



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO
Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: January 9, 2014 REPORT NO. HRB-14-001

ATTENTION: Historical Resources Board
Agenda of January 23, 2014

SUBJECT: **ITEM #7 – William and Ruby Snell Cottage**

APPLICANT: Jack and Karen Visin Joint Living Trust represented by Scott Moomjian

LOCATION: 337-341 Playa Del Sur, La Jolla Community, Council District 1

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the William and Ruby Snell Cottage located at 341 Playa Del Sur, and the building located at 337 Playa Del Sur as a historical resource.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate the William and Ruby Snell Cottage located at 341 Playa Del Sur as a historical resource with a period of significance of 1928 under HRB Criterion A as a resource that reflects the early historical and architectural development of the Windansea neighborhood. The designation excludes the 20 square foot addition to 341 Playa Del Sur constructed in 1979, and the rear cottage addressed at 337 Playa Del Sur in its entirety. The designation shall include the cobble retaining wall at the front of the property. This recommendation is based on the following finding:

Historically, the subject property was constructed by and for the Snell family, who played an integral role in the early development of the La Jolla Strand subdivision and the establishment of the neighborhood's identity of Windansea. Architecturally, the cottage, which was designed and built by owner and contractor William Snell, reflects the character of early development in Windansea and utilized indigenous local cobble hauled up from the beach below, a practice found in buildings scattered throughout the coastal areas of La Jolla during this early period.

BACKGROUND

This item is being brought before the Historical Resources Board in conjunction with a proposed building modification or demolition of a structure of 45 years or more, consistent with San Diego Municipal Code Section 143.0212. The property consists of two structures, one at the rear of the

lot addressed at 337 Playa del Sur constructed in 1925-1927 in a simple Vernacular Craftsman style; and one at the front of the lot addressed at 341 Playa del Sur constructed in 1928 in a Vernacular Tudor style.

The property was initially reviewed by historical resources staff as part of a Preliminary Review application submitted by the owner on August 24, 2010. A Historic Resource Technical Report prepared by Scott A. Moomjian was submitted with the Preliminary Review application and was deemed incomplete by staff. A revised Report was submitted in December 2010, and was deemed complete by staff (Attachment 4). The Report evaluated the history, modifications, eligibility and integrity of each building on site and determined that neither building was eligible for designation, due primarily to a lack of integrity based on physical evaluation of the building. Staff concurred, and the property was therefore not referred to the HRB for consideration.

Following the Preliminary Review application, the owner submitted a Coastal Development Permit application to demolish the existing buildings and construct a new duplex structure on site. As a result of the Preliminary Review, no historic issues were identified and the Coastal Development Permit was approved. That approval was appealed to the Planning Commission by three separate parties in May 2013. The issues raised in the appeal included the possibility that new information could demonstrate that the subject site is eligible for historic designation. At the hearing on June 20, 2013, staff requested a continuance to allow the appellants to provide additional information, and to allow the property to be reviewed and considered by the Historical Resources Board.

On July 3, 2013, the La Jolla Historical Society (LJHS) provided significant new information that speaks to the building's eligibility for historic designation (Attachment 5). This information included historic photographs, oral histories, and historical information not included in the applicant's Technical Report, as well as new analysis under the adopted designation criteria. Following submittal of the LJHS information, the item was withdrawn from the Planning Commission docket to allow the applicant and the LJHS to further evaluate the significance of the site and the possibility for adaptive reuse consistent with the Standards. Detailed evaluation of both the applicant's Technical Report and the additional information provided by the LJHS is presented in the Analysis section below.

The historic name of the resource, the William and Ruby Snell Cottage, has been identified consistent with the Board's adopted naming policy and reflects the name of the original owners who constructed the house as their personal residence.

