



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

## Report to the Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: September 14, 2023 REPORT NO. HRB-23-029

HEARING DATE: September 28, 2023

SUBJECT: **ITEM #3 – BENJAMIN F. DILLINGHAM III HOUSE**

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

APPLICANT: Hailey Family Trust; represented by Landmark Historic Preservation

LOCATION: 4494 Tivoli Street, Peninsula Community, Council District 2  
APN 530-062-22-00

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the Benjamin F. Dillingham III House located at 4494 Tivoli Street as a historical resource.

### STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate the Benjamin F. Dillingham III House located at 4494 Tivoli Street as a historical resource with a period of significance of 1983 to 2017 under HRB Criterion B. The designation excludes the rear yard pool and covered terrace structure, which were constructed outside the period of significance. This recommendation is based on the following finding:

The resource is identified with Benjamin F. Dillingham III, a historically significant person, and retains integrity for that association. Specifically, Benjamin F. Dillingham III occupied the property from 1983 to 2017 and used it as his personal office between 1992 and 2017. Dillingham was an openly gay chief-of-staff for mayor Maureen O'Connor and served on the boards of various charitable and philanthropic organizations, many of which were related to the LGBTQ community and AIDS support groups. He received awards and recognition from many of his peers and civic rights associations, including the establishment of "Ben Dillingham Day" by the City of San Diego. Dillingham has been credited as the driving force behind California State Senators Christine Kehoe's and Toni Atkins' choice to run for office as openly lesbian.

### 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 located on a corner lot in

the Sunset Cliffs neighborhood of the Peninsula community and contains a C-shaped residence and a detached garage, a detached covered terrace, and a pool.

The property has not been identified in any historic surveys, as the subject area has not been previously surveyed.

The historic name of the resource, the Benjamin F. Dillingham III House, has been identified consistent with the Board's adopted naming policy and reflects the name of Benjamin F. Dillingham III, a historically significant individual.

## ANALYSIS

A Historical Resource Research Report was prepared by Landmark Historic Preservation, which concludes that the resource is significant under HRB Criteria B, C, and D. Staff concurs that the site is a significant historical resource under HRB Criterion B, but not HRB Criteria C and D. 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 subject resource, located at 4494 Tivoli Street, is associated with Benjamin F. Dillingham III (1945-2017), a significant person associated with the LGBTQ+ Community. Dillingham was the owner and resident of 4494 Tivoli Street from 1983 to 2017. Between 1992 and 2017, he also handled his affairs with local social and civic organizations from his office on the second floor of 4494 Tivoli Street at the location of the 1955 balcony enclosure. Born in Honolulu, Hawaii, Dillingham attended Harvard University and the Harvard Business School, where he obtained a Master of Business Administration degree. He joined the Marine Corps as an officer, training at Camp Pendleton in San Diego. Dillingham served in the Vietnam War and was awarded the Bronze Star with Combat "V" for his service, a medal that is typically awarded to a service member for heroic or meritorious achievement.

After serving eight years, Dillingham resigned from the Marine Corps and settled in Ocean Beach in the late 1970s. Later, he worked for General Dynamics' Convair Division before working at the Metropolitan Transit Development Board (MTDB) as the Chief Financial Officer. Maureen O'Connor, a San Diego city councilwoman from 1971 to 1979 who was also the chair of the MTDB, recognized Dillingham's achievements and was impressed by his educational background and military service. In 1985, O'Connor ran for mayor and was elected. She asked Dillingham to be her chief of staff, and after initial hesitation, he accepted in 1986 and resigned from the MTDB.

