



Legislation Details (With Text)

File #: ID#15-398 **Version:** 1 **Name:**
Type: Action Item **Status:** Passed
File created: 5/6/2015 **In control:** City Council
On agenda: 5/21/2015 **Final action:** 5/21/2015
Title: HEARING to consider adoption of a resolution to designate the Huntington Boulevard Historic District to the Local Register of Historic Resources (Council District 5)
1. ***RESOLUTION - Designating the Huntington Boulevard Historic District to the Local Register of Historic Resources

Sponsors: Development and Resource Management Department

Indexes:

Code sections:

Attachments: 1. District Record, 2. Criteria for Designation, 3. Letters of Objection, 4. Resolution, 5. Supplement to File 15-398_Redacted.pdf, 6. Table for Map Reference Nos..pdf

Date	Ver.	Action By	Action	Result
5/21/2015	1	City Council	adopted as amended	Pass

REPORT TO THE CITY COUNCIL

May 21, 2015

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SUBJECT

HEARING to consider adoption of a resolution to designate the Huntington Boulevard Historic District to the Local Register of Historic Resources (Council District 5)
1. ***RESOLUTION - Designating the Huntington Boulevard Historic District to the Local Register of Historic Resources

RECOMMENDATION

Staff and the City of Fresno’s Historic Preservation Commission recommend that the City Council adopt the attached resolution to approve the Formal Application for a Huntington Boulevard Historic District. The request for a District was initiated by the Huntington Boulevard Homeowners in 2008. Pursuant to FMC12-1613(b) the Council shall adopt, modify or reject the designation and shall make

“findings as to which properties shall be considered contributors or non-contributors to the District.”

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2008 property owners along E. Huntington Boulevard approached City staff about the potential to be designated a Local Historic District on Fresno’s Local Register of Historic Resources. The Huntington Boulevard Homeowners Association appointed a committee to meet with the neighbors to solicit support. On January 26, 2009, the Initial Application for a Historic District was presented to and reviewed by the Historic Preservation Commission at a formal noticed hearing. The Commission received testimony from the public and on a vote of 4-0 found that Huntington Boulevard met the threshold for historic district status, and asked that Staff work with the residents to prepare a Formal Application, pursuant to Section 12-1610(c) of the Historic Preservation Ordinance.

Over the past six years staff and the Huntington Boulevard committee in tandem and separately have worked to prepare the Formal Application for a Huntington Boulevard Historic District. There are 121 separate residential properties within the proposed District which has a period of significance of 1914-1977. In consultation with the Committee, Staff has concluded that 116 of the 121 properties are contributors to the proposed District. The five non-contributors are ineligible as they have lost integrity to their period of significance due to significant alterations (Attachment A). It is recommended that two properties, both “contributors” and historically significant be excluded from the District boundaries due to the formal request of the property owners. With the removal of these two homes, the District includes 119 parcels, of which 114 are “Contributors to a Local Historic District,” as defined at FMC12-1603(g). The Formal Application for a Huntington Boulevard Historic District was approved 5-0 by the Commission at a noticed public hearing held on April 27, 2015.

BACKGROUND

The City’s Historic Preservation Ordinance (FMC 12-1600 et seq) provides for the designation of both individual properties as well as Local Historic Districts. Designated neighborhood historic districts provide for protection of the character-defining features of the District, compatible infill through design review, use of the more flexible California Historical Building Code as well as some perks through the City’s Zoning Ordinance. Most importantly, historic districts add to a sense of place and community pride and lead to enhanced property values. Designated non-residential buildings may also qualify for federal tax credits.

Huntington Boulevard is the heart of one of Fresno’s most architecturally distinct neighborhoods. Grand homes, in a variety of styles, stand side-by-side with more modest bungalows, all facing onto a wide boulevard bisected by a grassy median. The Boulevard is the center of the “Alta Vista Tract” which was first platted in 1911. The street was marketed to Fresno’s leading citizens and has been a preferred residence for business, education, and political leaders for the last 100 years. It has been described as one of the world’s great boulevards by Berkeley Professor and San Francisco architect Daniel Solomon.

