

CITY OF SAN DIEGO  
M E M O R A N D U M

DATE: March 11, 2011

TO: Historical Resources Board and Interested Parties

FROM: Kelley Stanco, Senior Planner

SUBJECT: **ITEM 6 — Robert and Frances Johnston Rental House**

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This item was continued from the September 23, 2010 Historical Resources Board hearing at the applicant's request to allow the applicant to provide the Board with additional information in support of designation. The applicant has submitted an addendum dated February 11, 2011, which is included as an attachment to this memo under separate cover.

The staff recommendation from the Staff Report dated September 15, 2010 remains unchanged:

Designate the Robert and Frances Johnston Rental House located at 1545 29th Street as a historical resource with a period of significance of 1943-1948 under HRB Criterion A. This recommendation is based on the following finding:

The resource is a special element of the City's cultural development and retains integrity. Specifically, the resource, owned by Hollywood Theatre owners Robert and Frances Johnston was used to house burlesque performers and entertainers from the Hollywood Theatre at its heyday during World War II, and is one of the last remaining structures associated with the Hollywood Theatre, which attracted performers from across the country.



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Kelley Stanco  
Senior Planner

Attachments:

1. Draft Resolution
2. Staff Report HRB-10-048 dated September 15, 2010
3. Applicant's Addendum Dated February 11, 2011 (under separate cover)

RESOLUTION NUMBER N/A  
ADOPTED ON 3/24/2011

WHEREAS, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego held a noticed public hearing on 3/24/2011, to consider the historical designation of the **Robert and Frances Johnston Rental House** (owned by Dylan S. Calsyn & Beth K. Timpe, 1545 29th Street, San Diego, CA 92102) located at **1545 29th Street, San Diego, CA 92102**, APN: **539-354-01-00**, further described as BLK 12 LOT 1 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 Robert and Frances Johnston Rental House on the following findings:

(1) The property is historically significant under CRITERION A as a special element of San Diego's cultural development. Specifically, the resource, owned by Hollywood Theatre owners Robert and Frances Johnston was used to house burlesque performers and entertainers from the Hollywood Theatre at its heyday during World War II, and is one of the last remaining structures associated with the Hollywood Theatre, which attracted performers from across the country. 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 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: \_\_\_\_\_  
NINA FAIN  
Deputy City Attorney



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

# Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: September 15, 2010 REPORT NO. HRB-10-048

ATTENTION: Historical Resources Board  
Agenda of September 23, 2010

SUBJECT: **ITEM #5 – Robert and Frances Johnston Rental House**

APPLICANT: Dylan Calsyn & Beth Timpe represented by IS Architecture

LOCATION: 1545 29th Street, Greater Golden Hill Community, Council District 3

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the Robert and Frances Johnston Rental House located at 1545 29<sup>th</sup> Street as a historical resource.

## STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate the Robert and Frances Johnston Rental House located at 1545 29<sup>th</sup> Street as a historical resource with a period of significance of 1943-1948 under HRB Criterion A. This recommendation is based on the following finding:

The resource is a special element of the City's cultural development and retains integrity. Specifically, the resource, owned by Hollywood Theatre owners Robert and Frances Johnston was used to house burlesque performers and entertainers from the Hollywood Theatre at its heyday during World War II, and is one of the last remaining structures associated with the Hollywood Theatre, which attracted performers from across the country.



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## 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 building is a two story single family residence located in a low-density single family zone in the South Park Addition subdivision. The building is on the southeast corner of 29<sup>th</sup> Street and Cedar Street and is surrounded by residential uses.

This item was previously docketed for review by the Board at the July 22, 2010 hearing with a staff recommendation to not designate the house due to a lack of integrity. The item was continued for 60 days at the request of the applicant in order to allow time to provide additional research and analysis in support of designation.