ANALYSIS

A Historical Resource Technical Report dated December 2010 was prepared by Scott A. Moomjian on behalf of the owner, which concludes that the subject buildings are not significant under any HRB Criteria. Additional documentation consisting of historic photographs, oral histories, historical context, and analysis under the City's designation Criteria was submitted by the La Jolla Historical Society, and concludes that both structures on the subject property are significant under HRB Criteria A and C. However, the LJHS has amended their findings, and

now recommends that only the front cottage at 341 Playa Del Sur is eligible for designation (Attachment 3). Upon review of all documents, staff finds that the front cottage located at 341 Play Del Sur is a significant historical resource under HRB Criterion A. This determination is consistent with the *Guidelines for the Application of Historical Resources Board Designation Criteria*, as follows.

CRITERION A - *Exemplifies or reflects special elements of the City's, a community's or a neighborhood's historical, archaeological, cultural, social, economic, political, aesthetic, engineering, landscaping or architectural development.*

The La Jolla neighborhood of Windansea was developed soon after the turn of the century in 1909 with the establishment of the La Jolla Strand subdivision (Map 1216). In 1912, in order to promote the subdivision, a small wooden pier was constructed just south between Gravilla and Kolmar streets, and a viewing stand was also built on the east side of Neptune Place across the street from the pier. Following the pier construction, a group of beach cottages was constructed on Bonair Street not far from the ocean. The first major development in the neighborhood was the Strand Hotel, constructed on Neptune Street between Playa del Sur Street on the south and Playa del Norte Street on the north, fronting the beach. The hotel was a one story square building constructed of redwood board-and-batten walls with a large patio in the center and a large porch looking out on to the ocean. Between 1912 and 1920 few houses were constructed in the neighborhood, although most of the lots had been sold.

In 1919 Dr. Arthur T. Snell (a dentist) and his wife Laura, who had moved from Pasadena California, bought the Strand Hotel from Charles Russell Orcutt. In 1920, William Snell, a contractor/builder and the grown son of Dr. Snell, came to La Jolla to help in the remodeling of the hotel, which included combining and enlarging rooms, as well as adding private baths. In regard to the remodeling, Mr. Snell recalled:

“One morning my father got me up about 5 o'clock to help get some large stones up from the beach. Mr. Steve Breeze brought down a team of horses and a stone boat. We hauled up stones all day. The night before, the tide had washed out the sand, and exposed the stones for that one day only. The next day the sand was all back in place. However, there were just enough stones and Mrs. Snell's brother, Raphael Hempstead, and I made a nice large fireplace that was the feature attraction of the dining room (Attachment 2). The old pier and viewing stand were falling apart so my father asked for and got permission to dismantle them both and use the material. This material was used to build a nice large porch alongside the kitchen. It was used by the help to cool themselves in the summer breeze, and to warm themselves in the winter sun.”

As a business stimulus, Dr. Snell decided to hold a competition to rename the Strand Hotel. Among the many names offered, the name that was used was similar to, but not exactly the same as the one offered by Mrs. Montgomery Brackett. Dr. Snell modified the suggested name, coining the name “Windansea Hotel.” The La Jolla Strand subdivision would, over time, take on the name “Windansea” as the common name for the neighborhood and the nearby beach, a highly popular surfing destination.

Dr. Snell continued to acquire property in the subdivision, including the two large lots to the east of the hotel site, which contained nothing but a small canyon about 15 feet deep, which drained run-off water from the upper area. In October of 1923, Dr. Snell's son William and his wife Ruby purchased the subject property (lot 20 of block 5) on the south side of Playa del Sur. Between 1925 and 1927 he constructed the rear house in a Vernacular Craftsman style, utilizing wood shingles and brick. In 1928, he constructed the front house in a Vernacular Tudor style, utilizing staggered wood shingles and cobble from the beach down the street. Mr. Snell's son Chuck, who provided the historic photographs included in the materials prepared by the La Jolla Historical Society, was interviewed by the Society and recalled, "My father told me how he brought the rocks up from the beach, and how he worked with Mack, a brick mason, to put them in place. They probably came from Windansea." Mr. Snell is recorded as occupying the 337 cottage as soon as it was built, and then moving to the 341 cottage when it was completed in 1928.

