



**THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO**

**M E M O R A N D U M**

**DATE:** February 8, 2024

**TO:** Policy Subcommittee of the Historical Resources Board

**FROM:** Kelley Stanco, Deputy Director, City Planning Department

**SUBJECT:** Hillcrest Historic District

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The City Planning Department is currently working on the Hillcrest Focused Plan Amendment (FPA) to the Uptown Community Plan, which aims to ensure that Hillcrest continues to thrive and meet the community's housing, transportation, public spaces and economic development goals.

As part of this effort, the Heritage Preservation team has implemented a historic preservation strategy that includes intensively surveying the potential Hillcrest Historic District that was identified during the 2016 Uptown Community Plan Update Process. The preservation strategy also includes the preparation of design regulations for the district that would protect the essential historic features and characteristics of the district while providing a clear and by-right approval for development.

The City Planning Department contracted with Heritage Architecture and Planning to conduct the intensive level survey work. They concluded that a smaller area generally centered around 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue between University Avenue and Robinson Avenue is eligible under HRB Criteria A and C.

Consistent with our practices in processing a historic district nomination, staff is seeking the Policy Subcommittee's review and comment on the draft historic context statement, statement of significance, period of significance, and boundary description and justification for the Hillcrest Historic District, which can be found in the District Record provided in Attachment 1.

The District Record figures, which are primarily photographs, are still being finalized and will be included in the nomination prior to Board review, which is scheduled to begin in March. The Draft Supplemental Development Regulations that would apply to the designated historic district are provided as reference and require Council adoption as part of the FPA in order to go into effect.

Following review by the Policy Subcommittee and prior to review by the Board, staff will schedule a workshop with property owners and businesses within the district boundary to

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inform them of the district process, the requirements of district designation, and the Supplemental Development Regulations.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Kelley Stanco', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Kelley Stanco  
Deputy Director

KS

Attachments:

1. Draft District Record for the Hillcrest Historic District
2. Draft Supplemental Development Regulations for the Hillcrest Historic District

\*Resource Name or # (Assigned by recorder)

D1. Historic Name: Hillcrest Historic District D2. Common Name: \_\_\_\_\_

\*D3. **Detailed Description** (Discuss overall coherence of the district, its setting, visual characteristics, and minor features. List all elements of district.):

The Hillcrest Historic District is located within the historic commercial core of the Hillcrest neighborhood in Uptown, a first-ring streetcar suburb which is now one of the City's oldest urban areas. The district consists of 29 parcels containing 21 contributing resources and 11 non-contributing buildings (Table 1). The contributing buildings include a variety of one- and two-story commercial buildings, typically One-Part or Two-Part Commercial Block buildings designed and accented in styles popular in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including Beaux Arts, Mission Revival, Spanish Colonial Revival, Art Moderne, and Art Deco. Two neon signs are among the 21 identified contributing resources. Buildings are typically set at the property lines, resulting in non-descript, utilitarian side and rear facades. Storefronts line the streets and often exhibit replacement of storefront glazing and door systems as is typical for commercial buildings and uses. The streets within the district include landscaped parkways, which are most densely vegetated along 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The district is surrounded by a mixture of residential, commercial, office, and medical uses, including a hospital complex one block to the north. While some properties around and within the district have redeveloped at scales not typically seen when Hillcrest first developed, overall the Hillcrest Historic District retains its pedestrian scale, commercial character, and integrity of design, materials, feeling and association.

**Table 1. Properties within the Hillcrest Historic District**

Assessor's Parcel Number	Address	Legal Description	Date	Style	Contributing or Non-Contributing
4520560300	3841-3847 4 <sup>th</sup> Ave	Blk 3 Lots 5-6 of Nutt's Addn	1939	One-Part Commercial Block Art Moderne	Non-Contributing
4520554900	3848-3852 4 <sup>th</sup> Ave	Blk 2 Lots 26-29 of Nutt's Addn	1931	Two-Part Commercial Block Art Deco	Contributing <sup>1</sup>
4520560200	3863-3867 4 <sup>th</sup> Ave	Blk 3 Lots 3-4 of Nutt's Addn	1924	One-Part Commercial Block Modified Spanish Colonial Revival	Contributing <sup>2</sup>
4520560100	3871 4 <sup>th</sup> Ave and 401-425 University Ave	Blk 3 Lots 1-2 of Nutt's Addn	1913/1938-39	Two-Part Commercial Block Art Moderne	Contributing <sup>1</sup>
4446710800	3919-3925 4 <sup>th</sup> Ave	Blk 8 Lot 9 of Hillcrest	1927	Two-Part Commercial Block Spanish Colonial Revival	Contributing <sup>1</sup>

