



Agenda Report

March 13, 2023

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council
FROM: Planning & Community Development Department
SUBJECT: DESIGNATION OF 731 EAST WASHINGTON BOULEVARD 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 former drive-in market building at 731 East Washington Boulevard meets Criterion C as a landmark pursuant to Pasadena Municipal Code (PMC) Section 17.62.040.D.2.c because it is a rare, intact example of an early automobile-related drive-in market that was converted into an auto servicing garage 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, whose work is of significance to the City;
3. Adopt a resolution approving a Declaration of Landmark Designation for 731 East Washington Boulevard, Pasadena, California;
4. Authorize the Mayor to execute a Declaration of Landmark Designation for 731 East Washington Boulevard, Pasadena, California; and
5. Direct the City Clerk to record the declaration with the Los Angeles County Recorder.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:

On January 17, 2023, the Historic Preservation Commission recommended that the City Council approve the designation of the former drive-in market building at 731 East Washington Boulevard as a landmark under Criterion C of PMC Section 17.62.040.

BACKGROUND:

The Site

The property is a rectangular parcel located at the northwest corner of Rutan Way and East Washington Boulevard. The building directly abuts the sidewalk paralleling East Washington Boulevard and extends north along the western edge of the site. See Attachment D for photographs of the site.

Exterior Features of the Building

The building has an L-shape plan and is composed of reinforced masonry coated with plaster. It has a flat roof surrounded by a low parapet that is minimally articulated along the east elevation. Along the east elevation, facing Rutan Way, six individual bays are separated by Art Deco-style decorative pilasters. The southernmost bay has been infilled with bricks, metal-sash windows, and a personnel entrance, but retains its original outline. The south end of the building has 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. 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 D for photographs of the building.

Documented Changes to the Property

The exterior of the building is largely intact. See Attachment F 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 southernmost bay.
- Installation of modern garage doors within original market bays.

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.

The subject property, though it originally served as a market, appears to have been converted into an automobile servicing garage by the early 1940s.¹ 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.² For further information regarding the early automobile-oriented properties, please refer to Attachment A.

Art Deco Architectural Style

The former drive-in market building is reflective of the Art Deco architectural style. Character-defining features of the Art Deco style include vertical emphases; smooth wall surfaces; flat roofs with shaped parapets, vertical projections, or towers; zigzags, chevrons, and geometric motifs; and metal windows units. For further information regarding the Art Deco architectural style, please refer to Attachment A.

Glenn Elwood Smith (1894-1976)

The former drive-in market building was designed by locally significant architect Glenn Elwood Smith. 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. For further information regarding Smith’s career, please refer to Attachment A.

ANALYSIS:

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, 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,

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

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

engineer, or builder whose work is of significance to the City or possesses artistic values of significance to the City.

Under Criterion C, the former drive-in market building 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 servicing garage 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 servicing garage 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 servicing garage.
- 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. The period of significance for the building is 1930, when the initial construction campaign began and concluded. The building on the property is the sole contributing feature to this designation.

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,



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Attachments (7):

- A. Historic Preservation Commission Staff Report (January 17, 2023)
- B. Application
- C. Vicinity Map
- D. Current Photographs
- E. Previous Landmark Determinations (1992 & 2010)
- F. Historical Documentation
- G. Effects of Historic Designation