



Meeting Date: 5/24/2022
Item Number: 4b
Time Estimate: 30 Minutes

CULTURAL HERITAGE COMMITTEE AGENDA REPORT

SUBJECT: DESIGNATE 1133 PISMO STREET, THE THOMAS AND MAY BRECHEEN HOUSE, AS A MASTER LIST RESOURCE

PROJECT ADDRESS: 1133 Pismo St.

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FILE NUMBER: HIST-0171-2022

FROM: Brian Leveille, Senior Planner

APPLICANT: Christopher & Heidi Frago

REPRESENTATIVE: James Papp

RECOMMENDATION

Make a recommendation to the City Council on the property's qualification to be included in the City's Inventory of Historic Resources as a Master List Resource.

1.0 BACKGROUND

Christopher and Heidi Frago, represented by James Papp, have requested that the property at 1133 Pismo Street be designated as a Master List Resource in the City's Inventory of Historic Resources, as the Thomas and May Brecheen House. An evaluation of the property and its eligibility for historic listing (Historical Evaluation, Attachment A) has been prepared by James Papp, PhD, Historian and Architectural Historian. The Cultural Heritage Committee shall review all applications for historic listing, as set out in §14.01.060 of the City's Historic Preservation Ordinance, and determine if the property meets eligibility criteria for listing and provide a recommendation to City Council, for final action on the application.

2.0 DISCUSSION

2.1 Site and Setting

The subject property is located southeast of Downtown in a medium-density (R-2) residential zoned area along Pismo Street, mid-block between Toro Street and Santa Rosa Street within the La Vina tract and one block northeast of Mitchell Park in the Old Town Historic District. Surrounding architectural styles in the neighborhood include Colonial Revival and Craftsman in largely original condition from the 1910s and 1920s. At the time of the development, the property was located across the street from William Weeks high school as well as Pierre Dallidet's vineyard, both of which are now gone. Other surrounding properties on the City's Master List of Historic Resources include the neighboring Thorne/Nuss House and the Vollmer House, both Craftsman style homes.

2.2 The Thomas and May Brecheen House

City records (see Attachment B) describe the property as a raised one-story residence having a rectangular plan and a Neoclassic Rowhouse stylistic influence, with several characteristic features highlighted:

- Composition shingle hip roof
- Clapboard siding
- Stairs leading to a front portico
- Single classical column
- Prominent triple window
- Brick chimney



Figure 1: Thomas and May Brecheen House

The property is currently on the City's Inventory of Historic Resources as a Contributing List Resource (added in 1987 per City Council Resolution 6157). The City's Historic Context Statement describes the Neo-Classical Cottage style (particularly prominent along Pismo Street) as a term used to describe simple house forms or cottages with fewer decorative features than other styles from the period, with decorative detailing typically being confined to the porch or cornice line (see Attachment C).

The applicant's Historical Evaluation describes the property's history and the building itself in further detail,¹ describing the house as a Colonial Revival or Streamline Colonial style home. The applicant's Historical Evaluation describes the relationship between Neoclassical styles and the Colonial Revival style, stating: "There are in fact, many Neoclassicisms; Colonial Revival is only one; and Neoclassical is best used as a catch-all" (Papp, pg. 17).

The style of the home is described as "the purest distillation of the planar, linear, curvilinear, and minimalist ideals of the Streamline Colonial architectural type in San Luis Obispo...." (Papp, pg. 83), and is also described as follows in the Summary Conclusion of the report:

Despite or perhaps because of its modest scale, the T. L. Brecheen House in the Old Town Historic District is the most highly refined example of asymmetric Colonial Revival—or Streamline Colonial—in San Luis Obispo. The bungalow communicates both its classical antecedents and modern aesthetic with an almost Zen-like economy and rhythm of forms.
(Papp, pg. 1)

¹ A description of the home's architecture is provided in pgs. 76-79 of the Historical Evaluation (Attachment A).

3.0 EVALUATION

To be eligible for listing as an historic resource, a building 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 D). Those resources that maintain their original or attained historic and architectural character and contribute either by themselves or in conjunction with other structures to the unique or historic character of a neighborhood, district, or to the City as a whole may be designated as a “Contributing List Resource” (HPO § 14.01.050). 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”. The property meets the eligibility criteria for listing as a historic resource and is currently on the City’s Inventory of Historic Resources as a Contributing List Resource. The applicant’s Historical Evaluation (Attachment A) provides a description of the architectural and historical significance of the house (Papp, pgs. 76-80) specifying what makes the property one of the most unique and important resources in the City, in support of the request for designation as a Master List Resource.