Mr. Snell dabbled in real estate and worked on other construction projects in the area during the 1920s, including the historically designated El Pueblo Ribera designed by architect Rudolf Schindler. By 1933, the effects of the Great Depression had reached the Snell family, who was forced to live in the garage at the rear of the property before eventually selling it and relocating to a house on Electric Avenue. Dr. Snell also lost his property, including the Windansea Hotel, prior to passing away in 1936. The Windansea Hotel was destroyed by fire just seven years later.

HRB Criterion A is multifaceted and includes resources that are significant for exemplifying or reflecting special elements of the city, community or neighborhood through at least one aspect of development. Per the Board's adopted Criteria Guidelines, resources reflecting special elements of historical development "shall exemplify or reflect a special or unique aspect of the City's general historical development; or shall exemplify or reflect a unique aspect of the City's history". Resources reflecting special elements of architectural development "shall exemplify or reflect development associated with the City's built environment, especially that designed and constructed by non-architects, including real estate developers, contractors, speculators, homeowners and others associated with the building industry."

Upon evaluation of the overall context surrounding the development of the subject property – including when and where it was constructed, who constructed it, and the how it was constructed – staff finds that the cottage at 341 Playa Del Sur is significant and eligible for designation under HRB Criterion A as a resource that reflects the early historical and architectural development of the Windansea neighborhood. Historically, the cottage was constructed by and for the Snell family, who played an integral role in the early development of the La Jolla Strand subdivision and the establishment of the neighborhood's identity of Windansea. Architecturally, the cottage, which was designed and built by owner and contractor William Snell, reflects the character of early development in Windansea, and utilized indigenous local cobble hauled up from the beach below, a practice found in buildings scattered throughout the coastal areas of La Jolla during this early period.

While other properties may reflect early development in Windansea, or the Vernacular aesthetic of early development in Windansea and the use of indigenous local cobble, no property has yet been identified which reflects all of these elements, along with the association with a founding

family of the neighborhood that were instrumental in establishing the identity of Windansea. Taken as a whole, staff finds that the cottage at 341 Playa Del Sur is distinct among others of its kind and does reflect special elements of the historical and architectural development of Windansea. Additionally, the modifications identified below in the discussion of HRB Criterion C do not significantly impair the integrity of the resource or its ability to convey its significance. Therefore, staff recommends designation of the William and Ruby Snell Cottage at 341 Playa Del Sur under HRB Criterion A. The rear cottage located at 337 Playa Del Sur is not recommended for designation, as it was not intended to serve as the Snell's primary residence, and does not exhibit the indigenous cobble found on the front cottage.

As an aside, in regard to the Context for La Jolla Beach Cottage development, the established Context was prepared in conjunction with a nomination for historic designation submitted in 2009, and discusses the early development of La Jolla and the beach cottages that characterized this early development from the late 1880s through the 1930s. The Context notes that these early beach cottages were located primarily in the "downtown" area of La Jolla within the original La Jolla Park subdivision, in the vicinity of Prospect Street, Girard Avenue, Fay Avenue, Ivanhoe Avenue, Wall Street, Pearl Street, Cave Street, Coast Boulevard, South Coast Boulevard, Draper Avenue, Eads Avenue, Kline Street, La Jolla Boulevard, Lookout Drive, Park Row, Princess Street, Spindrift Drive, Torrey Pines Road, and Virginia Way. The subject parcel is considerably south of these locations, in a different subdivision. As the established Context does not address Beach Cottage development in the Windansea area of La Jolla, staff finds that there is insufficient information to support designation of the subject property within the established Context of early Beach Cottage development.

