



Council Agenda Report

Item 5d

Department: Community Development
Cost Center: 4003
For Agenda of: 8/24/2021
Placement: Consent
Estimated Time: N/A

FROM: Michael Codron, Community Development Director
Prepared By: Walter Oetzell, Assistant Planner

SUBJECT: A REQUEST TO INCLUDE THE PROPERTY AT 350 HIGH STREET IN THE CITY'S INVENTORY OF HISTORIC RESOURCES AS A MASTER LIST RESOURCE AS 'THE TINY MART'

RECOMMENDATION

As recommended by the Cultural Heritage Committee, adopt a Resolution entitled, "A Resolution of the City Council of the City of San Luis Obispo, California, adding the property located at 350 High Street to the Master List of Historic Resources as 'The Tiny Mart' (HIST 0208 2021)."

DISCUSSION

Background

The owners of the property at 350 High Street have requested that the property be designated as a Master List Resource and included in the City's Inventory of Historic Resources as the "Tiny Mart." The property is not within any Historic District and is not currently included in the Inventory.

Previous Advisory Body Action

On June 28, 2021, the Cultural Heritage Committee considered this request and found that the property meets eligibility criteria for historical listing to a degree that qualifies it for designation as a Master List Resource and recommended that the City Council designate the property as such in the City's Inventory of Historic Resources.

Site and Setting

The property is on the northeast corner of High and Carmel Streets, within a residential area characterized by single family dwellings. The property was developed with a small commercial building, commissioned by Herman Hinzy Page and built by George W. Skiles, an active local architect, in 1926, for use as a neighborhood grocery store, along with a residential cottage next door (now 368 High; see Application, pg. 14). The commercial building and property at 350 High Street is the subject of this application and listing request. The applicants have provided an evaluation of the property and its eligibility for historic listing (Attachment B), prepared by James Papp, PhD, a local historian and architectural historian.

Building Architecture

As described in the applicant's Evaluation (Attachment B), the small commercial building on the site is a late example of Western False Front Vernacular style of late 19th- and early 20th Centuries, "an extension of standard urban architecture into unfamiliar settings, structural types, and materials" (Evaluation, pg. 9). It displays a



Figure 1: 350 High ("Tiny Mart")

characteristic square-parapet false front and is sheathed in "novelty siding" (siding of a pattern that allows it to lie flat on a wall surface) as its primary material. The applicant's Evaluation identifies several significant features of the building and property (see § 4, Architectural Significance of Tiny Mart):

- "Tandem" relationship to adjacent residential cottage (at 368 High);
- "Obtuse-angle footprint" where Spanish-era and "American grid" street layouts meet;
- Hand-painted "Eskimo Pie" mural from 1952 (subsequently restored by local artists);
- A relationship ("as the center of a Mini Development") with seven dwellings on the block, all by the same local owner-builder, George W. Skiles;

The City's Historic Context Statement describes the representative forms and styles of early 20th Century Commercial Development, including Commercial Vernacular styles. The specific architectural and historical characteristics of the building are more fully discussed in the applicant's Evaluation (Attachment B).

Frank W. and Alberta Bell

The applicant's Evaluation describes the subsequent proprietors of grocery stores at the site, up to the acquisition of the store by Frank and Alberta Bell in 1966, who are closely associated with the property. The Bells had worked and lived on farms in Central Texas and came to San Luis Obispo after 1951, during the period described as the Great Migration, between 1910 and 1970, out of the rural South to other more urban areas (see Attachment B, § 5 for discussion of this historical context, nationally and locally). As more fully described in the Application, the Bell's ownership of their business premises, their distinction as the first Black grocery owners in the City, and the survival of the premises as a representation of a Great Migration-era Black business give them and the property historical significance (Attachment B, pg. 34).

Eskimo Pie Mural

In 1952 a mural was hand-painted on the Carmel Street side of the Tiny Mart by the Golden State Creamery, advertising “Eskimo Pie,” which the company distributed locally, and this rare surviving example of Americana from the period was uncovered (on removal of asbestos siding) by the current owners in 1979 and subsequently restored (Attachment B, pg. 11). The Evaluation describes the context and controversies surrounding the portrayal of an indigenous person in the advertisement (from pg. 16) and discusses the value of its preservation as a complex landmark in local racial history and the history of racism (pg. 28). With respect to the preservation of the mural, the Cultural Heritage Committee noted the mural as an element of the property’s historical integrity deserving preservation, without explicit reference to the mural in their recommendation. The view of City staff on this issue is that as an element of the building’s integrity, it should remain intact in-situ. Were modification to be considered in future, the mural should be preserved, for example, by covering it, or similar treatment, in a manner that doesn’t damage or destroy the mural itself.