Around the same time that Dillingham accepted the chief-of-staff position for Mayor O'Connor, his relationship with his partner Dennis G. Whorton had deteriorated to the point where Whorton moved out of 4494 Tivoli St. and filed a lawsuit against Dillingham. This concerned Dillingham greatly, as he feared that the press coverage surrounding his homosexuality would negatively impact Mayor O'Connor (2008 oral interview). However, Mayor O'Connor was largely unfazed and together Dillingham and O'Connor addressed the issue openly with the press and the people of San Diego, handing out copies of Whorton's lawsuit. It was at this time in 1986 that Dillingham began to live openly as a gay man and a public figure. O'Connor faced criticism for having a gay man as her chief of staff; however, the controversy eventually waned and O'Connor became the first elected

official in San Diego to march in the local Lesbian and Gay Pride Parade. A photo from 1986-1991 shows Dillingham marching alongside O'Connor. O'Connor also proclaimed the first "Gay Pride Days" in San Diego.

After O'Connor's term ended in 1992, Dillingham focused on helping the LGBTQ+ community overcome discrimination in issues such as the AIDS epidemic while working out of his personal office at 4494 Tivoli Street. This issue was especially important and personal to Dillingham, as he lost three romantic partners to AIDS. Dillingham served on the boards of numerous charitable organizations, such as the San Diego Human Dignity Foundation (founded in 1996 as an LGBTQ+ community benefit foundation), the AIDS Project San Diego/AIDS Foundation San Diego (which provided services to people with AIDS and their family), AIDS Walk San Diego, the L.I.F.E. Foundation, the San Diego Community Research Group (which experimented drugs for treating AIDS), and Episcopal Community Services. For Dillingham's leadership and service to the LGBTQ+ community, he was awarded the Harvey Milk Memorial Award (by Nicky Awards, held in San Diego since 1975), the San Diego LGBT Pride Man of the Year award in 1993, the Humanitarian Award from the City of San Diego Human Relations Committee, the Crystal Torch Award from the Human Rights Campaign, and the Episcopal Community Services Award for Social Justice. The San Diego LGBT Community Center, also known as "The Center," features a Veterans Wall of Honor named after Dillingham and another service member.

Dillingham encouraged other members of the LGBTQ+ community, such as Christine Kehoe, to run for office. Christine Kehoe, the first elected gay official in San Diego who worked as a Council member, described Dillingham as a role model. Toni Atkins, who also served on the City Council, later characterized Dillingham as "...a pioneer, mentor, and a statesman...a lodestar for those of us aspiring to serve in politics." Both Kehoe and Atkins were elected to the California State Senate after serving in San Diego. In 2000, the San Diego City Council adopted [Resolution Number R-293103](#) to establish "Ben Dillingham Day" in recognizing Dillingham's commitment to community service, philanthropic endeavors, and integrity.

Modifications to the property, including the partial enclosure of the northwest elevation balcony, are detailed in the discussion of Criterion C below. The second-floor balcony was enclosed in 1955, but was present on the home during Dillingham's ownership and occupancy, serving as his office, and therefore reflects the property's significance under HRB Criterion B.

Significance Statement: The subject resource was occupied by Benjamin F. Dillingham III, a historically significant person, from 1983 to 2017 and contained Dillingham's office at the location of a 1955 balcony enclosure where he handled his social and civic affairs between 1992 and 2017. Dillingham was an openly gay chief-of-staff for mayor Maureen O'Connor and served on the boards of various charitable and philanthropy organizations, many of which were related to the LGBTQ+ community and AIDS support. He received awards and recognition from many of his peers and civic rights associations, including the establishment of "Ben Dillingham Day" by the City of San Diego. Dillingham has been credited as the driving force behind California State Senators Christine Kehoe's and Toni Atkins' choice to run for office. Dillingham's outstanding contributions to community service and political achievements to advance LGBTQ+ rights and dignity are notable. Therefore, staff recommends the designation of the resource located at 4494 Tivoli Street 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 was built in 1927 in the Spanish Colonial Revival style. It has a low-pitched, cross-gable roof with Spanish tiles and decorative hand-troweled stucco. The building is two-story and C-shaped in plan. A large three-story octagonal tower is at the corner of the southwest and northwest elevations. This prominent tower contains rectangular and arched windows.

