



REPORT to the MAYOR and MEMBERS of the CITY COUNCIL  
From the CITY MANAGER

DATE: September 10, 2024

SUBJECT: 2024-0794 (HARBIN) - CONSIDERATION OF A  
REQUEST TO DESIGNATE THE PROPERTY LOCATED  
AT 9353 LEMON AVENUE, APN 495-175-04-00 AS A  
HISTORIC LANDMARK AND ESTABLISH A PROPERTY  
PRESERVATION (MILLS ACT) AGREEMENT

ISSUING DEPARTMENT: Community Development

SUMMARY:

Issue:

Does the property at 9353 Lemon Avenue qualify for designation as a historic landmark, and should the City enter into a property preservation (Mills Act) agreement with the owner?

Recommendation:

The Historic Preservation Commission recommends that the City Council adopt resolutions to 1) designate the property known as the Palmer "Darrell" Diamond Residence located at 9353 Lemon Avenue as a historic landmark based on eligibility criterion C for embodying distinctive characteristics of the Custom Ranch style and criterion D for being representative of the notable work of an acclaimed builder, the Diamond Construction Company (**Attachment A**) and 2) enter into a Mills Act Property Preservation Agreement with the property owner (**Attachment B**).

Fiscal Impact:

The amount of property tax to the City would be reduced by approximately \$450 annually. In exchange for discounted property taxes, the City receives guaranteed property maintenance and improvements to ensure the ongoing preservation, rehabilitation, and restoration as stipulated in a property preservation agreement.

Well maintained historic landmarks can increase property values in the neighborhood.

City's Strategic Goals:

- Promote a high quality of life that current and future generations can afford to call home.

Environmental Review:

This project is categorically exempt from environmental review pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Sections 15301 and 15331.

BACKGROUND:

The Historic Preservation Element of the General Plan provides a framework for the City's Historic Preservation program, of which a Register of Historic Landmarks is a key component. Chapter 25.03 of the City's Historic Preservation Ordinance provides for the designation of historic landmarks by the City Council. A cultural resource may be designated a historic landmark if it meets one or more of eight criteria listed below.

- A. It exemplifies or reflects special elements of the City's cultural, social, economic, political, aesthetic, engineering, or architectural history;
- B. It is identified with persons or events significant in local, state, or national history;
- C. It embodies distinctive characteristics of a style, type, period, or method of construction, or is a valuable example of the use of indigenous materials or craftsmanship;
- D. It is representative of the notable work of an acclaimed builder, designer, or architect;
- E. It is identified with a person or groups who significantly contributed to the culture and development of the City;
- F. It embodies elements of outstanding attention to architectural design, detail materials, or craftsmanship;
- G. It is an archeological or paleontological site which has the potential of yielding information of scientific value; or
- H. It is a geographically definable area possessing a concentration of sites, buildings, structures, improvements, or objects linked historically through location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and/or association, in which the collective

value of the improvements may be greater than the value of each individual improvement.

Properties with landmark designation are eligible for a reduced property tax assessment through the Mills Act. California Government Code Section 50280 et seq. authorizes cities to enter into property preservation agreements with owners of qualified historical properties to ensure and support ongoing preservation, maintenance and restoration efforts. The program, known as the Mills Act, is implemented through a 10-year preservation agreement. Each year, on the anniversary of the effective date of the Agreement, a year is automatically added to the initial term of the agreement unless either party files a notice of non-renewal.

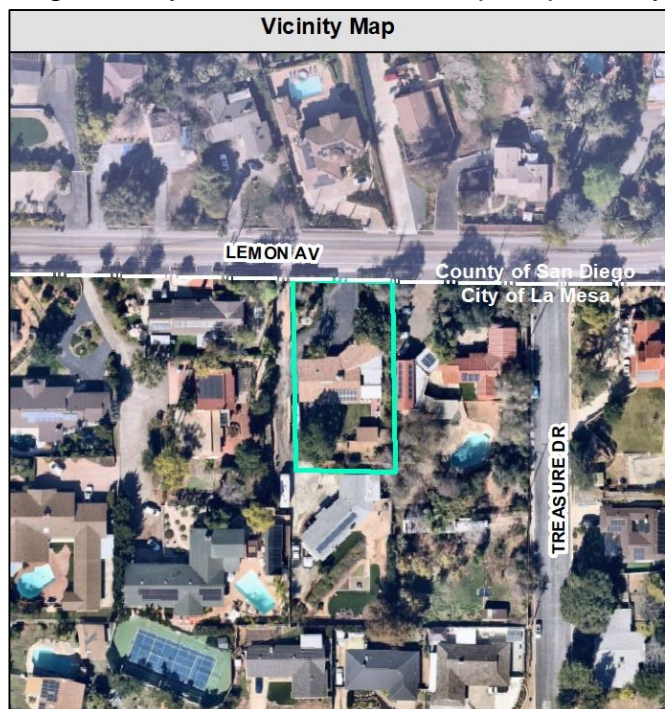
The owner of 9353 Lemon Avenue has nominated the property for local historic landmark designation. On June 4, 2024, the Historic Preservation Commission conducted a public hearing and adopted resolutions recommending that the City Council approve historical landmark designation and enter into a Mills Act Preservation Agreement with the owner (**Attachments C and D**).

**DISCUSSION:**

Sited on a 0.38-acre site, located on the south side of Lemon Avenue between Marguerita Lane and Treasure Drive, the residence sits slightly back from and above the street. The surrounding neighborhood of suburban single-family homes was developed primarily between the 1940s and the 1970s. The City’s municipal boundary extends along the north property line. A vicinity map is shown below, and the Assessor Parcel map is provided as **Attachment E**.

