



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

Report to the Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: November 3, 2023 REPORT NO. HRB-23-039

HEARING DATE: November 16, 2023

SUBJECT: **ITEM #3 – Clinton Abbott/ William Templeton Johnson/ Brawner & Hunter House**

RESOURCE INFO: [California Historical Resources Inventory Database \(CHRID\) link](#)

APPLICANT: Barbier Snapp Trust 07-09-14; represented by IS Architecture

LOCATION: 4499 Hermosa Way, Uptown Community, Council District 3
APN 443-140-0500

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the Clinton Abbott/ William Templeton Johnson/ Brawner & Hunter House located at 4499 Hermosa Way as a historical resource.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate the Clinton Abbott/ William Templeton Johnson/ Brawner & Hunter House located at 4499 Hermosa Way as a historical resource under HRB Criterion B with a period of significance of 1923-1944 and under HRB Criteria C and D with a period of significance of 1923. The designation includes the original garage and Don Quixote tile bench. The designation excludes the 1987-1988 lap pool and pool structure, the modified tiled pond feature and the gazebo. This recommendation is based on the following findings:

1. The resource is identified with Clinton Abbott, a historically significant person and retains integrity for that association. Specifically, the resource was Abbott's home from 1923-1944 during the most productive years of his career as a leading conservationist in the San Diego region. Abbott was the director of the San Diego Natural History Museum from 1922 to 1944 and oversaw the construction of the current Museum building as well as its conversion to a hospital during WWII. Abbott was also instrumental in advocating for the establishment of the Anza-Borrego Desert State Park in 1928 to protect rapidly declining desert species. Abbott resided at the 4499 Hermosa Way property during the majority of his tenure at the San Diego Natural History Museum and during the establishment of the Anza-Borrego Desert State Park.
2. The resource embodies the distinctive characteristics through the retention of character defining features of the Spanish Colonial Revival style and retains integrity to its 1923 period of significance. Specifically, the resource features stucco exterior, low-pitched tile roof with

little eave overhang, varied roof forms, asymmetrical façade, Juliette balconies, recessed arched entry and arched door, arched sleeping porch, decorative ironwork, stucco chimney, courtyard, arched windows and wood windows.

3. The resource is representative of a notable work of Master Architect William Templeton Johnson and retains integrity as it relates to the original design. Specifically, the residence was designed in one of Johnson's favored residential architectural styles and exemplifies his quality of design using the Spanish Colonial Revival architectural vocabulary. The resource also reflects the quality of work and masterful execution of residential construction techniques associated with Master Builders Brawner & Hunter. Specifically, the house is significant as the result of a successful partnership between an architect and builders that both excel in their fields. Additionally, the resource won a 1933 San Diego Chapter of the American Institute of Architects design award.

BACKGROUND

This item is being brought before the Historical Resources Board in conjunction with the owner's desire to have the site designated as a historical resource. The resource is a two-story residence with detached garage and pool structure located in the Mission Hills neighborhood on a canyon lot overlooking Mission Valley.

The property was identified in the 2016 Uptown Community Plan Area Historic Resources Survey Report and given a Status Code of 5S3, "Appears to be individually eligible for local listing or designation through survey evaluation.

The historic name of the resource, the Clinton Abbott/ William Templeton Johnson/ Brawner & Hunter House, has been identified consistent with the Board's adopted naming policy and reflects the name of Clinton Abbott who is a historically significant individual, the name of William Templeton Johnson, a Master Architect, and the name of Brawner & Hunter, Master Builders.

ANALYSIS

A Historical Resource Research Report was prepared by IS Architecture, which concludes that the resource is significant under HRB Criteria B, C and D and staff concurs. This determination is consistent with the [Guidelines for the Application of Historical Resources Board Designation Criteria](#), as follows.

CRITERION B - Is identified with persons or events significant in local, state or national history.