The southwest and northwest elevations are highly visible facades that exhibit many character-defining features. The southwest elevation contains a colonnade of arched supports along a one-story wing, forms an open patio space, and features a quoined entry and a porte-cochere style driveway. The entry is deeply inset and arched. Exposed beams are present below the ceilings of this open patio space. Windows along this elevation are tripartite in design.

The northwest elevation wing is two-story. The ground floor continues the colonnade arch design, spanning the width of the façade. The second floor contains a balcony with wood balustrade and decorative posts but is partially enclosed with a stucco wall and non-original octagonal and tripartite windows. Interior courtyard elevations contain a tapered chimney, double-hung windows, and French doors. The courtyard also includes a pool, a detached covered terrace, and a detached garage.

There have been several modifications to the property. Most notably, the 1955 balcony enclosure, located on a northwest elevation, was an incompatible treatment with the building's highly visible and character-defining façade. This enclosure, featuring stucco cladding and tripartite windows, replaced a previously open balcony with wood balustrade and decorative trabeated wood posts and the original exterior wall behind the enclosure has also been demolished, negatively impacting the building's material integrity under Criterion C. In 2001, Dillingham further modified this enclosure through a building permit. Between 2018 and 2019, Heritage Preservation staff worked closely with the applicant to remodel the property and construct a new pool, a ground-floor addition, and a new detached covered terrace. Heritage Preservation staff and the applicant agreed on the retention of the balcony enclosure that was the personal office of Benjamin F. Dillingham III, a historically significant individual. Staff deemed the treatment consistent with the U.S. Secretary of Interior Standards, as the balcony enclosure is associated Mr. Dillingham's ownership and occupancy, and this the property's significance under HRB Criterion B. However, as a result, the rehabilitation work did not restore the property to the point where it would be eligible for designation under HRB Criterion C, due to the significant impact to architectural integrity resulting from the balcony enclosure.

While the house features several character-defining features associated with the Spanish Colonial Revival style, the prominent 1955 enclosure of the balcony on a highly visible and character-defining façade has resulted in a loss of integrity of design, workmanship and materials as it relates to HRB Criterion C. Therefore, staff does not recommend 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.*

The subject property was designed by established Master Architect Charles S. Salyers and constructed by established Master Builder Lewis Henry Dodge of the Dodge Construction Company.

Charles H. Salyers was born in Tennessee in 1900 and lived in San Diego by 1910. As a young man, he worked in the building industry and developed residential design and construction skills. Salyers' earliest works were in the Spanish Eclectic style. In 1926, he designed the subject property at 4494 Tivoli Street. In 1927, Salyers was hired as the designer for Gibson City development in the Kensington community of San Diego. He was granted an architect's license in 1933 and became a prolific residential designer. He began working in the Streamline Moderne style in the 1930s, including in his residential designs. In 1941, Salyers was recruited to serve as the first Chief Building Inspector at the newly created County Surveyor's Office. He relinquished this position in 1948 when Governor Earl Warren appointed him Chief of the State Division of Housing. After serving in this capacity for two years, he returned to San Diego and resumed designing and constructing single-family houses. In his later years, he gained publicity for relocating an entire apartment building from Point Loma to Golden Hill. Salyers retired from practice in 1966. More than five of Salyer's works have previously been designated as historical resources by the City of San Diego Historical Resources Board, including the Paul E. Stake/George Schilling House (HRB #356), which established him as a Master Architect by the HRB in 1998, the James P. and Florence E. Gibson/ Charles Salyers House (HRB #925), and the Leslie R. and Isabel M. Smith/Charles H. Salyers Spec House #1 (HRB #1048).