Initial Application for a Huntington Boulevard Historic District:

In 2008 several property owners along E. Huntington Boulevard met with City staff to discuss the potential for becoming a Local Historic District. The City’s Historic Preservation Project Manager, Karana Hattersley-Drayton, attended a neighborhood meeting on August 28, 2008 to answer

questions about the process for creating a Historic District and the concomitant benefits and constraints. Following this meeting, the Huntington Boulevard Homeowners Association Board appointed a committee to work with staff and with the neighborhood to solicit support for the District. Over the next several months this committee collected permission forms from 81% of the property owners. It is important to note that the City's Ordinance only requires a majority of property owners, which has been interpreted by the City Attorney's Office as 51%.

Following several meetings with the committee an Initial Application was presented for review at a publicly noticed meeting of the Historic Preservation Commission on January 26, 2009. As required (FMC 12-1610(b) this Application included a proposed District Boundary and a statement regarding how the proposed District met the Designation Criteria as outlined at 12-1607(b). In addition, the petitions from the property owners were also presented although they were not required for the Initial Application. The Commission heard testimony from several property owners and on a 4-0 vote found that the proposed Huntington Boulevard Historic District met the threshold for historic district status and encouraged staff to work with the neighborhood on the preparation of a Formal Application.

Criteria for Designation for Local Historic Districts:

The Criteria for eligibility of a Local Historic District is described at FMC 12-1607(b) (Attachment B). Of interest is that unlike individual properties considered for the Local Register of Historic Resources only fifty percent of the resources within a proposed District must be fifty years of age or older. Because of this stipulation the period of significance for the proposed Huntington Boulevard Historic District extends to 1977, to include a contemporary style residence which has been evaluated as a contributor, based on its architectural merit.

A proposed Local Historic District must meet at least one or more criteria of significance. The Huntington Boulevard Historic District appears to easily satisfy this requirement under four criteria:

Criterion i: It exemplifies or reflects special elements of the city's cultural, social, economic, political, aesthetic, engineering, or architectural heritage;

Criterion ii: It is identified with a person or group that contributed significantly to the culture and development of the city;

Criterion iii: 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;

Criterion iv: Structures within the area exemplify a particular architectural style or way of life important to the city.

As noted in the District nomination form (Attachment A), the proposed Huntington Boulevard Historic District appears to qualify for designation to the Local Register of Historic Resources:

"Huntington Boulevard is one of the most architecturally distinct neighborhoods in Fresno with a diverse mix representing the major styles prevalent during the period (1914-1977). Several homes were designed by prominent local and regional architects (and/or design-build firms) including Butner and Glass, Coates and Traver, Felchlin, Franklin and Shaw, H. Rafael Lake, Fred Swartz and Taylor-Wheeler Builders. W.D. Coates (who served as the California State Architect from 1909-1911) designed the only French Eclectic style residence on the boulevard as his home. Henry Shields, a

partner in the design-build firm of Trehwitt-Shields and Fisher, also had a home built for him on the boulevard. Shortly after its annexation in 1912 Huntington Boulevard became the preferred address for the intellectual and business elite of Fresno. Property owners included A.G. Wishon; Fred Billings, who with his business partner Rhine Meyering developed the Alta Vista Tract; Fresno Bee editor Carlos McClatchy; the President of Gottschalks Department Store (Abraham Blum); and numerous attorneys, teachers, physicians, ranchers and local business owners.

The District also appears to be eligible to the National Register of Historic Places, however, this is a process separate from that of the City's Local Register program.

Formal Application for a Local Historic District:

The requirements for a Formal Application for a Local Historic District are outlined at FMC 12-1610 (c). The steps are arduous and include 1) consent of a majority of the property owners (as of May 7th, 2015, 86% have signed permission forms), and 2) preparation of a Historic Property Survey Report which includes a District map (previously adopted), a historic overview which includes a statement of significance and a list of property types, as well as individual survey forms for each property whether or not it is a contributor or non-contributor.

Additionally, there are notification requirements for the Formal Application including a notice to the property owners and a public notice published once in a local newspaper (Fresno Bee April 17, 2015). All 121 property owners were sent a packet on March 9th that included an invitation to a neighborhood meeting (held March 25th at Jackson Elementary School), notification about the April 27th HPC meeting, a copy of the Historic Preservation Ordinance, a copy of the District Record for Huntington Boulevard and a copy of the survey form prepared for the individual's property. It should be noted that the community meeting on March 25th was well attended with 25 properties represented, some by more than one owner. Talia Kolluri-Barbick from the City Attorney's office also attended and following a power point presentation by Karana Hattersley-Drayton, helped to answer questions from the neighbors.

