a dimension of visual and spatial complexity. Exterior walls were clad with terra cotta, cast stone, or another smooth material and expressed minimal depth or projection; ornament, sculpture, and other details were applied abstractly and in low relief. Classical elements like columns were stripped down to their most rudimentary forms by fluting, reeding, and other reductive methods. Buildings were often polychromatic, an effect that was achieved through means such as the use of faience and the application of hued metals. Façades were replete with abstract, eye-catching geometric motifs that exploited the decorative value of mass-produced products and provided buildings with a glitzy appearance. Ornament was applied superficially to exterior walls and acted as a decorative “skin.”

By the time the exposition ended in October 1925, the Art Deco style had ascended in popularity in the United States, and examples of the style could be found in abundance in the American urban environment. Its tasteful blend of modern aesthetics, fine craftsmanship, and sumptuous materials emerged as a bold, evocative symbol of modernity, and its keen ability to exploit the decorative qualities of mass-produced, machine made materials was a testament to the virtues of American ingenuity.<sup>4</sup>

The SurveyLA “L.A. Modernism, 1919-1980” sub-context identifies the character-defining features of the Art Deco architectural style as:

- Emphasis on verticality
- Smooth wall surfaces, such as stucco
- Flat roof, at times with shaped parapets, vertical projections or towers, emphasizing verticality
- Zigzags, chevrons and other stylized and geometric motifs as decorative elements on façade
- Metal windows, often fixed sash and casement

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<sup>4</sup> SurveyLA, “Los Angeles Citywide Historic Context Statement, Context: Architecture and Engineering, Sub-Context: L.A. Modernism, 1919-1980,” prepared for the City of Los Angeles, Department of City Planning, Office of Historic Resources, July 2021, 50-53.

- Little or no exterior decorative detailing<sup>5</sup>

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.

#### Glenn Elwood Smith (1894-1976)

The subject building was designed by locally significant architect Glenn Elwood Smith. The "Residential Period Revival Architecture and Development in Pasadena" historic context summarizes Smith's career:

Glen Elwood Smith was a prolific, but little known Pasadena architect. Born in Tuscola, Illinois on July 12, 1894, he attended school in Pasadena and then studied architecture at USC. He worked as a draftsman and designer for several local firms including the Foss Design and Building Company, Herbert Hamm Structural Engineer, and the architect Myron Hunt.

While he worked for Herbert Hamm, he designed speculative house plans, which were featured in the Home Builders Page of the *Pasadena Star News*. By 1925 he had officially opened his own practice. He designed a few commercial and institutional buildings including the Spanish Colonial Revival style Fire Station #6 (1938) at 1435 North Raymond Avenue, the Ives & Warren Company Mortuary (1929, with Frederick Kennedy, Jr.) at 100 North Hill Avenue; and the Art Deco style Lamanda Park Masonic Lodge (1926) at 25 South Huntington Drive.<sup>6</sup>

Smith also advertised his house designs in the *Pasadena Star News*. In contrast to the Period Revival style bungalows and cottages he designed by Hamm, he independently designed spacious two story houses. While the designs demonstrate his skill as an architect, it appears as though few were actually constructed. Most of Smith's documented designs were for relatively modest-sized Period Revival style houses.<sup>7</sup>

Smith is attributed as the architect of more than 30 buildings in Pasadena that have been found eligible or designated as individual historic resources or as contributors to local landmark and historic districts.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 63.

<sup>6</sup> Address changed to 25 South Sierra Madre Boulevard before 1951; Sanborn Map Company, *Pasadena, California* (New York, NY: Sanborn Map Company, 1931, rev. 1951), 162.

<sup>7</sup> Teresa Grimes and Mary Jo Winder, "Residential Period Revival Architecture and Development in Pasadena from 1915-1942," prepared for the City of Pasadena Planning and Community Development Department, August 2004, 21-22.

## **ANALYSIS:**

Staff has determined that the former drive-in market building at 731 East Washington Boulevard is eligible for designation as a Landmark under Criterion C of PMC Section 17.62.040.D.2.c, 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 former drive-in market at 731 East Washington Boulevard is significant because it is a rare, intact example of an early automobile-related drive-in market that was converted into an auto shop early in its history. It is additionally significant as a distinctive example of the Art Deco architectural style, designed by prolific local architect Glenn Elwood Smith. The subject property is a unique expression of Smith's diverse professional style, which incorporated elements of the Period Revival and Modern architectural movements, adapted for an automobile-oriented property.

The building retains architectural integrity (its ability to demonstrate why it is significant) through its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association as follows:

- Location: The building remains on its original site.
- Design: The building retains the majority of its form, plan, space, structure, and style, including its L-shape footprint, plaster exterior coating, parapet roofline, garage bay openings and surrounds, styled concrete pilasters, decorative tiles, and applied geometric motifs. The conversion of the building from a drive-in market to an auto shop occurred early in its history and required minimal exterior modification. Later exterior alterations, including infill of bays and possible modification of the tower, result in minimal visual impact on the significant original design features, and therefore the design of the auto shop embodies the defining characteristics of a distinct architectural movement.
- Setting: The surrounding mixed-use setting remains 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 Art Deco design and construction, and therefore retains integrity of workmanship.
- Feeling: The property clearly expresses the characteristics of an Art Deco-style auto shop.
- Association: The property has remained in use as an automobile-related property since its construction.

Based on the above, the property retains sufficient integrity to qualify for designation as a Landmark under Criterion C. The building retains the majority of its original character-defining features, including its L-shape footprint, plaster exterior coating, parapet roofline, garage bay opening surrounds, styled concrete pilasters, decorative tiles, and applied geometric motifs. All alterations to the building, including the replacement roofing and modified openings are not character-defining features.

**CONCLUSION:**

The former drive-in market building at 731 East Washington Boulevard qualifies for designation as a Landmark under Criterion C as an intact, locally significant example of the Art Deco architectural style; as a rare example of an early, stylized automobile-related property; and as a work of notable architect Glenn Elwood Smith.



for Jennifer Paige, AICP  
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Attachments:

- A. Application
- B. Vicinity Map & Historical Documentation
- C. Photographs
- D. Previous Landmark Determinations (1992 & 2010)
- E. Effects of Historic Designation