

DEPARTMENT OF
CITY PLANNING
200 N. SPRING STREET, ROOM 272
LOS ANGELES, CA 90012-4801

CULTURAL HERITAGE COMMISSION

RICHARD BARRON
PRESIDENT

GAIL KENNARD
VICE PRESIDENT

PILAR BUELNA
DIANE KANNER
BARRY MILOFSKY

COMMISSION OFFICE
(213) 978-1300

CITY OF LOS ANGELES
CALIFORNIA



ERIC GARCETTI
MAYOR

EXECUTIVE OFFICES

VINCENT P. BERTONI, AICP
DIRECTOR
(213) 978-1271

KEVIN J. KELLER, AICP
EXECUTIVE OFFICER
(213) 978-1272

LISA M. WEBBER, AICP
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
(213) 978-1274

<http://planning.lacity.org>

August 18, 2020

Los Angeles City Council
c/o Office of the City Clerk
City Hall, Room 395
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Attention: PLUM Committee

Dear Honorable Members:

STIRES STAIRCASE BUNGALOW COURT; 1251-1259 WEST SUNSET BOULEVARD; CHC-2020-896-HCM; ENV-2020-897-CE; CD-1

At its meeting of **August 6, 2020**, the Cultural Heritage Commission took the actions below to include the Stires Staircase Bungalow Court in the list of Historic-Cultural Monuments, subject to adoption by the City Council:

1. **Determined** that the proposed designation is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), pursuant to Article 19, Section 15308, Class 8 and Article 19, Section 15331, Class 31 of the State CEQA Guidelines;
2. **Determined** that the property conforms with the definition of a Monument pursuant to Section 22.171.7 of the Los Angeles Administrative Code;
3. **Recommended** that the City Council consider the Stires Staircase Bungalow Court for inclusion in the list of Historic-Cultural Monuments; and
4. **Adopted** the attached Findings as amended by the Commission.

The Commission vote was as follows:

Moved: Kennard
Seconded: Milofsky
Ayes: Barron
Nays: Buelna, Kanner

Vote: 3 – 2

James K. Williams, Commission Executive Assistant II
Cultural Heritage Commission

The Cultural Heritage Commission would appreciate your inclusion of the subject property to the list of Historic-Cultural Monuments.

Time for Council to Act: The Commission action is hereby transmitted to the City Council for consideration. Pursuant to Section 22.171.10(f) of the Los Angeles Administrative Code, the Council may approve or disapprove in whole or in part an application or initiation for a proposed designation of a Monument. The Council shall act in 90-days of the public hearing held before the Commission on the proposed designation. The City Council may unilaterally extend the 90-day time limit to act for a maximum of 15 days for good cause. With written consent of the owner, the time for the City Council to act may be extended by up to an additional 60 days. If the Council does not act on the application or initiation within this specified time limit, the application or initiation to designate a Monument shall be deemed to have been denied.

Enclosure: Amended Findings, Staff Report, Categorical Exemption, Mailing List

STIRES STAIRCASE BUNGALOW COURT

1251-1259 West Sunset Boulevard

CHC-2020-896-HCM

ENV-2020-897-CE

AMENDED FINDINGS

(Amended by the Cultural Heritage Commission on August 6, 2020)

- The Stires Staircase Bungalow Court “exemplifies significant contributions to the broad cultural, economic or social history of the nation, state, city or community” as an example of 1920s working class housing developed adjacent to the Sunset Boulevard streetcar line.
- The Stires Staircase Bungalow Court “is associated with the lives of historic personages important to national, state, city, or local history” as a property owned by Lilly Bennett Baldwin Howard, who became one of the first female bank executives to make her fortune in the banking industry.
- The Stires Staircase Bungalow Court “embodies the distinctive characteristics of a style, type, period, or method of construction” as an excellent example of a hillside bungalow court.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The Stires Staircase Bungalow Court meets all three of the Historic-Cultural Monument criteria.