Lewis Henry Dodge was born in New Hampshire in 1871 and learned carpentry and home building from his father. At age 20, he began working in the building industry, constructing houses, schools, churches, and industrial buildings. While working in New England, he constructed buildings in locally popular styles like Tudor Revival, English Revival, and Dutch Colonial Revival. Upon moving to San Diego in 1923, he established the Dodge Construction Company. His early works in San Diego were built in the Tudor Revival and Dutch Colonial Revival styles before he shifted to the Spanish Colonial Revival style. The Dodge Company built at least 45 houses in San Diego. Dodge Construction Company was cited many times in the "Better Homes" section of the newspaper for his work in Kensington and Sunset Cliffs. In Sunset Cliffs, the John P. Mills Organization bought large tracts of land and hired Dodge to build homes in its subdivisions. The subject property was built for William and Olga Mills; William Mills was the brother of John P. Mills and the finance manager of the John P. Mills Organization. The subject property was also featured in the "Better Homes" section of the *San Diego Union*. The "Better Homes" section of the newspaper was inspired by the Better Homes Movement, a national drive to build better quality affordable homes with progressive design features. It was driven by the ideology of providing good design and quality construction for all socioeconomic levels. Presently, the Board has designated at least seven residences built by Lewis Henry Dodge and Dodge Construction Company as historical resources, including the John and Amy Ballinger House (HRB Site #592). The Lewis and Annie Dodge/Dodge Construction Company House (HRB #1192) and a nearby Lewis and Annie Dodge/Charles Salyers/ Dodge Construction Company Spec House #2 (HRB #1349). These designated properties were designed in the Tudor and Spanish Colonial Revival styles.

The subject property, in its original condition, represents a notable architectural work of both established Master Builder Lewis Henry Dodge and established Master Architect Charles H. Salyers. The property features a variety of custom details and demonstrates a high degree of craftsmanship. It was featured on a full page in the "Better Homes" section of *the San Diego Union-Tribune* in 1927. However, in its current condition with the 1955 balcony enclosure, the property no longer retains integrity design, workmanship, and materials as it relates to Criterion D. The 1955 enclosure has altered the building's spatial relationships, massing, and pattern of windows at a highly visible, character-defining elevation and the property no longer retains integrity of design, materials,

workmanship or feeling. Therefore, staff does not recommend the designation of the subject property under Criterion D due to loss of integrity.

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 Benjamin F. Dillingham III House, located at 4494 Tivoli Street, as a historical resource with a period of significance of 1983 to 2017 under HRB Criterion B. The designation excludes the rear yard pool and covered terrace structure, which were constructed outside the period of significance.



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Alvin Lin  
Assistant Planner



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Suzanne Segur  
Senior Planner/ HRB Liaison  
City Planning Department

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Attachment(s):

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

RESOLUTION NUMBER N/A  
ADOPTED ON 9/28/2023

WHEREAS, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego held a noticed public hearing on 9/28/2023, to consider the historical designation of the Benjamin F. Dillingham III House (owned by Hailey Family Trust, 4494 Tivoli Street, San Diego, CA 92107) located at **4494 Tivoli Street, San Diego, CA 92107**, APN: **530-062-22-00**, further described as BLK 5 LOTS 12 & 13 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 Benjamin F. Dillingham III House on the following findings:

(1) The resource is identified with Benjamin F. Dillingham III, a historically significant person, and retains integrity for that association. Specifically, Benjamin F. Dillingham III occupied the property from 1983 to 2017 and used it as his personal office between 1992 and 2017. Dillingham was an openly gay chief-of-staff for mayor Maureen O'Connor and served on the boards of various charitable and philanthropic organizations, many of which were related to the LGBTQ community and AIDS support groups. He received awards and recognition from many of his peers and civic rights associations, including the establishment of "Ben Dillingham Day" by the City of San Diego. Dillingham has been credited as the driving force behind California State Senators Christine Kehoe's and Toni Atkins' choice to run for office as openly lesbian.

(2) 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 exclude the rear yard pool and covered terrace structure, which were constructed outside the period of significance.

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

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SPACE ABOVE THIS LINE FOR RECORDER'S USE

RESOLUTION NUMBER **N/A**

HISTORICAL DESIGNATION OF PROPERTY ON

**4494 Tivoli Street, San Diego, CA 92107**

ASSESSOR PARCEL NUMBER **530-062-22-00**

HISTORICAL RESOURCES BOARD NUMBER **0**