



Legislation Details (With Text)

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Title: CONSIDER RECOMMENDATION TO THE CITY COUNCIL THE DESIGNATION OF THE HERNDON SUBSTATION CONTROL BUILDING LOCATED AT 7430 N WEBER AVENUE TO FRESNO'S LOCAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC RESOURCES AND ADOPTION OF FINDINGS NECESSARY TO SUPPORT RECOMMENDATION PURSUANT TO FMC 12-1609 AND FRESNO GENERAL PLAN POLICY FOR DEMOLITION REVIEW HCR-2-g.

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May 21, 2018

FROM: DANIEL ZACK, AICP, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
Development and Resource Management Dept.
Secretary, Historic Preservation Commission

BY: LAURA VAN ONNA
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SUBJECT:
CONSIDER RECOMMENDATION TO THE CITY COUNCIL THE DESIGNATION OF THE HERNDON SUBSTATION CONTROL BUILDING LOCATED AT 7430 N WEBER AVENUE TO FRESNO'S LOCAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC RESOURCES AND ADOPTION OF FINDINGS NECESSARY TO SUPPORT RECOMMENDATION PURSUANT TO FMC 12-1609 AND FRESNO GENERAL PLAN POLICY FOR DEMOLITION REVIEW HCR-2-g.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Commission find that the Herndon Substation Control Building (1931) located at 7430 N Weber Avenue be found eligible for listing in the Local Register of Historic Resources, as meeting the applicable criteria for buildings more than fifty years old in FMC 12-1607 (a)(1). If the Commission concurs with the staff recommendation, the property will be forwarded to the Fresno City Council for designation pursuant to FMC 12-1609 and General Plan Policy HCR-2-g. As required by the City's Historic Preservation Ordinance, notice of this hearing considering designation of the property was published in *The Fresno Bee* on May 10, 2018.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Staff received a demolition permit application from the owner of the Herndon Substation Control Building located at 7430 N Weber Avenue on April 17, 2018. Pursuant to the City's General Plan Policy HCR-2-g, historic preservation staff reviewed the demolition permit for the potential that the building might be eligible for listing in the Local Register of Historic Resources. According to records on file, in the past there have been 50-75 demolitions permits reviewed by staff each year, of which one or two may have been reviewed in the field and documented. On rare occasions, the property is evaluated on State survey forms and presented to the Commission for review.

An owner representative presented Staff with the "Historical Resource Evaluation of the Herndon Substation, Fresno County, California," prepared by Aubrie Morlet of Applied EarthWorks, Inc. for Pacific Gas and Electric Company in April 2010 - in which Herndon Substation and its Control Building are researched, documented, evaluated, and found to be ineligible for California and Local designation due to lack of integrity, on the premise of the property owner's proposal to demolish the Control Building. Staff is concerned that the finding for the Control Building in this report relies heavily on the loss of integrity for Herndon Substation as a whole and does not give full consideration to local significance. Staff visited the property on May 4, 2018 to meet with the owner representative and to accurately document the current state of the Control Building and found that the building was structurally sound and intact and that it appeared to be eligible for listing in the Local Register of Historic Resources.

The Herndon Substation Control Building (1931) located at 7430 N Weber Avenue was constructed in 1931 as a two-story public utility building on the Herndon Substation site located on a large tract of land located between the San Joaquin River to the north and the community of Herndon to the south. It meets Criteria i and iii (only one is required) for designation in the Local Register for buildings greater than fifty years of age as it: is associated with the merger of Pacific Gas and Electric Company and San Joaquin Light and Power Corporation and with the role of the substation in the economic and social growth of the region (i) and embodies distinctive characteristics of the Art Deco architectural style (iii).

The Herndon Substation was built and completed in June 1931 specifically to interconnect the two electrical systems of the San Joaquin Light and Power Corporation and the Pacific Gas and Electric Company. The substation was completed one year after the merger of the two organizations and signifies the end of the regional electric company and the beginning of PG&E's dominance in Northern and Central California. At the time of its construction, this new electrical technology was critical to support the growing population and continued growth of agriculture in Fresno County and the rest of the San Joaquin Valley. All that remains of the 1931 Herndon Substation is the Control Building. Because of its role in the growth of the PG&E system and its critical importance to the growth of the regional agricultural economy and the cities and towns that supported that economy, the Herndon Substation Control Building is eligible under Criterion i.