The subject property “exemplifies significant contributions to the broad cultural, economic or social history of the nation, state, city or community” as an example of 1920s working class housing developed adjacent to the Sunset Boulevard streetcar line. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, there was a massive population influx into Los Angeles, resulting in a construction boom and spread of the city in all directions. The subject property was built along the Pacific Electric streetcar line on Sunset Boulevard in response to the need for housing in the area, most likely for employees of the nearby film studios. The streetcar line servicing Sunset Boulevard was in use in the area from 1901 until the late 1940s, and the period of significance for streetcar suburbanization in the city spans from 1888 to 1933, encompassing the 1922 construction of the subject property. The streetcar line played a key role in laying the groundwork for the future growth of the area. At a time when automobiles were ascending as the primary form of transportation, the subject property was designed without driveways, garages, or vehicular access, making the residents dependent on the streetcar for transportation. The subject property represents railroad settlement at the peak of rail access in Los Angeles.

The subject property also “is associated with the lives of historic personages important to national, state, city, or local history” as a property owned by Lilly Bennett Baldwin Howard, who became one of the first female bank executives to make her fortune in the banking industry. Baldwin Howard, wife of Elias Jackson “Lucky” Baldwin, owned the subject property from 1929 until her death in 1938, although it remained in the name of her estate until 1950. Following Lucky Baldwin’s death in 1909, Baldwin Howard flourished as her own financial manager, and became a millionaire in her own right by investing in the banking business. During her banking career, she served as President of the Hollywood State Bank and Broadway State Bank; Vice President of the First National Bank of Pasadena, and owner of the Continental Bank (later part of Bank of America). When she passed away her *New York Times* obituary called her a “financial genius,” noting that she had “guided the destiny of half a dozen banks.”

Additionally, the Stires Staircase Bungalow Court “embodies the distinctive characteristics of a style, type, period, or method of construction” as an excellent example of a hillside bungalow court. By the 1920s, the intense demand for higher density housing led to innovative multi-family property designs that assimilated into the low-density environment that characterized the city. The bungalow court was the earliest iteration of the resulting low-rise, high density courtyard apartment building. However, much of the early development in Los Angeles occurred near the hills surrounding downtown, many courtyard designs, including the subject property, had to adjust themselves to topographical constraints. Featuring two rows of one-story detached residences arranged on either side of an ascending concrete staircase with the primary entrance to each unit opening directly onto the central walkway, the subject property exhibits the characteristics of the downhill U-parti bungalow court typology.

Despite minor interior and exterior alterations, the subject property retains sufficient integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association to convey its significance.

CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT (“CEQA”) FINDINGS

State of California CEQA Guidelines, Article 19, Section 15308, Class 8 “*consists of actions taken by regulatory agencies, as authorized by state or local ordinance, to assure the maintenance, restoration, enhancement, or protection of the environment where the regulatory process involves procedures for protection of the environment.*”

State of California CEQA Guidelines Article 19, Section 15331, Class 31 “*consists of projects limited to maintenance, repair, stabilization, rehabilitation, restoration, preservation, conservation or reconstruction of historical resources in a manner consistent with the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitating, Restoring, and Reconstructing Historic buildings.*”

The designation of the Stires Staircase Bungalow Court as an Historic-Cultural Monument in accordance with Chapter 9, Article 1, of The City of Los Angeles Administrative Code (“LAAC”) will ensure that future construction activities involving the subject property are regulated in accordance with Section 22.171.14 of the LAAC. The purpose of the designation is to prevent significant impacts to a Historic-Cultural Monument through the application of the standards set forth in the LAAC. Without the regulation imposed by way of the pending designation, the historic significance and integrity of the subject property could be lost through incompatible alterations and new construction and the demolition of an irreplaceable historic site/open space. The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation are expressly incorporated into the LAAC and provide standards concerning the historically appropriate construction activities which will ensure the continued preservation of the subject property.

The City of Los Angeles has determined based on the whole of the administrative record, that substantial evidence supports that the Project is exempt from CEQA pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section Article 19, Section 15308, Class 8 and Class 31, and none of the exceptions to a categorical exemption pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2 applies. The project was found to be exempt based on the following:

The use of Categorical Exemption Class 8 in connection with the proposed designation is consistent with the goals of maintaining, restoring, enhancing, and

protecting the environment through the imposition of regulations designed to prevent the degradation of Historic-Cultural Monuments.

The use of Categorical Exemption Class 31 in connection with the proposed designation is consistent with the goals relating to the preservation, rehabilitation, restoration and reconstruction of historic buildings and sites in a manner consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties.

Categorical Exemption ENV-2020-897-CE was prepared on August 6, 2020.