

November 13, 2017

FROM: DANIEL ZACK, AICP, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR  
Development and Resource Management Dept.

SUBJECT: CONSIDERATION OF A MILLS ACT HISTORICAL PROPERTY CONTRACT  
FOR THE WISHON HOME (HP#291) LOCATED AT 3555 E. HUNTINGTON  
BOLEVARD PURSUANT TO FMC 12-1706.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends that the Commission hold a public hearing and recommend that the Director of Development and Resource Management enter into a Historical Property Contract for the Wishon Home (HP#291) located at 3555 E. Huntinton Boulevard pursuant to FMC 12-1706.

## **BACKGROUND**

The Wishon Home is a distinctive two-story home is located on Block 17 of the Alta Vista Tract. It was the residence of Albert Graves Wishon, who helped to develop the subdivision. The tract was platted in 1911 as a streetcar suburb on either side of the Sunnyside and Recreation Line which had been extended circa 1907 by Wishon to carry Fresno residents out to Recreation Park (Garcia 2003). Albert Wishon purchased the first parcels in the new subdivision in 1912, a day after the official annexation, and he completed this beautiful Arts and Crafts inspired residence at the corner of Huntington Boulevard and Sixth Street in 1916. Block 17 was subdivided a few years later to allow first for a residence for his daughter and son-in-law, Jenny Wishon Watson and later to accommodate the 1947 residence for Wishon's granddaughter, Eleanor Wishon MacMichael. The home shares attributes with the Arts and Crafts movement of the early 20th century: the two story irregular massing with a steeply pitched roof, gables and dormers, wide overhanging eaves, a façade pergola which connects the house to the out-of-doors, double hung sash windows with multiple lights in the upper half, French doors, knee braces at the cornice, etc. (Carter and Goss 1988:140) However it is also architecturally unique, in part due to the tile roof.

The owners have requested to enter into a Historical Property Agreement (also known as a Mills Act contract) with the City.

Mills Act contracts are a very effective historic preservation tool. Such agreements provide for yearly property tax savings for the owner in exchange for a commitment to maintain and improve the historic character of the property. This Mills Act program was adopted by the City Council in 2016, and this proposal, if approved, will be part of the first group of contracts enacted under the program.

The minimum duration for a Mills Act Contract is 10 years. Once granted a Mills Act contract, a property owner saves approximately 40%-50% of the individual assessed tax valuation of the property. The estimated loss of revenue to the City for a property valued at \$1,000,000 would be approximately at \$800 to \$1,000 per year.

In order to ensure compliance with the proposed program, staff and/or the Historic Preservation Commission conduct periodic inspections of the properties to verify that the agreed-to improvements are being made by the owner.

On November 1 Commissioners Goldbeck and McNary, as well as Amber Piona and Dan Zack of City staff, met with the owners on-site and reviewed their proposed 10 Year Improvement Plan of projects for maintenance and restoration of the historic character of the home. Commissioners Goldbeck and McNary and staff found the proposed plan to be appropriate the needs of the home and the goals of the program.

## **CEQA**

The proposed historic designation seeks to insure the long-term preservation of the subject resource which is exempt from CEQA (California Environmental Quality Act) review, per section 15331, Class 31 of the CEQA guidelines.

Attachment:       Exhibit A - DPR Evaluation for the Wishon Home  
                          Exhibit B – Proposed 10 Year Improvement Plan

## BUILDING, STRUCTURE, AND OBJECT RECORD

\*NRHP Status Code: 2D2, 3B, 5B

\*Resource Name: A.G. and Henrietta Wishon Home

**B3. Original Use:** Single family residence

**B4. Present Use:** Single family residence

\***B5. Architectural Style:** Arts and Crafts

\***B6. Construction History:** Original building permit issued on 10 November 1915; garage added in 1916 with an addition to garage in 1938 by Taylor-Wheeler; new bathroom, windows and general repairs to the home in 1937 and swimming pool constructed in 1941.

