

# Agenda Report

October 30, 2023

**TO:** Honorable Mayor and City Council  
**FROM:** Planning & Community Development Department  
**SUBJECT: DESIGNATION OF THE PRIMARY RESIDENCE AT 656 S. OAK KNOLL 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 primary residence at 656 S. Oak Knoll Avenue meets Criterion C as a landmark pursuant to Pasadena Municipal Code Section 17.62.040.D.2 because it embodies the distinctive characteristics of the Vernacular Hipped Cottage architectural style;
3. Adopt a resolution approving a Declaration of Landmark Designation for 656 S. Oak Knoll Avenue, Pasadena, California;
4. Authorize the Mayor to execute a Declaration of Landmark Designation for 656 S. Oak Knoll Avenue, Pasadena, California; and
5. Direct the City Clerk to record the declaration with the Los Angeles County Recorder.

## **HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:**

On August 15, 2023, the Historic Preservation Commission recommended that the City Council approve the designation of the primary residence at 656 S. Oak Knoll Avenue as a landmark under Criterion C of Pasadena Municipal Code (PMC) Section 17.62.040.D.2.

## **BACKGROUND:**

### 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 property line. The property also includes a secondary detached residence that was built in 1921 and reconstructed in 1947 located at the rear of the site, at the northeast corner of the lot.

### Exterior Features of the Primary Residence:

The primary residence 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 residence is a one-story, vernacular building. 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 in the City's records which building features of the existing structure were included in the original 1921 construction and which were subsequently altered as part of the 1947 reconstruction.

### Documented Changes to the Property:

Historical building permits and visual analysis indicate that the primary 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.

### Vernacular Hipped Cottages

According to the Historic Context Report "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 656 South Oak Knoll Avenue

- One-story configuration with basement
- Hipped roof with hipped and gabled dormers
- Open eaves with projecting, rounded rafter tails
- Rectangular boxy plan
- Shingle and wood lap siding
- Partial-width recessed front porch with unique arched entry Original paneled-wood and glazed front door
- Original wood-sash windows, some in a diamond pane muntin arrangement
- Arroyo stone foundation

#### ANALYSIS:

The primary residence at 656 S. 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 an architect, designer, engineer, or builder whose work is of significance to the City or possesses artistic values of significance to the City.*

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.

The primary residence retains all of its original character-defining features and retains sufficient integrity to qualify for designation as a landmark under Criterion C as a prime example of the Vernacular Hipped Cottage architectural style. 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. As such, the only contributing structure to this designation is the main house at the front of the property.

#### **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, ACP  
Director of Planning & Community  
Development Department


Prepared by:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
ROBERT W. KEATINGE  
Associate Planner

Reviewed by:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
KEVIN JOHNSON  
Principal Planner

Approved by:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
MIGUEL MÁRQUEZ  
City Manager

Attachments (5):

- A. Historic Preservation Commission Staff Report (August 15, 2023), without attachments
- B. Application & Historic Documentation
- C. Vicinity Map
- D. Current Photographs
- E. Effects of Historic Designation