Figure 2: Eskimo Pie Mural

Evaluation of Eligibility

To be eligible for listing as an historic or cultural resource, the resource must exhibit a high level of historic integrity, be at least 50 years old, and meet one or more of the eligibility criteria described in § 14.01.070 of the Historic Preservation Ordinance (see Attachment C). As provided in § 14.01.050 of the Ordinance, the most unique and important resources and properties in terms of age, architectural or historical significance, rarity, or association with important persons or events in the City’s past may be designated as “Master List Resources.”

Architectural Criteria

As described in the applicant’s Evaluation, the commercial building exhibits characteristic features of Commercial Vernacular architecture from the early 20th Century, consistent with listing criteria for “Style” and for “Design”:

“... embodying as a Western False Front corner store the distinctive characteristics of a type of construction evaluated as a measure of current rarity and vernacular influences that represent a particular social milieu and period of the community” (pg. 1)

The property and building retain their character defining features including: the “novelty siding”; the “obtuse-angle” footprint resulting from the unusual shape of the property; the Western False Front shop façade; the multi-paned plate glass shop front window shaded by a fabric awning; small louvered ventilation windows flanking the shop window; and the hand-painted advertising sign (Attachment B, pg. 36).

Historic Criteria

Based on the significance of Frank W. and Alberta Bell as the first Black grocery owners the applicant's Evaluation concludes that the property qualifies for Master List designation by its association with persons significant to the community and who made early contributions to the community (pg. 1), as described by listing criteria for “History – Person.”

Integrity

To demonstrate satisfaction of listing criteria for “Integrity,” the applicant's Evaluation notes the retention of the original footprint and character-defining elements of the building, and absence of significant modification. Apart from minor window additions (to the south- and southwest-facing walls) and addition of COR-TEN steel accents to window frames and corner boards (considered reversible and not detrimental to communication of the building's historical significance), the property and building exhibit a high degree of integrity (Attachment B, pp. 36-37).

Conclusion

The information submitted by the applicant, documenting the architectural character and integrity of the Tiny Mart, and describing the people associated with the property, provided a basis for the Cultural Heritage Committee to find that the property satisfies Architectural Criteria for Style and Design (§§ 14.01.070 (A) (1) & (2)), Historic Criteria for “History-Person” (§ 14.01.070 (B) (2)), and Criteria for Integrity (§§ 14.01.070 (C) (1) & (2)), and that its architectural character and association with Frank W. and Alberta Bell qualify the property for designation as a Master List Historic Resource:

“Tiny Mart is eligible for the Master List for its architectural representation of a social milieu and period, [and] association with historically significant pioneer African American business owners... (Attachment B, pg. 39)

Policy Context

The recommended action on this item is supported by historical preservation policies set out in § 3.0 of the Conservation and Open Space Element of the City's General Plan, and with procedures and standards for listing of historic resources set out in the City's Historic Preservation Ordinance §§ 14.01.060 & 14.01.070.

Public Engagement

Public notice of this hearing has been provided to owners and occupants of property near the subject site, and published in a widely circulated local newspaper, and hearing agendas for this meeting have been posted at City Hall, consistent with adopted notification procedures. Public notice was also previously provided for the Cultural Heritage Committee meeting of June 28, 2021.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

This project is categorically exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Inclusion of the subject properties on the City's Inventory of Historic Resources does not have the potential for causing a significant effect on the environment, and so is covered by the general rule described in § 15061 (b) (3) of the CEQA Guidelines.

FISCAL IMPACT

Budgeted: No

Budget Year: 2021

Funding Identified: No

Fiscal Analysis:

Funding Sources	Total Budget Available	Current Funding Request	Remaining Balance	Annual Ongoing Cost
General Fund	N/A	\$	\$	\$
State				
Federal				
Fees				
Other:				
Total	\$	\$0	\$	\$0

Adding the Property to the Master List of Historic Resources will have no fiscal impacts. Historic designation of the Property itself has no bearing on City fiscal resources. As a Master List Resource, however, the Property would be eligible for historic preservation incentives under the "Mills Act." A subsequent request to enter into a "Mills Act Contract" with the City would be considered under a separate application. A separate fiscal analysis would be reviewed by the City Council should the property proposed be added to the Mills Act list of properties.

ALTERNATIVES

1. ***Decline to designate the property as a Master List Resource in the Inventory of Historic Resources.*** This decision would be based on finding that the Property is not considered to be sufficiently unique or important, or found to satisfy Evaluation Criteria for listing to a degree warranting such designation.
2. ***Continue consideration of the request for additional information or discussion.***

ATTACHMENTS

- A – Draft Resolution adding 350 High Street to Master List Of Historic Resources
- B – Applicant's Evaluation of Eligibility for Listing (James Papp, PhD)
- C – Evaluation Criteria for 350 High Street