Pursuant to the FMC 12-1610(b) a majority of property owners must consent to the designation of the proposed District. A "majority" has been defined as 51%; however, staff has always asked communities to garner at least 80% of their neighbors to ensure harmony within a proposed District. As of May 7, 2015 86% of the property owners have signed a form requesting that their property be listed on the Local Register of Historic Resources. Any forms signed at the beginning of this process in 2008 were signed again over the past several months and new property owners have also received the information packet. Eleven properties are already individually listed on the Local Register and an additional home is a designated heritage resource.

The protocols for Local Districts require that the Commission "make findings on issues or concerns raised by any individual property owner; [and] identify any property owner objecting to the inclusion of their property within the district..." (FMC 12-1610 (e)(2)(3). The Commission hearing on April 27, 2015 was well attended. Eight members of the public spoke in support of the District. The property owners for one household spoke in opposition as did another individual who does not own property on the boulevard. Although the property owners in opposition to the District announced at the meeting that they have solicited and collected 45 petitions from property owners who are now opposed to the District, no petitions have been submitted as of May 7, 2015. None of these 45 property owners spoke on the record at the Commission meeting. Two property owners (including the one family who spoke in opposition to the District) previously submitted letters objecting to the

inclusion of their property within the boundaries of the proposed District (Attachment C). These letters were included in the staff report to the Commission which was also posted on the City's Historic Preservation web site.

At the April 27, 2015 meeting the Commission did not formally alter the boundaries of the District as previously adopted in 2009. However, staff recommends that the two property owners who to date have submitted formal requests to be excluded be removed from the District boundaries. A property excluded from the District can in theory be demolished in the future or have significant changes made to the street elevations. The property owners also may not use the California Historical Building Code or take advantage, if applicable, of relief from property development standards.

It is important to note that Fresno's two residential historic districts (Wilson Island and the Porter Tract) have been very successful. Permit reviews have been expedited for any properties within the District(s) and property owners have saved money by use of the California Historical Building Code. Two property owners within the Wilson Island Historic District in fact spoke about their positive experiences at the Huntington Boulevard neighborhood meeting on March 27, 2015. Both gentlemen also fielded questions from local homeowners.

CONCLUSION

Huntington Boulevard is a crown jewel for Fresno, with its mix of architect-designed homes and modest Craftsman bungalows. It serves as an urban park for the city and is used daily by pedestrians and bicyclists. A majority of homeowners have worked together for several years to ensure that the historic integrity of the boulevard is protected in part to protect property values. One term heard several times at the April 27th hearing was "stewardship;" that homeowners want to be good stewards of the neighborhood. Pursuant to FMC 12-1610(e)(3) the Commission took testimony, considered the facts and approved the Formal Application for a Huntington Boulevard Historic District with the original proposed District boundaries. Staff is recommending that the boundary be modified to exclude the two formal requests for exclusion from property owners. The City Council may adopt, modify or reject the designation recommendations of the Commission (FMC 12-1613(b)).

Should the Council designate a Huntington Boulevard Historic District, pursuant to FMC 12-1610(f) staff and the property owners within the District will meet to develop a Conservation/District Plan which will establish the preservation objectives of the Local Historic District. The Plan will include how best to achieve design review, which activities are regulated or excluded from review and public education and outreach.

ENVIRONMENTAL FINDINGS

The designation of historic properties is not a "project" for the purposes of the California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA"), as it will not result in a direct or indirect change in the environment.

LOCAL PREFERENCE

Local preference was not considered because designation of a historic district does not entail a bid or award of a construction or services contract.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no additional impact beyond the expenditure of staff time.

Attachments:

1. District Record for Proposed Huntington Boulevard Historic District.
2. Criteria for Designation of Local Historic Districts FMC 12-1607(b).
3. Letters of Objections, Penny Raven (25 March 2015) and Charles Springsted (20 March 2015).
4. A Resolution of the City Council of the City of Fresno, California, Designating Huntington Boulevard, Which Includes All Properties Described in Attachment A, as a Local Historic District.