The only individuals associated with the substation are PG&E engineers, construction supervisors, and various maintenance workers, all of whom had only a limited connection with the facility. While many of these individuals had long careers with PG&E, none were prominent locally or made substantial contributions to the development of PG&E's system. None of the individuals appear to be historically significant and therefore the Herndon Substation Control Building does not appear to be eligible under Criterion ii.

While the Control Building is minimal in decoration, it embodies distinctive characteristics of the Art Deco architectural style with elements that include smooth walls surfaces and vertical projections above the roofline that give a vertical emphasis as well as fixed sash and casement metal windows. It was also constructed at the height of the Art Deco movement, is the only Art Deco substation remnant in Fresno County, and is one of the few examples of the Art Deco style remaining in the City of Fresno. Therefore, the Herndon Substation Control Building is eligible under Criterion iii.

Due to the development history of the site, it is not likely to yield archaeological resources important to prehistory or prehistory and therefore does not appear to be significant under Criterion iv.

The Herndon Substation Control Building located at 7430 N Weber Avenue appears to be eligible for listing in the City of Fresno's Local Register of Historic Resources. The property is greater than 50 years of age and possesses integrity of location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association (FMC 12-1607). Although integrity of setting, feeling, and association have diminished due to the replacement of structures and equipment on the Herndon Substation site and due to the removal of some equipment and controls from the Control Building, the result is not a loss of integrity. The site that surrounds the Control Building retains its historic use, and equipment from the Control Building has not been completely removed. Although the Control Building was converted to an unmanned station in 1963, it was still transitioning from use to vacancy in the early 2000s.

The Herndon Substation Control Building is significant under Criterion i because it is associated with the merger of Pacific Gas and Electric Company and San Joaquin Light and Power Corporation and with the role of the substation in economic and social growth of the region and Criterion iii because it embodies distinctive characteristics of the Art Deco architectural style.

BACKGROUND

Local Register Criteria and Protocols:

The City's Historic Preservation Ordinance is located at Chapter 12, Article 16. Section 1607 outlines the criteria for designation of a resource to the Local Register of Historic Resources. A "historic resource" is "any building, structure, object or site" which is generally more than fifty years of age and "possesses integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association, and:

- (i) Is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or
- (ii) Is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or
- (iii) Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction, or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values; or
- (iv) Has yielded or may be likely to yield, information in prehistory or history."

The City's criteria for assessing significance are patterned after the National Register of Historic Places (1966 as amended) which uses letters A-D for significance. Fresno's Local Register is also similar, although not equivalent, to the California Register of Historical Resources which uses a numbering system of 1-4 for criteria. Although the concept of "integrity" is not specifically defined in the City's Ordinance, it is implicitly understood to follow the National Register which defines "integrity" as "the ability of a property to convey its significance." "To retain integrity a property will always possess several and usually most, of the aspects." (How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation," 1988: 44).

The process for designating a historic resource is outlined in FMC 12-1609. In brief, a request to designate a resource to the Local Register may be made by the Council, the Commission, the Secretary to the Commission, the property owner, or an authorized representative of the owner [12-1609(a)]. Applications for listing use the state protocol for survey forms with both a DPR 523A (Primary) as well as a DPR 523B (Building, Structure, Object Form) [12-1609(a)(1-9)]. A notice must be published in a local newspaper at least 10 days prior to the hearing and sent to the property owner as well. Commissioners must also physically visit the property prior to the Commission hearing [12-1609(c)(1)].

Attachments

- Exhibit A: State of California Survey Forms for the Herndon Substation Control Building 7430 N Weber Avenue Prepared May 7, 2018 by Laura Groves van Onna for the City of Fresno.
- Exhibit B: "Historical Resource Evaluation of the Herndon Substation, Fresno County, California," prepared by Aubrie Morlet of Applied Earthworks, Inc. for Pacific Gas and Electric Company in 2010.