The historic name of the resource, the Robert and Frances Johnston Rental House, has been identified by staff as the appropriate name based on the historical significance of the property. The Board's adopted naming policy is silent in regard to naming associated with Criterion A. With a strict application of the naming policy, the house would be named for the first owner/resident. However, staff's position is that this naming is inappropriate, as it does not relate to the significance or historic period of the building. Given that the property is eligible under HRB Criterion A as a special element of San Diego's cultural development because it was used by owners Robert and Frances Johnston to house entertainers from the Hollywood Theatre from 1943-1948, staff finds that the most appropriate name would be the Robert and Frances Johnston Rental House.

## ANALYSIS

The applicant has submitted an addendum to the nomination prepared by IS Architecture and dated September 3, 2010 which concludes that the house is significant under HRB Criteria A, B and C. Staff has reviewed the addendum and concurs that the house is significant under HRB Criterion A, but not HRB Criteria B and C. 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 addendum has provided additional information on the history and significance of the Hollywood Theatre (originally the Liberty Theatre) located on F Street in downtown San Diego. The theatre was the only exclusively burlesque theatre in San Diego from the early 1920s until 1970. Burlesque was a highly popular form of entertainment in the early part of the twentieth century. The Hollywood Theatre operated as the Liberty Theatre up through the Depression and the 1935-36 Exposition, during which time the theatre had to shutter its doors for a year and a half. When the theatre reopened following the Exposition, it did so as the Hollywood Theatre. Famous burlesque acts, including Lili St. Cyr, started and performed at the theatre. During World War II the Theatre enjoyed terrific success with the influx of new servicemen. The severe

housing shortage created by the influx of both servicemen and war-time workers prompted the Johnstons to purchase the subject property to house their entertainers and workers, which they did from 1943-1948. With the demolition of the Hollywood Theatre in 1982, the subject property is one of the few remaining properties associated not only with the Johnstons, but with the burlesque entertainers that made the Hollywood Theatre such an enduring success and a unique entertainment venue in downtown San Diego. Therefore, staff recommends designation under HRB Criterion A as a special element of the cultural development of San Diego, with a period of significance of 1943-1948.

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

The addendum provides some additional information on Robert and Frances Johnston and asserts that the subject property is the best remaining example that could be associated with them. However, the report limits its discussion of the Johnston's properties to the subject property and a home in Mission Hills located at 2350 Fort Stockton Drive, which is under review as a structure 45 years old or older. No final determination regarding eligibility of the Fort Stockton home has been made. The Criteria Guidelines require research into all properties owned, operated or occupied by the potentially significant individual in order to determine which extant property best reflects the individual's significant accomplishments. The report did not provide any analysis beyond the mention of the Mission Hills property and the fact that the Hollywood Theatre has been demolished. Even if the Johnstons were to be considered historically significant, the applicant has not provided the research or analysis required to demonstrate that the subject property is the appropriate property to be designated for an association with them. Therefore, staff continues to recommend against 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 applicant has not provided any additional information regarding the integrity of the home not previously known at the time of the last staff report. Staff maintains that the modifications (which include substantial additions and wholesale replacement of the windows) have significantly and adversely impacted the building's integrity as it relates to design, materials, workmanship and feeling, all of which are critical to conveying significance as a resource which embodies the distinctive characteristics of vernacular Prairie architecture. As a result, the building no longer retains architectural integrity to its 1912 date of construction. Therefore, staff continues to recommend against designation under HRB Criterion C.

#### 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.

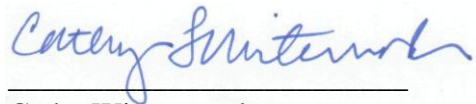
## CONCLUSION

Based on the information submitted and staff's field check, it is recommended that the Robert and Frances Johnston Rental House located at 1545 29<sup>th</sup> Street be designated under HRB Criterion A as a special element of San Diego's cultural development with a period of significance of 1943-1948. 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.



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Kelley Stanco  
Senior Planner



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Cathy Winterrowd  
Principal Planner/HRB Liaison

KS/cw

- Attachment(s):
1. Draft Resolution
  2. Staff report HRB-10-034, dated July 15, 2010
  3. Applicant's Addendum under separate cover