State of California - The Resources Agency  
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION  
**DISTRICT RECORD**

Primary#  
HRI#  
Trinomial

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D1. Historic Name: Hillcrest Historic District D2. Common Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Assessor's Parcel Number	Address	Legal Description	Date	Style	Contributing or Non-Contributing
4520561500	3796 5 <sup>th</sup> Ave and 425-441 Robinson Ave	Blk 6 Lots 11-12 of Nutt's Addn	1946	Art Moderne	Contributing <sup>3</sup>
4520561600	3800 5 <sup>th</sup> Ave	Blk 3 Lots 17-22 of Nutt's Addn	1973	Modern Contemporary	Non-Contributing
4520562700	3801-3807 5 <sup>th</sup> Ave	Blk 4 Lots 8-9 of Nutt's Addn	1922/ 1958/ 1965/ 1993	One-Part Commercial	Non-Contributing
4520562600	3817-3823 5 <sup>th</sup> Ave	Blk 4 Lot 7 of Nutt's Addn	1913	Two-Part Commercial Block Mission Revival	Contributing <sup>1</sup>
4520562500	3825-3827 5 <sup>th</sup> Ave	Blk 4 Lot 6 of Nutt's Addn	1920	Two-Part Commercial Block Mission Revival	Contributing <sup>3</sup>
4520561700	3828-3832 5 <sup>th</sup> Ave	Blk 3 Lots 23-24 of Nutt's Addn	1986	New Traditional/Neo Spanish Eclectic	Non-Contributing
4520562400	3833 5 <sup>th</sup> Ave	Blk 4 Lot 5 of Nutt's Addn	2023	21 <sup>st</sup> Century Contemporary	Non-Contributing
4520561800	3838-3840 5 <sup>th</sup> Ave	Blk 3 Lots 25-26 of Nutt's Addn	1939	One-Part Commercial Block Art Moderne	Contributing <sup>1</sup>
4520562300	3845-3847 5 <sup>th</sup> Ave	Blk 4 Lots 4 of Nutt's Addn	1917/ 1950-51/ 1965	One Park Commercial Block	Contributing <sup>3</sup>
4520561900	3846-3854 5 <sup>th</sup> Ave	Blk 3 Lots 27-28 of Nutt's Addn	1923/ 1928	Two-Part Commercial Block Monterey	Contributing <sup>3</sup>
4520562200	3849-3863 5 <sup>th</sup> Ave	Blk 4 Lot 3 W 65 ft Lot 3 E 35 ft of S 44 ft OF Nutt's Addn	1931/ 1960	One-Part Commercial Block Art Deco	Contributing <sup>1</sup>
4520562000	3862-3870 5 <sup>th</sup> Avenue	Blk 3 Lots 29-32 of Nutt's Addn	1927	One Part Commercial Block	Contributing <sup>1</sup>
4520562000	3872-3896 5 <sup>th</sup> Ave and 455 University Ave	Blk 3 Lots 29-32 of Nutt's Addn	1927	Two Part Commercial Block Art Moderne	Contributing <sup>1</sup>