The resource is associated with Clinton G. Abbot, a former director of the San Diego Natural History Museum and leading conservationist in the San Diego region. Abbott was born in Liverpool, England in 1881 to American parents. He graduated from Columbia University in 1903 and pursued graduate studies at Cornell University for a short time in 1915 which helped him develop a strong background in natural history and ornithology. In 1911 Abbott became a nationally recognized naturalist with the publication of his book, *The Home Life of the Osprey*, in 1911. He was involved in various conservation groups including the New York State Conservation Commission and the Cooper Ornithological Society.

In the early 1920s, the San Diego Society of Natural History offered Abbott the position of educational assistant to the then-director, Howard Cleaves. When Cleaves left his position in 1922 Abbott was promoted to director and served in that position until his death in 1946. In the 1920s, Abbott emphasized the need to preserve local flora and fauna in both California and Mexico and was particularly concerned with the bird and mountain lion populations. Abbott was named the acting director of the San Diego Museum of Man in 1929 while still serving as director of the San Diego Natural History Museum. During the Great Depression, Abbott was able to secure enough funding to construct the San Diego Natural History Museum's current building and arrange numerous research trips for his staff. The Museum was taken over by the U.S. Navy during WWII and converted for use as a hospital and Abbott oversaw the removal of the collections. Abbott continued to serve as director of the Museum until he passed away in 1946.

In addition to his work at the San Diego Natural History Museum, Abbott played an instrumental role in the establishment of the Anza-Borrego Desert State Park. Working with Guy Fleming and Frederick Olmstead, Abbott advocated for setting aside a desert region in the southern part of California that would protect the rapidly disappearing desert flora and fauna. In 1928, Fleming and Abbott presented a plan to the newly formed State Park Commission to include Borrego Desert as one of the new state parks proposing a plan that would encompass 120,000 acres of desert land. Serving as the Commission's director, Olmstead approved the recommendation and the project was given the name of Borrego Palms Desert Park. The first parcel of parkland was obtained in 1932 and it took another sixteen years to grow to the current Anza-Borrego Desert State Park.

Abbott and his wife, Dorothy, constructed the subject resource for use as their personal residence in 1923. Abbott lived at the property from 1923 to 1944, during the most productive years of his career as the director of the San Diego Natural History Museum and also during the establishment of Anza-Borrego Desert State Park.

Significance Statement: The resource is associated with Clinton Abbott, a historically significant person and retains integrity for that association. Specifically, the resource was Abbott's home from 1923-1944 during the most productive years of his career as a leading conservationist in the San Diego region. Abbott was the director of the San Diego Natural History Museum from 1922 to 1944 and oversaw the construction of the current Museum building as well as its conversion to a hospital during WWII. Abbott was also instrumental in advocating for the establishment of the Anza-Borrego Desert State Park. Abbott resided at the 4499 Hermosa Way property during the majority of his tenure at the San Diego Natural History Museum and during the establishment of the Anza-Borrego Desert State Park. Therefore, staff recommends designation under HRB Criterion B.

CRITERION C - Embodies distinctive characteristics of a style, type, period or method of construction or is a valuable example of the use of natural materials or craftsmanship.

The subject resource is a two-story, single family residence constructed in 1923 in the Spanish Colonial Revival style on a canyon lot that takes advantage of views of Mission Valley. The site is accessed from Hermosa Way by a site wall and gate located adjacent to the original Spanish style garage. The exterior of the main residence and garage is clad with a hand-troweled stucco finish. The eastern, primary façade of the main residential structure is wide and asymmetrically broken into five sections distinguished by various roof pitches and elevation projections. The roof forms vary; however, each section is consistently low-pitched with little eave overhang and covered in red tile

resulting in a cohesive appearance. The main entrance is centrally located on the primary façade and is recessed within an arched opening. Above the entrance are five arches that were originally part of a sleeping porch.

A paved courtyard is located on the west façade. On this elevation, a portion of the ground floor is recessed beneath a cantilevered second story which is accessed by a set of exterior stairs. The stairs feature tiles that depict the story of Don Quixote and are accompanied by a matching tile covered concrete bench. The courtyard is enclosed on one side by a modern structure that encloses a lap pool. The pool structure is designed in a modern Spanish style and compliments the architecture of the historic structure.