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

Chain of Title and City Directory research revealed past owners and tenants of the subject building, none of which appear to be historically significant individuals. While the Snell family played a prominent role in the development and identity of the Windansea neighborhood; it does not appear that they rise to the level of historically significant individuals. Additionally, their involvement in and contribution to the history of Windansea is better reflected in HRB Criterion A, as discussed above. Therefore, staff does not recommend 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 property located at 337 Playa Del Sur was constructed in 1925-1927 in the Vernacular Craftsman style, and features a medium pitch cross gable roof with asphalt shingles; overhanging eaves; exposed eaves and simple fascia boards; wood shingle siding over wood frame construction; and a concrete foundation. The north elevation features a brick chimney at the gable end. Fenestration is limited, and features a combination of wood frame, aluminum and vinyl windows, at least half of which appear to be in the original openings. The applicant's report identifies shingle replacement at the rear cottage, noting some inconsistencies in the style of shingle found on the building. There is some uncertainty surrounding the garage at the rear of the building fronting onto the alley. The applicant's report indicates that the construction of the

garage differs from the rest of the building, and speculates that one was likely built after the other. Additionally, the Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps dating to 1949 do not show the presence the shed roof pop-out at the rear, which contains the garage. However, the oral history taken from the son of the original owner builder clearly states that the family was forced to live in the garage at the rear of the property prior to selling the property in 1933. This would indicate that the garage was in place at this time, although it is not reflected in the 1949 Sanborn Map. Therefore, staff finds that there is insufficient evidence to establish exactly when the shed roof garage portion of the building was constructed.

The property located at 341 Playa Del Sur was constructed in 1928 in the Vernacular Tudor style, and features a steeply pitched front gable roof with wood shingles; clipped eaves; wood shingle siding over wood frame construction; and a concrete foundation. The north elevation features a distinctive cobble chimney set just to the side of the gable end. Fenestration features a combination of wood frame, aluminum jalousie and vinyl windows. Most of these occurred within the original openings, with the exception of several windows at the rear at the location of a 20 square foot addition that was added in 1979. The applicant's report identifies shingle replacement; however, if replacement occurred the same pattern was used, as evidenced by the 1929 historic photos included in the information provided by the La Jolla Historical Society.

The subject buildings are limited, Vernacular examples of their respective styles – Craftsman and Tudor – and do not exhibit a significant number of character defining features. Additionally, these simple structures have undergone some modifications, including window replacements in original and altered openings that further detract from the limited expression of the style. Therefore, staff does not recommend designation of the subject property under HRB Criterion C, as the buildings do not exhibit the distinctive characteristics of a style, type, period or method of construction in a historically significant way, and are not valuable examples of the use of natural materials or craftsmanship, beyond the cobble chimney and site wall.

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

William Snell, who owned and constructed the buildings on the subject property, was a contractor by trade and worked on the Windansea Hotel as well as El Pueblo Ribera. However, Snell has not been established as a Master Builder, and there is insufficient evidence to do so at this time. The buildings are not associated with the work of a Master Builder, Architect, or other Master, and are therefore not eligible for designation under HRB Criterion D.

CRITERION E - Is listed or has been determined eligible by the National Park Service for listing on the National Register of Historic Places or is listed or has been determined eligible by the State Historical Preservation Office for listing on the State Register of Historical Resources.

The property has not been listed on or determined eligible for listing on the State or National Registers, and is therefore not eligible for designation under HRB Criterion E.

CRITERION F - *Is a finite group of resources related to one another in a clearly distinguishable way or is a geographically definable area or neighborhood containing improvements which have a special character, historical interest or aesthetic value or which represent one or more architectural periods or styles in the history and development of the City.*

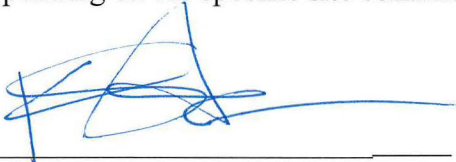
The property is not located within a designated historic district, and is therefore not eligible for designation under HRB Criterion F.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

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 William and Ruby Snell Cottage located at 341 Playa Del Sur be designated with a period of significance of 1928 under HRB Criterion A as a resource that reflects the early historical and architectural development of the Windansea neighborhood. The designation excludes the 20 square foot addition to 341 Playa Del Sur constructed in 1979, and the rear cottage at 337 Playa Del Sur in its entirety. The designation shall include the cobble retaining wall at the front of the property. 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.