3.1 Architectural Criteria

Character-defining features of the Neo-Classical Cottage style are described in the City’s Historic Context Statement (excerpt provided in Attachment C) to include:

- Symmetrical façade
- Simple square or rectangular form
- Gabled or hipped roof with boxed or open eaves
- Wood exterior cladding
- Simple window and door surrounds
- Details may include cornice line brackets
- Porch support with turned spindles or square posts

As described and depicted in pages 76-82 of the applicant’s Historical Evaluation, the dwelling exhibits many of these characteristic features:

The character-defining features of the Brecheen House are its low-pitched bellcast roof, asymmetric porch, single Tuscan column on a solid railing, echoing single and tripartite sash windows on its street façade with their muntined upper sashes and plate glass lower sashes, rhythmic fenestration on the southwest façade, plain frieze, novelty siding, string-coursed chimney with pyramidal base, and end-period Bishop Peak granite curb. (Papp, pg. 80)

Based on the property’s current designation as a Contributing List Resource and based on the applicant’s evaluation, the subject property embodies distinctive characteristics of the Neo-Classical Cottage style and thus satisfies the Architectural Criteria set forth in § 14.01.070 (A) of the Historic Preservation Ordinance. As noted in the conclusion below, the Committee should make a recommendation on whether the property qualifies as one of the most unique and important resources in the City to a degree that qualifies the property for designation as a Master List Historic Resource.

3.2 Historic Criteria

Timelines of the history of the Streamline Colonial architectural style in San Luis Obispo, the history of the 1133 Pismo Street property, and the history of the property's namesake T. L. Brecheen are provided in pages 6-16 of the Historical Evaluation. The house was purchased by 29-year old Thomas Levin Brecheen, newly appointed principal of San Luis Obispo's public grammar school, in July 1907. T. L. Brecheen was initially described by the *Telegram* as "a hard student and thorough disciplinarian" in 1907 (Papp, pg. 1), but his residency and employment in the City of San Luis Obispo was tumultuous and brief, and he moved to Alameda in 1908.

...One year later, in August 1908, Brecheen, only just married to May Miller, abruptly resigned his principalship over a minor matter of class division. In December the Board of Supervisors removed him from the County School Board. (Papp, pg. 70)

However, as the applicant notes in the evaluation (Papp, pg. 80), Thomas Brecheen's association with the property is too brief for a relevant association to be established with important historical events or significance to the community rising to a level of significance that would satisfy Historic Criteria described in § 14.01.070 (B) of the Historic Preservation Ordinance.

3.3 Integrity

The dwelling remains in its original location, and the evaluation² notes the integrity of various character-defining elements. Notwithstanding minor subsequent modifications, including an addition in the back of the house creating an L shape footprint and a hip-roof 10 foot extension about 3 feet from the northeast wall, the evaluation notes the following:

The Brecheen House retains excellent integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. (Papp, pg. 80)

Based on the property's current designation as a Contributing List Resource and based on the applicant's evaluation, the subject property satisfies the criteria for Integrity set forth in § 14.01.070 (C) of the Historic Preservation Ordinance.

3.4 Conclusion

The property's current designation as a Contributing List Resource as well as the applicant's Historical Evaluation demonstrate that the property satisfies Evaluation Criteria for Architectural Style and Design described in § 14.01.070(A) of the City's Historic Preservation Ordinance (SLOMC Ch. 14.01). The Committee should make a recommendation on whether, as described in the Historical Evaluation provided with the application, the property qualifies as one of the most unique and important resources in the City, in terms of age, architectural or historical significance, or rarity, to a degree that qualifies the property for designation as a Master List Historic Resource.

² Historical Evaluation (Attachment 1), pg. 80

4.0 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.

5.0 ACTION ALTERNATIVES

1. Staff Recommendation: Make a recommendation to the City Council on the property's qualification to be included in the City's Inventory of Historic Resources as a Master List Resource. If the Committee recommends the property to be a Master List Resource, the Committee should note the elements of the property which satisfy Evaluation Criteria to a degree warranting such designation, as being among 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.
2. Continue consideration of the request with direction to the applicant and staff on pertinent issues.

6.0 ATTACHMENTS

- A - Historic Resource Evaluation (Historical Evaluation, James Papp, PhD)
- B - Historic Resource Inventory, 1133 Pismo (City "Yellow File")
- C - Neo-Classical Cottage Style (excerpt from Historic Context Statement)
- D - Evaluation Criteria (Historic Preservation Ordinance)