



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

DATE: November 22, 2022

SUBJECT: CONSIDERATION OF PROJECT 2022-1748 (BUBY), A REQUEST TO DESIGNATE THE PROPERTY LOCATED AT 4517 DATE AVENUE, APN 470-640-11-00 IN THE R1 (URBAN RESIDENTIAL) ZONE AS A HISTORIC LANDMARK AND TO ESTABLISH A PROPERTY PRESERVATION (MILLS ACT) AGREEMENT FOR THE SITE

ISSUING DEPARTMENT: Community Development

SUMMARY:

Issues:

Does the property at 4517 Date Avenue qualify for designation as a historic landmark and should the City enter into property preservation (Mills Act) agreement with the owner?

Recommendation:

The Historic Preservation Commission recommends that the City Council adopt resolutions to 1) designate the Ovid and Helen Thompson House at 4517 Date Avenue as a historic landmark (**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 \$700 annually. In exchange for discounted property taxes, the City receives guaranteed property maintenance and improvements to ensure the ongoing preservation, rehabilitation, and restoration of Mills Act properties. Well maintained historic landmarks can increase property values in the neighborhood.

City's Strategic Goals:

- Revitalize neighborhoods and corridors
- Ensure safe and affordable homes for La Mesa's current and future residents

Environmental Review:

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

BACKGROUND:

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, and the owners have applied for this benefit in conjunction with

the landmark nomination. California Government Code Section 50280 et seq. authorizes cities to enter into property preservation agreements with owners of qualified historical properties to ensure the preservation, maintenance and restoration of historic properties through reduced property tax assessments. This program, known as the Mills Act, provides for 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.

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 owners of 4517 Date Avenue have nominated the property to the local historic landmark registry. On November 1, 2022, the HPC voted 5-0 to adopt resolutions recommending that the City Council approve historical landmark designation and enter into a Mills Act Preservation Agreement with the owners. Resolutions memorializing the HPC's actions are provided as **Attachments C and D**.

DISCUSSION:

The owners of 4517 Date Avenue have applied for designation of the property as a local historic landmark. Located at the northeast corner of Date Avenue and Pasadena Avenue, the property is a contributing resource to the Date Avenue Historic District and is listed on the potential landmark registry. In the Historic Resources Inventory (**Attachment E**), the site is identified as the LaMarcus Thompson Home. A vicinity map is shown below, and the Assessor Parcel Map is provided as **Attachment F**.

Constructed circa 1911, the single-story residence has architectural styling consistent with the Craftsman style. It sits on a raised foundation that is higher on the south portion owing to the site's gently downhill slope from northwest to southeast. Character defining features include an asymmetrical front façade with a recessed front porch that curves around the southwest corner of the building and a low-pitched gable roof with deep eaves. Roof treatments include exposed wood eaves, shaped rafter tails, a pair of gablets, and a cross gable over the entry. Exterior siding includes clapboard, shiplap, and ogee styles. Windows are single and double-hung wood



frame. Overall the residence is consistent in styling with the other early twentieth century residences in the surrounding historic district. Photos are provided in the nomination report, **Attachment G**.

A number of exterior alterations have occurred over the years. Earlier changes include enclosing the original rear porch into a laundry room, adding a cupola and weathervane to the roof, relocating the front door, and enlarging the front living room window. More recently, a small addition to the southeast corner of the house was completed in 1995, and a balcony was added to the south elevation in 2001. The 1995 and 2001 alterations were reviewed and approved by the Historic Preservation Commission. Certifications of Action for both projects are included in the nomination report.



Austin and Elizabeth Clements were responsible for constructing the residence but never lived in it. They were originally from British Columbia and immigrated to the US in 1901. They were residents of La Mesa from 1909 through 1912 and were active community leaders and civic boosters. Mr. Clements was a founding director of the Bank of La Mesa, an initial stockholder in the La Mesa Volunteer Fire Company, a signatory to the Application to Incorporate for the City, and charter member and first treasurer of the La Mesa Masonic Lodge.

La Marcus and Ada Thompson owned the house after it was completed, but also did not live there. They sold to La Marcus' brother Ovid Thompson and his wife Helen Thompson in 1912. Ovid Thompson died in 1914, but Helen Thompson continued to live at the residence until her death in 1930. Helen Thompson made improvements to the house in 1916 and rented rooms up until 1925. After Helen Thompson's death, ownership returned to Ada Thompson. After a period of various rental occupancies, the house was purchased by John and Olga Ringheim, who lived there for many years and owned the property from 1936 to 1969.

The Historic Preservation Commission concluded that the property is eligible for landmark designation under **Criterion C**, for embodying distinctive characteristics of a style, type, period, or method of construction. The resource is an early example of the Craftsman



style in La Mesa, and although altered, retains sufficient integrity, and exhibits original well-preserved features that are distinctive and unusual in the neighborhood, such as the roof gables and the curved front porch with curved balustrade and curved roof lines.

Mills Act Agreement

Planned improvements identified by the owners are listed below. Those improvements would be funded with the Mills Act tax savings and are proposed for inclusion in the Mills Act agreement, with a ten-year recommended timeline for completion:

- Remove cupola and weathervane
- Rehabilitate curved siding around the porch balustrade in like kind
- Rebuild select double-hung windows and doors to match original
- Re-paint the exterior
- Install window screens and screen/storm doors
- Replace roof and add venting as needed
- Complete HVAC improvements

Public Notice of Project

Notification of the November 22, 2022, public hearing to consider the historic landmark application and preservation agreement was published in the Daily Transcript and mailed to all property owners within 300 feet of the subject property on November 10 2022. 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. 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 the draft resolutions provided as **Attachments A and B** to designate the Ovid and Helen Thompson House at 4517 Date Avenue as a historic landmark and execute the Mills Act Preservation Agreement.

Reviewed by:



Greg Humora
City Manager
Attachments:

Respectfully submitted by:



Kerry Kusiak
Director of Community Development

- A. Draft Council Resolution for Historic Landmark Designation
- B. Draft Council Resolution for Mills Act Agreement
- C. Resolution HPC 2022-09 Recommending Landmark Designation
- D. Resolution HPC 2022-10 Recommending a Mills Act Agreement
- E. Historic Resources Inventory Worksheet
- F. Assessor Parcel Map Sheet
- G. Historic Landmark Nomination Report