Decorative features that are characteristic of the Spanish Colonial style are present on all facades of the main residence and include Juliette balconies, arched windows, decorative ironwork, a stucco chimney and multi-lite wood windows in various operations.

The site contains multiple pathways, steps and site walls that terrace down the steep hillside. A concrete gazebo is located on the northeast side of the property. There is no evidence that these features date from the period of significance or contribute to the historic significance of the resource.

Several modifications to the property have been made since its 1923 date of construction. Comparisons with photos of the resource from 1927 indicate that new balusters were added to the lower portion of the exterior stairs on the west elevation at an unknown date. Additionally, the existing balusters on these stairs were modified likely to meet Building Code requirements. In 1958 a kitchen remodel led to the enlargement of a window on the west façade. In 1983 the original sleeping porch over the front entrance was converted to a bathroom and the five arched openings were enclosed with glass. The lap pool and its enclosing structure on the western side of the parcel were constructed in 1987-1988. In 2018, three modified windows on the east façade were restored to their historic appearance. At an unknown date the ceramic tiles of the pond feature in the courtyard were painted over. Other modifications include the addition of hardscape features throughout the parcel and new paving on pathways and within the courtyard. These modifications do not impair integrity of design, material, workmanship or feeling and the building retains integrity as it relates to HRB Criterion C.

The Spanish Colonial Revival style uses decorative details borrowed from the entire history of Spanish architecture. Its vocabulary is influenced by Moorish, Byzantine, Gothic or Renaissance precedents. The style became popular after the Panama-California Exposition of 1915 and reached its height in the 1920's and early 1930's before rapidly declining in the 1940's. Identifying features include a low-pitched roof with little or no eave overhang, red tile roof covering, stucco exterior wall finishes, an asymmetrical façade and arches above doors and principle windows. Common decorative details are patterned tiles, carved stonework, large focal windows, wooden or iron window grilles, decorative vents and balconies.

Significance Statement: The house continues to convey the historic significance of the Spanish Colonial Revival style by embodying the historic characteristics associated with the style; including a stucco exterior, low-pitched tile roof with little eave overhang, varied roof forms, asymmetrical façade, Juliette balconies, recessed arched entry and arched door, arched sleeping porch, decorative

ironwork, stucco chimney, courtyard, arched windows and wood windows. Therefore, staff recommends designation under HRB Criterion C.

CRITERION D - Is representative of a notable work of a master builder, designer, architect, engineer, landscape architect, interior designer, artist or craftsman.

William Templeton Johnson was born in Staten Island, New York, in 1877. After high school, he took a job at an asphalt and gravel roofing business. He traveled extensively for the job, including to Savannah, Georgia, and Monterrey, Mexico. In Mexico, he was more fully exposed to the construction business, as well as to Spanish Colonial architecture and Mexican culture.

In 1905, Johnson began his career in architecture. He worked briefly with the well-known East Coast firm Delano & Aldrich. Funded by his wife's family, Johnson took William Delano's advice and moved to Paris to study in the Beaux-Arts tradition. He studied at the Atelier Chiffot and the École des Beaux-Arts until 1911, when he returned to New York.

In 1912, Johnson and his wife relocated to San Diego. Upon their arrival, he started his own architectural firm. In 1913, he designed the Francis W. Parker School quadrangle plan buildings (HRB #482). In this early part of his career, he also built several residences in both Coronado and San Diego.

During the period from 1918 to 1930, Johnson designed his most influential structures. In 1921, he designed his first major public structure, the La Jolla Public Library (HRB #228), in a combination of the Spanish Colonial Revival and Italian Renaissance Revival styles. Between 1922 and 1925, he designed several residences, the La Jolla High School, the La Jolla High School Auditorium, the now-demolished Roosevelt Junior High School Music Building, two private research laboratories, and the Fine Arts Gallery, now the San Diego Museum of Art in Balboa Park. In 1926, he designed the first unit of a building in La Jolla called "Los Apartamentos de Seville" that would later become La Valencia Hotel (HRB #204). In 1927, he designed the Southern Trust & Commerce Bank, and in 1928, the San Diego Trust & Savings Bank Building (HRB #335), to which he relocated his architectural office. The latter building is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. In 1929, he designed the Junipero Serra Museum (HRB #237) in Presidio Park, and the Samuel I. Fox Building (HRB #127-079) at 6th Avenue and Broadway.