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Assessor's Parcel Number	Address	Legal Description	Date	Style	Contributing or Non-Contributing
4520562100	501-519 University Ave and 3865 5 <sup>th</sup> Ave	Blk 4 Lots 1 & 2 W 65 ft of Nutt's Addn	1937	Two Part Commercial Block Art Moderne	Contributing <sup>1</sup>
4446711200 4446711300	3900-3910 5 <sup>th</sup> Ave	Blk 8 Lots 12 & 13 (EX ST), and Blk 8 Lot 14 of Hillcrest	1989	New Traditional Commercial/Office	Non-Contributing
4466721100	3919 5 <sup>th</sup> Ave	Blk 1 Lot 10 POR of Hillcrest	N/A	Surface Parking Lot	Non-Contributing
4446710900	406 University Ave and 3909-3913 4 <sup>th</sup> Ave	Blk 8 Lots 10 & 11 W 45 FT of Hillcrest	1920	Enframed Commercial	Non-Contributing
4446711000	412-414 University Ave	Blk 8 Lots 10 & 11 E 45 ft of W 90 ft of Hillcrest	1921	Two-Part Commercial Block	Non-Contributing
4446711000	412-414 University Ave	Blk 8 Lots 10 & 11 E 45 ft of W 90 ft of Hillcrest	1955	"Jimmy Wong's Golden Dragon" Neon Sign	Contributing <sup>1</sup>
4446711100	416 University Ave	Blk 8 Lots 10 & 11 (EX ST) E 45 ft of Hillcrest	1989	New Traditional Commercial	Non-Contributing
4520562000	435-449 University Ave	Blk 3 Lots 29-32 of Nutt's Addn	1924	Two Part Commercial Block Art Moderne	Contributing <sup>1</sup>
4446720600	502 University Ave	Blk 1 POR of Hillcrest	1927	Neoclassical Commercial	Contributing <sup>1</sup>
4520563500	521-535 University Ave	Blk 4 POR of Nutt's Addn	1927	Beaux Arts One-Part Commercial Block	Contributing <sup>1</sup>
4446720800	530-534 University Ave	Blk 1 Lots 14 & 15 W 1/2 of N 6 1/2 ft Lot 13 W 1/2 of Hillcrest	1918	Two-Part Commercial Block Spanish Colonial Revival	Contributing <sup>1</sup>
4446720900	540-550 University Ave	Blk 1 Lots 14 & 15 E 1/2 of N 6 1/2 ft Lot 13 E 1/2	1911	Two-Part Commercial Block	Contributing <sup>1</sup>

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Assessor's Parcel Number	Address	Legal Description	Date	Style	Contributing or Non-Contributing
		of Hillcrest			
4446720700	No Address	Blk 1 POR of Hillcrest	N/A	Surface Parking Lot	Non-Contributing
	In the public right-of-way over University Avenue west of 5th Ave			"Hillcrest" Neon Sign	Contributing <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Contributes to the district's significance related to historical and architectural development under HRB Criterion A and embodiment of early 20<sup>th</sup> century commercial architecture under HRB Criterion C.

<sup>2</sup> Contributes to the district's significance under HRB Criterion A for its association with San Diego's LGBTQ+ community.