The house is a one-story dwelling with an attached two-car garage constructed in 1956 in the Contemporary Custom Ranch architectural style by the Diamond Construction Company as the family residence of Palmer “Darrell” Diamond.

As described in the landmark nomination report prepared by Urbana Preservation & Planning (**Attachment F**), the original owner Palmer “Darrell”



Diamond and his brother, Norval, assumed control of their family's Los Angeles-based construction company in 1930 and relocated to San Diego. By the mid-1930s, the Diamond Construction Company had gained recognition for their affordable yet high-quality style homes, at a time when both the construction industry and homeowners were impacted by the Great Depression. Their one-story vernacular cottages in neighborhoods such as Pacific Beach, Ocean Beach, and Mission Beach were among the earliest to be purchased using FHA loans. Diamond Construction continued to develop modest tract homes through the 1950s, and in 1952, the Diamond Tract in La Mesa was featured as part of National Home Week. The company also designed and built a handful of custom homes, including Palmer "Darrell" Diamond's family residence at 9353 Lemon Avenue. Mr. and Mrs. Diamond resided at 9353 Lemon Avenue until Mr. Diamond's death in 1993, and the property remained in the Diamond family until 2019.

Characteristic Custom Ranch features present on the house include slab-on-grade construction, an irregular floorplan, long horizontal massing, an asymmetrical façade, low-pitched roof with deep eave overhangs, vertical board-and-batten siding, locally-sourced custom cut stone, frameless windows, absence of applied decoration, and strong interior and exterior connections. Original contributing site features also present include custom cut stone and block walls.

Within the company's portfolio of projects, consisting mostly of modest tract homes, the Diamond's residence exhibits a high level of individualization not commonly visible in other Custom Ranch style properties associated with the company. The original architecture integrity of the resource remains with only minor alterations under the Diamond family's ownership. Alterations include the removal of a rectangular frameless window and louvered window on the west elevation, the addition of a vinyl unit on the east elevation, the removal of a louvered window and original front door on the main (north) elevation, and replacement of the original roofing over the covered patio on the southeast corner of the dwelling. Overall the resource retains integrity of location, materials, setting, and design.

The Historic Preservation Commission concluded that the resource qualifies for landmark designation under Criterion C, for embodying distinctive characteristics of the Custom Ranch architectural style. The house is one of only two identified Custom Ranch properties attributed to the Diamond Construction Company in La Mesa. The Commission further concluded that the resource also qualifies for designation under Criterion D, representative of the notable work of an acclaimed builder, designer, or architect, as representing the notable work of the Diamond Construction Company in the Custom Ranch style.

### *Mills Act Agreement*

In addition to landmark designation, the property owner is seeking to enter into a property preservation agreement with the City under the Mills Act concurrently with the landmark nomination. Although the property is currently in good condition, the owner has prepared a detailed rehabilitation plan that addresses ongoing maintenance of windows, siding, stucco, masonry, roofing, hardware, etc. and identifies rehabilitation needs where alterations have occurred. Improvements would be funded with the Mills Act tax savings and are proposed for inclusion in the Mills Act agreement. The applicant has outlined a ten-year plan to complete the rehabilitation, including the following:

- Install period appropriate fixed ribbed glass glazing on the north (front) elevation where jalousie windows were once located (2026).
- Rehabilitate fixed wood windows at the west and north elevations (2027).
- Maintenance and rehabilitation of hardscape site features (2028).
- Remove non-historic basketball hoop located above garage door (2030).
- Replace non-historic vinyl windows at the kitchen and on the south elevation of the dark room with period-appropriate aluminum casement units (2033).

### *Public Notice of Project*

Notification of the September 10, 2024, public hearing to consider the historic landmark application and the Mills Act agreement was mailed to all property owners within 300 feet of the subject property and published in the Daily Transcript on August 29, 2024. No comments have been received.

### *Environmental Review:*

The historic landmark nomination request is exempt from environmental review pursuant to categorical exemption Class 1, Existing Facilities and categorical exemption Class 31, Historical Resource Restoration/Rehabilitation, as provided by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines Sections 15301 and 15331, respectively. Section 15301 exempts activities involving negligible or no expansion of use of an existing facility. Section 15331 exempts the preservation and conservation of historical resources when carried out in a manner consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties. Exterior alterations to historic landmarks are subject to development approval by the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) to ensure that cultural resources are being maintained in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. The project serves to protect the resource by ensuring that

future alterations are subject to the standards described in Section 15331. None of the exceptions in Section 15300.2 apply.

**CONCLUSION:**

The Historic Preservation Commission recommends that the City Council adopt resolutions designating the property known as the Palmer "Darrell" Diamond Residence located at 9353 Lemon Avenue as a historic landmark under Criterion C for embodying distinctive characteristics of the Custom Ranch style and under criterion D for being representative of the notable work of an acclaimed builder, the Diamond Construction Company (**Attachment A**), and authorizing a Mills Act Preservation Agreement (**Attachment B**).

Reviewed by:



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Greg Humora  
City Manager

Respectfully submitted by:

Lynnette Santos

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Lynnette Santos  
Director of Community Development

**Attachments:**

- A. Draft Council Resolution for Historic Landmark Designation
- B. Draft Council Resolution for Mills Act Agreement
- C. Resolution HPC 2024-01 Recommending Landmark Designation
- D. Resolution HPC 2024-02 Recommending a Mills Act Agreement
- E. Assessor Parcel Map Sheet
- F. Historic Landmark Nomination Report