From 1930 until his retirement in 1955, Johnson built many other important public buildings, including the Museum of Natural History in Balboa Park, the County Administration Building (HRB #203, designed in collaboration with Louis Gill, Richard Requa and Samuel Hamill), and the former main branch of the San Diego Public Library (HRB #683).

Although Johnson was comfortable with all the styles of his time, he preferred to build in Mediterranean and Spanish Eclectic styles. He was perhaps the leading architect in San Diego during his career. Although he is well known for his residential designs, his primary impact on the City of San Diego is through his design of public structures such as museums, schools and libraries. Among other awards, William Templeton Johnson was named into the AIA College of Fellows in 1939. A partial list of Johnson's works is below.

- HRB #127-079– Samuel I. Fox Building (531 Broadway), 1929
- HRB #203– County Administration Building (1600 Pacific Highway), 1938 (with Richard Requa, Samuel Hamill and Louis Gill)
- HRB #204– La Valencia Hotel (1132 Prospect Street), 1926
- HRB #228– La Jolla Public Library (1006 Wall Street), 1921
- HRB #237– Junipero Serra Museum (2727 Presidio Drive), 1929
- HRB #335– San Diego Trust and Savings Bank Building (530–540 Broadway)
- HRB #354– SDG&E Station B (903 Kettner Boulevard), 1911–1941
- HRB #453– Hildred R. and Marion M. Peckham House (2905 Nichols Street), 1928
- HRB #482– Francis W. Parker School (4201 Randolph Street), 1913
- HRB #683– San Diego City Library (820 E Street), 1954
- HRB #733– William Templeton Johnson House (4520 Trias Street), 1918
- HRB #764– Marion Delafield Sturgis and Samuel Otis Dauchy/William Templeton Johnson House (4455 Hermosa Way), 1927
- HRB #797– William Templeton Johnson Spec House #1 (4467 Ampudia Street), 1926
- HRB #853– Sarah Brock/William Templeton Johnson House (1603 Torrance Street), 1925
- HRB #980– Dr. James and Virginia Churchill/William Templeton Johnson House (3264 Curlew Street), 1922
- HRB #990– William Templeton Johnson/ Harry Brawner Rental House (4460 Trias Street), 1918
- HRB #1364– Kate O. Sessions/ William Templeton Johnson Spec House (4154 Lark Street), 1912
- HRB #1493– Mamie and Oliver Evans/ William Templeton Johnson House (4388 Ampudia Street), 1924

At least 18 of Johnson's works have been designated as historical resources by the City of San Diego Historical Resources Board. They include the Junipero Serra Museum (HRB #237), the Francis W. Parker School (HRB #177), and the William Templeton Johnson/ Harry Brawner Rental House (HRB #990).

Builders Harry Brawner and Harmon Hunter were partners during the 1910s and 1920s. Known for their quality of construction and their enduring construction methods and techniques, they were sought after by important architects of the era, such as Irving Gill, William Sterling Hebbard, William Templeton Johnson and Emmor Brooke Weaver, to construct their designs. A partial list of Brawner & Hunter's works is below.

- HRB #49– (Melville) Klauber House (3060 6th Avenue), 1909 (no longer standing)
- HRB #392/1276-129– Bartlett/Webster House (2850 Cedar Street), 1910
- HRB #486– Rosecroft (530 Silvergate Avenue), 1912
- HRB #572/821-22– Mary Ward/Emmor Brooke Weaver House (1824 Sheridan Avenue), 1912
- HRB #756– Sarah Brock/William Templeton Johnson/Brawner & Hunter House (4451 Hermosa Way), 1922
- HRB #990– William Templeton Johnson/Harry Brawner Rental House (4460 Trias Street), 1924
- Arthur Marston House (3575 7th Avenue), 1909 (formerly HRB #50, rescinded)

- Christian Science Church (Laurel Street)

At least six of Brawner and Hunter's works have been designated as historical resources by the City of San Diego Historical Resources Board. They include the Bartlett/Webster House (HRB #392/1276-129), Rosecroft (HRB #486), and the Sarah Brock/William Templeton Johnson/Brawner & Hunter House (HRB #756).