\***B7. Moved?** ☒ No

\***B8. Related Features:** The home faces south onto the former right-of-way for the Sunnyside and Recreation Lines. The dual track for the street car was removed in 1939 and the area is now a grassy median.

**B9a. Architect:** Coates and Traver

**B9b. Builder:** Unknown

\***B10. Significance:** **Theme:** Streetcar suburb **Area:** Alta Vista Tract (Huntington Boulevard)

**Period of Significance:** 1916-1936 **Property Type:** Single-family residential **Applicable Criteria:** A/1/i; B/2/ii; C/3/iii

This distinctive two-story home is located on Block 17 of the Alta Vista Tract and was the residence of Albert Graves Wishon, who helped to develop the subdivision. The tract was platted in 1911 as a streetcar suburb on either side of the Sunnyside and Recreation Line which had been extended circa 1907 by Wishon to carry Fresno residents out to Recreation Park (Garcia 2003). Albert Wishon purchased the first parcels in the new subdivision in 1912, a day after the official annexation, and he completed this beautiful Arts and Crafts inspired residence at the corner of Huntington Boulevard and Sixth Street in 1916. Block 17 was subdivided a few years later to allow first for a residence for his daughter and son-in-law, Jenny Wishon Watson and later to accommodate the 1947 residence for Wishon's granddaughter, Eleanor Wishon MacMichael. The home shares attributes with the Arts and Crafts movement of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century: the two story irregular massing with a steeply pitched roof, gables and dormers, wide overhanging eaves, a façade pergola which connects the house to the out-of-doors, double hung sash windows with multiple lights in the upper half, French doors, knee braces at the cornice, etc. (Carter and Goss 1988:140) However it is also architecturally unique, in part due to the tile roof.

\***B12. References:** 1918, 1948 and 1963 Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps; Building permits on file, City of Fresno; Heritage Fresno: Homes and People, 1975:62; Draft Nomination forms for Huntington Boulevard, National Register of Historic Places (1994); Virginia and Lee McAlester, A Field Guide to American Houses, 2002; Garcia, Uvaldo. "History of the Alta Vista Tract and Huntington Boulevard: A Work of Albert Graves Wishon." Unpublished Ms. Prepared for History 100, Fresno State University, 13 May 2003; Carter and Goss 1988:140; John Edward Powell, Biographies of W.D. Coates and Harrison Traver, 1996 (A Guide to Historic Architecture in Fresno).

\***B14. Evaluator:** Karana Hattersley-Drayton, M.A.  
Historic Preservation Project Manager, Fresno

\***Date of Evaluation:** 4 February 2015

(This space reserved for official comments.)



**CONTINUATION SHEET**

Primary # \_\_\_\_\_

HRI# \_\_\_\_\_

Trinomial \_\_\_\_\_

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Resource: A.G. and Henrietta Wishon Home

\*Recorded by: Karana Hattersley-Drayton

\*Date: 11 July 2014

■ Continuation

Albert Graves Wishon was born on November 6, 1858 at Coppeges Mill, Missouri. His early experience and interest in farming and civil engineering provided a foundation for his entrepreneurial work in Fresno. He built the San Joaquin Valley's first power plant on the Kaweah River east of Visalia: the Mt. Whitney Power Company which began operations on June 30, 1899 (Heritage Fresno:62). Wishon left the Mt. Whitney Company in 1902 and that same year convinced three Los Angeles investors, A.C. Balch, W.G. Kerckhoff and Henry E. Huntington, to purchase the faltering San Joaquin Power Company. In 1903 the company was renamed the San Joaquin Light and Power Corporation and included in its holdings the Fresno City Water Company and the Fresno City Railway, which was renamed the Fresno Traction Company. Wishon was appointed the General Manager.

Wishon purchased and improved Recreation Park (located at Cedar and Ventura) and in order to bring visitors to the park he struck a deal with the Pacific Improvement Company which owned the 190-acre alfalfa field immediately east of downtown Fresno and north of Ventura. (Although the 1906 Sanborn indicates street blocks throughout this area, there apparently was no development and it was only a paper subdivision.) The agreement allowed Wishon to lay a double track down Mariposa Street. Passenger service on the expanded Sunnyside and Recreation Line began after 1907.