Kelley Stanco
Senior Planner



Cathy Winterrowd
Interim Deputy Director/HRB Liaison

KS/cw

Attachments:

1. Draft Resolution.
2. Photo of Windansea Hotel.
3. Letter from the La Jolla Historical Society dated October 30, 2013.
4. Applicant's Historical Report dated December 2010 under separate cover.
5. Additional Documentation provided by the La Jolla Historical Society under separate cover.

RESOLUTION NUMBER N/A
ADOPTED ON 1/23/2014

WHEREAS, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego held a noticed public hearing on 1/23/2014, to consider the historical designation of **The William and Ruby Snell Cottage** (owned by Jack and Karen Visin Joint Living Trust, 5508 Pacifica Drive, San Diego, CA 92037) located at **341 Playa Del Sur, San Diego, CA 92037**, APN: **351-383-14-00**, further described as BLK 5 LOT 20 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 William and Ruby Snell Cottage on the following finding:

(1) The cottage located at 341 Playa Del Sur is historically significant under CRITERION A as a resource that reflects the early historical and architectural development of the Windansea neighborhood, and retains integrity to the 1928 period of significance. Historically, the subject property was constructed by and for the Snell family, who played an integral role in the early development of the La Jolla Strand subdivision and the establishment of the neighborhood's identity of Windansea. Architecturally, the cottage, which was designed and built by owner and contractor William Snell, reflects the character of early development in Windansea and utilized indigenous local cobble hauled up from the beach below, a practice found in buildings scattered throughout the coastal areas of La Jolla during this early period. 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 the cobble retaining wall at the front of the property.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the designation shall exclude the 20 square foot addition to 341 Playa Del Sur constructed in 1979, and the rear cottage addressed at 337 Playa Del Sur in its entirety.

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: N/A

BY: _____
JOHN LEMMO, Chair
Historical Resources Board

APPROVED AS TO FORM AND
LEGALITY: JAN I. GOLDSMITH,
CITY ATTORNEY

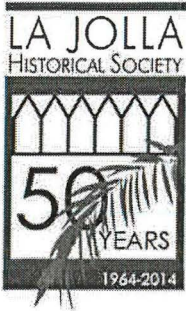
BY: _____
CORRINE NEUFFER,
Deputy City Attorney

Dining
Room

Hotel
Windansea
LaJolla
Calif.



1928



October 30, 2013

Ms. Cathy Winterrowd
Principal Planner
Development Services
City of San Diego
1222 First Avenue, Fifth Floor
San Diego, CA 92101

Re: Support for Visin Project/Snell Cottage (337-341 Playa Del Sur)

Dear Ms. Winterrowd:

The La Jolla Historical Society strongly supports the revised Visin Project that includes the preservation of the Snell Cottage located at 337-341 Playa Del Sur in the La Jolla community.

Over the past few months, LJHS has worked with the development consultants retained by the Visins to ensure that the revised project meets the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Rehabilitation of Historic Properties. The revised Visin Project was unanimously approved by the LJHS Preservation Committee on August 19, 2013. We recommend the project be approved by the City of San Diego.

LJHS believes that the Snell Cottage at 341 Playa Del Sur (the Tudor style cottage located at the front of the property) is significant and eligible for historic designation by the Historical Resources Board (HRB). We recommend that this structure be designated when the property is considered by the Board.

Further, LJHS believes that the rear 337 Playa Del Sur building is not significant and should not be designated when the property is considered by the Board. LJHS withdraws any former support for designation of the 337 Playa Del Sur building on the basis that, upon closer inspection, the structure lacks original integrity, and stands as an impediment to the successful processing of the revised Visin Project and rehabilitation of Snell Cottage.

With the designation of Snell Cottage at 341 Playa Del Sur and the non-designation of the 337 Playa Del Sur building, the revised Visin Project will represent a successful collaborative effort which balances the interests of development, property rights, community character, and historic preservation. It is a model that should be encouraged.

Sincerely,

Heath Fox
Executive Director