Clinton and Dorothy Abbott commissioned William Templeton Johnson and Brawner & Hunter to design and construct the subject resource in 1923. The residence was designed in one of Johnson's favored residential architectural styles, the Spanish Colonial Revival, and exemplifies his quality of design. The resource is representative of the Brawner & Hunter's masterful execution of residential construction techniques and quality of work that they practiced in conjunction with leading architects of the period. Additionally, Johnson won a San Diego Chapter of the American Institute of Architects design award for the residence in 1933.

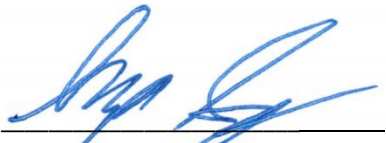
Significance Statement: The subject resource retains integrity and continues to reflect Master Architect William Templeton Johnson's original design and aesthetic in one of his favored architectural styles, the Spanish Colonial Revival. The resource also reflects the quality of work and masterful execution of residential construction techniques associated with Master Builders Brawner & Hunter. The house is significant as the result of a successful partnership of an architect and builders that both excel in their fields. Additionally, in 1933 the resource won a San Diego Chapter of the American Institute of Architects design award. Therefore, staff recommends designation under HRB Criterion D.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Designation brings with it the responsibility of maintaining the building in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards. The benefits of designation include the availability of the Mills Act Program for reduced property tax; the use of the more flexible Historical Building Code; flexibility in the application of other regulatory requirements; the use of the Historical Conditional Use Permit which allows flexibility of use; and other programs which vary depending on the specific site conditions and owner objectives. If the property is designated by the HRB, conditions related to restoration or rehabilitation of the resource may be identified by staff during the Mills Act application process, and included in any future Mills Act contract.

CONCLUSION

Based on the information submitted and staff's field check, it is recommended that the Clinton Abbott/ William Templeton Johnson/ Brawner & Hunter House located at 4499 Hermosa Way be designated under HRB Criterion C as an example of the Spanish Colonial Revival style and HRB Criterion D as a notable work of Master Architect William Templeton Johnson and Master Builders Brawner & Hunter with a period of significance of 1923; and under HRB Criterion B for its association with historically significant individual Clinton Abbott with a period of significance of 1923-1944. The designation includes the original garage and Don Quixote tile bench. The designation excludes the 1987-1988 lap pool and pool structure, the modified tiled pond feature and the gazebo.



Suzanne Segur
Senior Planner/ HRB Liaison
City Planning Department

ks/SS

Attachment(s):

1. Draft Resolution
2. Applicant's Historical Report under separate cover

RESOLUTION NUMBER N/A
ADOPTED ON 11/16/2023

WHEREAS, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego held a noticed public hearing on 11/16/2023, to consider the historical designation of the Clinton Abbott/ William Templeton Johnson/ Brawner & Hunter House (owned by Barbier Snapp Trust 07-09-14, 1026 W. Washington Street, San Diego, CA 92103) located at **4499 Hermosa Way, San Diego, CA 92103**, APN: **443-140-05-00**, further described as VL 11 ST CLSD ADJ & DOC203856REC68 IN VL 7 THRU 10 & IN in the City of San Diego, County of San Diego, State of California; and

WHEREAS, in arriving at their decision, the Historical Resources Board considered the historical resources report prepared by the applicant, the staff report and recommendation, all other materials submitted prior to and at the public hearing, inspected the subject property and heard public testimony presented at the hearing; and

WHEREAS, the property would be added to the Register of Designated Historical Resources as **Site No. 0**, and

WHEREAS, designated historical resources located within the City of San Diego are regulated by the Municipal Code (Chapter 14, Article 3, Division 2) as such any exterior modifications (or interior if any interior is designated) shall be approved by the City, this includes but is not limited to modifications to any windows or doors, removal or replacement of any exterior surfaces (i.e. paint, stucco, wood siding, brick), any alterations to the roof or roofing material, alterations to any exterior ornamentation and any additions or significant changes to the landscape/ site.