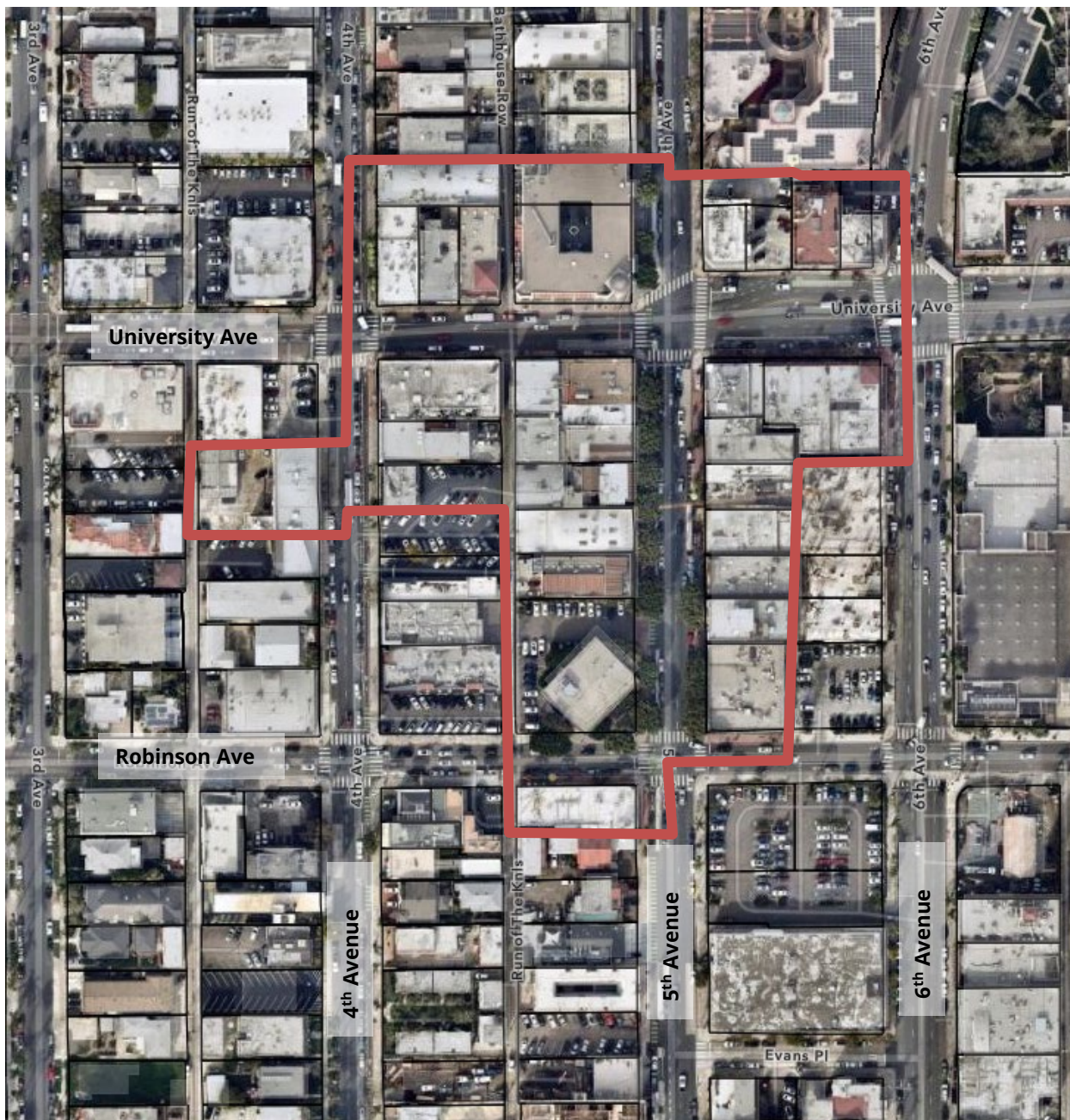
<sup>3</sup> Contributes to all aspects of the district's significance.

**\*D4. Boundary Description** (Describe limits of district and attach map showing boundary and district elements.):

The Hillcrest Historic District is bounded as follows: beginning at the northwest corner of Lot 29, Block 2 of Nutt's Addition Subdivision (Map 628), extending eastward along the northern lot line to the middle of 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue; then heading north to a point parallel to the northern lot line of Lot 9, Block 8 of Hillcrest Subdivision (Map 1069); then heading east along the northern lot lines of Lots 9 and 14, Block 8 to the middle of Fifth Avenue; then heading south slightly to a point parallel to the northern property line of APN 444-672-11-00 (32.748747311855695, -117.16044567886199); then heading east along the northern property lines of APN 444-672-11-00, 444-672-08-00, and 444-672-09-00 to the middle of Sixth Avenue (32.74874390818623, -117.15952167739702); the heading south to a point parallel to the southern property line of APN 452-056-35-00 (32.74786007264276, -117.15952319495976); then heading west to the southwest corner of the parcel (32.747858380956266, -117.15997447668641); then heading south along the eastern lot lines of Lots 4 through 9, Block 4 of Nutt's Addition to the middle of Robinson Avenue; then heading west to the intersection of Robinson Avenue and Fifth Avenue; then heading south down Fifth Avenue to a point parallel to the southern lot line of Lot 11, Block 6 of Nutt's Addition (32.74672651041348, -117.16040283461805); then heading west along the southern lot line of Lot 11 to the middle of the alley between Fifth Avenue and Fourth Avenue; then heading north to a point parallel to the southern lot line of Lot 6, Block 3 of Nutt's Addition (32.74771831783603, -117.16103350233585); then heading west along the southern lot line of Lot 6, Block 3 to the middle of Fourth Avenue; then heading slightly south to a point parallel to the southern lot line of Lot 26, Block 2 of Nutt's Addition (32.74764519727941, -117.16162577865242); then heading west along the southern lot line of Lot 26, Block 2 to the southwest corner of the lot; then heading north along the western lot line of Lot 26, Block 2 back to the beginning point.

