



## PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

### STAFF REPORT

**DATE:** AUGUST 15, 2023

**TO:** HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

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

**SUBJECT:** APPLICATION FOR DESIGNATION AS A LANDMARK  
656 SOUTH OAK KNOLL AVENUE

---

#### 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 primary residence located at 656 South Oak Knoll Avenue meets Criterion "C" for designation as a landmark pursuant to Pasadena Municipal Code (PMC) Section 17.62.040.D.2 because it embodies the distinctive characteristics of a locally significant property type, architectural style and period. It is a notable example of a Vernacular Hipped Cottage; and,
3. Recommend that the City Council approve the designation of the primary residence at 656 South Oak Knoll Avenue as a landmark.

#### BACKGROUND:

On May 31, 2023, Ignacio Borensztein and Mira Judith Simon, the owners of the property, submitted an application for landmark designation of the primary residence at 656 South Oak Knoll Avenue. 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.

## **DESCRIPTION:**

### Property Data

- Address: 656 South Oak Knoll Avenue
- Location: East side of South Oak Knoll Avenue, south of East California Boulevard
- Date of Construction Completion: 1903 (primary residence); 1921 (secondary residence; 1947 reconstructed) (source: County Assessor)
- Original Architect: Unidentified
- Original Builder: David N. Parker
- Original / Present Use: Duplex
- Property size: 7,526 square feet (source: County Assessor)
- Building size: 1,564 square feet (source: County Assessor)

### **Architectural Description:**

#### The Site:

The property is located on a rectangular shaped lot on the east side of South Oak Knoll Avenue, south of East California Boulevard. The surrounding residential neighborhood features a variety of one- and two-story single-family houses and duplexes in a variety of architectural styles. The building is set approximately 25 feet from the front, west property line and adjacent single-family houses and duplexes are located on separate lots to the north and south. The property also includes a secondary detached residential building that was built in 1921 and reconstructed in 1947 located the northeast corner of the lot. The rear, east property line abuts a single-family residence located on South Hudson Avenue.

#### Exterior Features of the Primary Residence:

The primary building is a one-story, single-family house built in the Vernacular Hipped Cottage style. The house features a hipped roof with hipped and gabled dormers, a partial-width recessed front porch with unique arched entry, shingle and wood lap siding, Arroyo stone foundation, open eaves with projecting, rounded rafter tails, an original paneled-wood and glazed front door and original wood-sash windows, some of which feature a diamond pane muntin arrangement. Nearly all of these elements have remained unaltered since their initial construction. Although a minor addition was constructed at the southwest corner of the building in the 1920s, the overall composition of the primary façade retains integrity to its original appearance.

#### Exterior Features of the Secondary Residence:

The secondary building is a one-story, vernacular single-family house. The house features a side-gabled roof, wood single-hung and fixed windows with muntins, and shingle cladding. A front patio is covered by overhanging eaves supported by square posts along the south elevation. A portion of the patio is covered with a flat roof supported by square posts attached to the rear of the structure. It is unclear which building features of the existing structure were included in the original 1921 construction and which were subsequently altered.

Documented Changes to the Property:

Historical building permits and visual analysis indicate that the main residence on the property has been modified with the construction of a minor addition at the front, southwest corner of the building, construction of a rear addition, and application of new roofing as recently as 2002. As noted above, the secondary detached residential building on the property was constructed in 1921 and was reconstructed in 1947.

Current Conditions, Use, and Proposed Plans:

The exterior of the primary residence is currently in good condition and used as a single-family residence. No changes to the property are proposed at this time.

**Historical Overview:**

Vernacular Hipped Cottages:

According to the Historic Context entitled “Late 19th and Early 20th Century Development and Architecture in Pasadena” prepared by the City of Pasadena in 2010, Vernacular Hipped Cottage architecture was one of the most common house types constructed in Pasadena at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They were typically one-story, box-like cottages capped with a hipped roof:

Usually a dormer, which is also hipped, is centered over the main facade, although a front gable over a three-sided bay is also a favored variation of the basic roof form. A front porch, often recessed into the façade and visually opposing a bay window, was a ubiquitous element. Detailing and proportions of the openings and bays can link the cottage either to the Queen Anne, Neoclassical, or Colonial Revival styles.

The character-defining features of a 20th century Hipped Vernacular Cottage are:

- One-story
- Rectangular boxy plan
- Wood clapboard or shiplap siding
- Hipped roof with slightly overhanging boxed eaves
- Centrally located dormers
- Full- or partial-width front porches, typically recessed
- Tripartite, bay, and double-hung windows
- Minimal ornamentation

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 primary residence at 656 South Oak Knoll 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 a architect, designer, engineer, or builder whose work is of significance to the City or possesses artistic values of significance to the City.”

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 primary residence at 656 South Oak Knoll Avenue is significant because it is a notable example of a Vernacular Hipped Cottage from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. 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 is in its original location.
- Design: The building retains the majority of its form, plan, space, structure, and style, including its massing, exterior cladding, original fenestration and exterior materials, roof form, and entryway.
- Setting: The residential neighborhood is 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 early-20<sup>th</sup> century residential construction, and therefore retains integrity of workmanship.
- Feeling: The property clearly expresses the characteristics of the Vernacular Hipped Cottage architectural style and evokes the feeling of the early residential development of Pasadena.
- Association: The primary residence at 656 South Oak Knoll Avenue retains integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship and feeling, and therefore continues to convey its association with early-20<sup>th</sup> century 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 a one-story configuration; hipped roof with hipped and gabled dormers; partial-width recessed front porch with unique arched entry; shingle and wood lap siding; Arroyo stone foundation; open eaves with projecting, rounded rafter tails; original paneled-wood and glazed front door and original wood-sash windows. All alterations to the building are compatible with the original structure. The contributing structure to this designation includes the main house and does not include detached rear unit.

The secondary, rear residence is not a rare or noteworthy example of a particular architectural style and it is not individually exceptional for its design or method of construction. The secondary residence was constructed in 1921 and reconstructed in 1947. The date of reconstruction does not relate to the initial development of the property, nor does it fall within the period of significance of the Vernacular Hipped Cottage property type. The secondary residence on the property is therefore non-contributing to this designation and is also not eligible for individual designation on its own merits.

**CONCLUSION:**

The primary residence at 656 South Oak Knoll Avenue qualifies for designation as a landmark under Criterion C as a notable example of a Hipped Vernacular Hipped Cottage.



---

Jennifer Paige, AICP  
Director of Planning & Community  
Development

Prepared by:



---

Robert W. Keatinge  
Associate Planner

Reviewed by:



---

Kevin Johnson  
Principal Planner

Attachments:

- A. Vicinity Map
- B. Application & Historical Documentation (Building Description Blank; Sanborn Map)
- C. Current Photographs
- D. Effects of Historic Designation