NOW, THEREFORE,

BE IT RESOLVED, the Historical Resources Board based its designation of the Clinton Abbott/ William Templeton Johnson/ Brawner & Hunter House on the following findings:

(1) The property is historically significant under CRITERION B for its association with Clinton Abbott, a historically significant person and retains integrity for that association. Specifically, the resource was Abbott's home from 1923-1944 during the most productive years of his career as a leading conservationist in the San Diego region. Abbott was the director of the San Diego Natural History Museum from 1922 to 1944 and oversaw the construction of the current Museum building as well as its conversion to a hospital during WWII. Abbott was also instrumental in advocating for the establishment of the Anza-Borrego Desert State Park in 1928 to protect rapidly declining desert species. Abbott resided at the 4499 Hermosa Way property during the majority of his tenure at the San Diego Natural History Museum and during the establishment of the Anza-Borrego Desert State Park. This finding is further supported by the staff report, the historical research report, and written and oral evidence presented at the designation hearing.

(2) The property is historically significant under CRITERION C for its distinctive characteristics through the retention of character defining features of the Spanish Colonial Revival style and retains integrity from its 1923 period of significance. Specifically, the resource features stucco exterior, low-pitched tile roof with little eave overhang, varied roof forms, asymmetrical façade, Juliette balconies, recessed arched entry and arched door, arched sleeping porch, decorative ironwork, stucco chimney, courtyard, arched windows and wood windows. This finding is further supported by the staff report, the historical research report, and written and oral evidence presented at the designation hearing.

(3) The property is historically significant under CRITERION D as a notable work of Master Architect William Templeton Johnson and retains integrity as it relates to the original design. Specifically, the residence was designed in one of Johnson's favored residential architectural styles and exemplifies his quality of design using the Spanish Colonial Revival architectural vocabulary. The resource also reflects the quality of work and masterful execution of residential construction techniques associated with Master Builders Brawner & Hunter. Specifically, the house is significant as the result of a successful partnership between an architect

and builders that both excel in their fields. Additionally, the resource won a 1933 San Diego Chapter of the American Institute of Architects design award. This finding is further supported by the staff report, the historical research report, and written and oral evidence presented at the designation hearing.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, in light of the foregoing, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego hereby approves the historical designation of the above named property. The designation includes the parcel and exterior of the building as Designated Historical Resource **Site No. 0**.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the designation shall include original garage and Don Quixote tile bench.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the designation shall exclude the 1987-1988 lap pool and pool structure, the modified tiled pond feature and the gazebo.