The land adjacent to the streetcar line became increasingly desirable for residential use. The "Alta Vista Tract" was mapped by William Stranaham and officially platted in 1911. The tract was annexed to the City on January 23, 1912 and next day Wishon bought the first lots on Huntington Boulevard (the former Mariposa Street). Wishon was clearly involved with the development of the tract and in the covenants that were included in deeds. By 1920 there were 267 homes in the Tract, most of them on the side streets of Balch, Platt, Kerckhoff and Verrue.

The San Joaquin Light and Power Corporation merged with Pacific Gas and Electric in 1930 and Wishon remained a director and vice chairman of the board until his death. A.G. Wishon was also involved in numerous other enterprises in the Fresno area and served, for example, as a director of the Sun Maid Raisin Company. In later years he operated orchards and vineyards with his son-in-law, Ralph W. Watson (who lived in the Tudor Revival style home next door).

The A.G. and Henrietta Wishon Home was designed by the architectural firm of Coates and Traver. William D. Coates studied with Paul Cret at the University of Pennsylvania and from 1909 to 1911 he served as the California State Architect. In 1911 he formed a partnership with Harrison B. Traver, a former college classmate at the University of Pennsylvania. In 1914 the firm moved to Fresno where they continued to practice until 1925. They designed several local buildings and residences of note, including the Liberty Theatre and Fresno High School as well as the Wishon Home and the Butler Home at 3635 E. Huntington (Powell 1996). Coates also lived on Huntington Boulevard and designed the French Eclectic style home (known locally as the "Witches House") at 3901 E. Huntington for his own residence.

The A.G. Wishon Home appears to be eligible to the National Register of Historic Places, the California Register of Historical Resources and the Local Register of Historic Resources under Criterion A/1/i as one of the first homes in the Alta Vista Tract, under Criterion B/2/ii for Wishon's role in local and regional history and under Criterion C/3/iii as the work of a master, the architectural firm of Coates and Traver and as a superb and eclectic example of the Arts and Crafts aesthetic. A contributor to the home is the 88 foot tall California Coast Redwood in the front yard which is decorated each year and has been honored by the National Christmas Tree Association as the Nation's Tallest Living Lighted Decorated Christmas Tree (December 2001 HB Calendar).





“The Wishon House” Preservation Plan  
 3555 East Huntington Blvd.  
 Fresno, Calif. 93702

Year	Project
2018	Replace missing terra cotta roof tiles. Repair downspout separated from building. Remount fallen shutter on West side of house. Dislodge debris embedded throughout downspout system. Maintain building as required including removal of debris from gutters and roof.
2019	Repair and paint exterior double doors on west side of house. Find and install matching or similar door hardware. Maintain building as required including removal of debris from gutters and roof.
2020	Rebuild or replace front gate on south side of property maintaining original design and reusing hardware. Maintain building as required including removal of debris from gutters and roof.
2021	Rebuild and replace missing shutters on house side facing street (South) to match original design. Maintain building as required including removal of debris from gutters and roof.
2022	Repair and/or replace, and paint sagging ornamental joists over the back door. Inspect and repair and/or replace rotted fascia and exterior decorative woodwork. Maintain building as required including removal of debris from gutters and roof.
2023	Replace and/or repair rotted wood in arbors, maintaining original shape and scale, attached to front and West sides of house. Paint arbors including tops. Maintain building as required including removal of debris from gutters and roof.
2024	Repair chipped and cracked cement in front porch. Re-stain cement on front porch to original red color if possible. Maintain building as required including removal of debris from gutters and roof.
2025	Repair decomposing areas of front porch columns and paint. Maintain building as required including removal of debris from gutters and roof.
2026	Repair and repaint window trim. Maintain building as required including removal of debris from gutters and roof.
2027	Remove dead trees. Repair or replace fence along East side of property (6 <sup>th</sup> st.). Maintain building as required including removal of debris from gutters and roof.