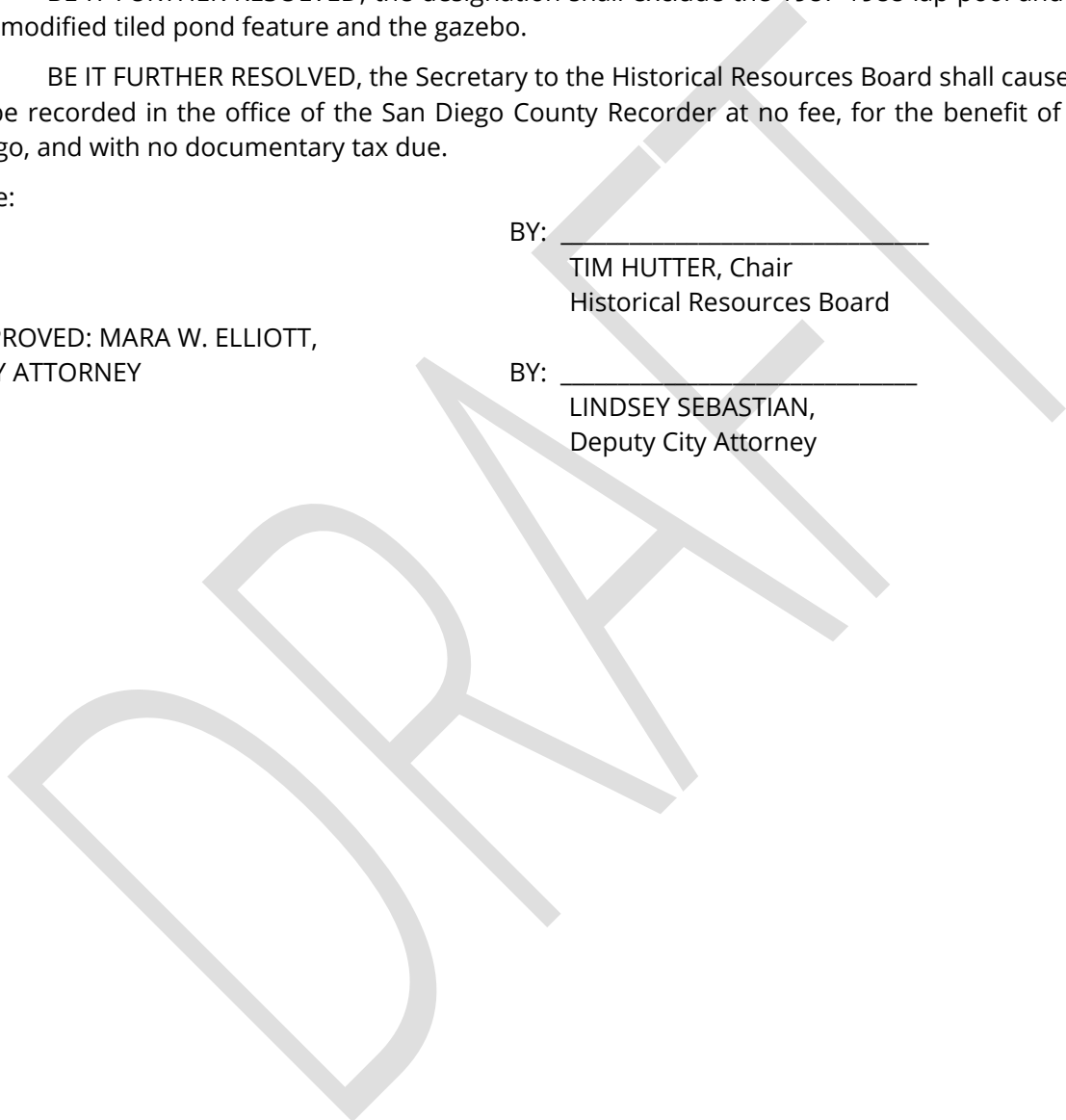
BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the Secretary to the Historical Resources Board shall cause this resolution to be recorded in the office of the San Diego County Recorder at no fee, for the benefit of the City of San Diego, and with no documentary tax due.

Vote:

BY: _____
TIM HUTTER, Chair
Historical Resources Board

APPROVED: MARA W. ELLIOTT,
CITY ATTORNEY

BY: _____
LINDSEY SEBASTIAN,
Deputy City Attorney



RECORDING REQUESTED BY
CITY OF SAN DIEGO
DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DEPARTMENT

WHEN RECORDED MAIL TO

HISTORICAL RESOURCES BOARD
ATTN: HRB SECRETARY
1222 FIRST AVENUE, MS 501
SAN DIEGO, CA 92101

SPACE ABOVE THIS LINE FOR RECORDER'S USE

RESOLUTION NUMBER **N/A**

HISTORICAL DESIGNATION OF PROPERTY ON

4499 Hermosa Way, San Diego, CA 92103

ASSESSOR PARCEL NUMBER **443-140-05-00**

HISTORICAL RESOURCES BOARD NUMBER **0**