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Proposed Hillcrest Historic District Boundary

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**\*D5. Boundary Justification:**

A detailed reconnaissance survey was undertaken of the potential Hillcrest Historic District that was identified as part of the 2016 Uptown Community Plan, which was bounded by Washington Street to the north, Sixth Avenue to the east, Pennsylvania Avenue to the south and First Avenue to the west. The detailed reconnaissance survey revealed that this broader area did not contain a sufficient concentration of resources to be eligible as a historic district. However, the detailed reconnaissance survey found – and the intensive evaluation conducted to prepare this nomination confirmed – that a smaller boundary centered largely around Fifth Avenue from University Avenue to Robinson Avenue contains a sufficient concentration of resources that convey the area’s significance related to the historical, architectural, and cultural development of Hillcrest.

The proposed boundaries of the Hillcrest Historic District encompass the core of the business district in Hillcrest and are determined by concentrations of properties that reflect the district’s significance related to the historical and architectural development of the commercial core of Hillcrest. The boundary also contains a concentration of resources that have housed or continue to house LGBTQ+ businesses such as bars, clubs, coffee houses, and bookstores, as well as support and advocacy organizations, reflecting the districts importance to and significant association with San Diego’s LGBTQ+ community.

**D6. Significance: Theme** Commercial Development, LGBTQ+ Community  
**Area** Hillcrest Neighborhood, City of San Diego **Period of Significance** 1908-1948, 1970-1990  
**Applicable Criteria** HRB Criteria A and C (Discuss district's importance in terms of its historical context as defined by theme, period of significance, and geographic scope. Also address the integrity of the district as a whole.)

In order to be eligible for designation, a historic district must have a distinct period of significance, a definable geographic boundary, and an association with one of the themes established in the historic context. Additionally, a historic district must retain sufficient integrity as a whole to convey its significance, and it must also contain a substantial concentration of properties that contribute to the district.

The historic context and significant themes related to the development of the Hillcrest community are discussed below, as well as the property types, architectural styles, and stylistic influences present in the district. A statement of significance detailing how the district embodies the significant themes is also provided, along with a discussion of the methods used in evaluating the integrity of individual properties as contributing or non-contributing resources to the district.

The historic context for the Hillcrest Historic District has been compiled largely from the 2016 Uptown Community Plan Historic Context Statement (Uptown Context), the 2016 Citywide LGBTQ Historic Context Statement (Citywide LGBTQ Context), and the 2021 Hillcrest Focused Plan



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Amendment LGBTQ+ Historic Context Statement (Hillcrest LGBTQ+ Context). Relevant significant themes from the Uptown Context include *"The Railroad Boom and Early Residential Development: 1885-1909"*, *"The Panama-California Exposition and Streetcar Suburbs: 1909-1929"*, *"Great Depression and World War II: 1929-1948"*, *"Postwar Development, Suburbanization, the Automobile, & Modernism: 1948-1970"*, and *"Neighborhood Revitalization and the LGBTQ+ Community: 1970-1990."*<sup>1</sup> Relevant themes from the Hillcrest LGBTQ+ Context include "LGBTQ+ Social Life in Hillcrest", "LGBTQ+ Arts and Culture in Hillcrest", and "LGBTQ Business and Commerce."

## Historic Context

### EARLY HISTORY: 1769-1885

Hillcrest is located within one of San Diego's oldest neighborhoods in Uptown on land that is within the traditional and unceded territory of the Kumeyaay Native Americans and later was within the jurisdiction of the Mission San Diego de Alcalá, founded by the Spanish in 1769. In 1867 real estate magnate Alonzo Horton purchased approximately a thousand acres of land adjacent to New Town, expanding San Diego to the east significantly. The success of Horton's venture encouraged other eager speculators to follow suit and expanded to areas now encompassing Hillcrest, North Park, Mission Hills, University Heights, Golden Hill, Sherman Heights, and Logan Heights.<sup>2</sup>

Land speculation in the community accelerated during the early 1870s, when the Texas and Pacific Railway Company announced that it would construct a transcontinental rail line to San Diego. However, the Financial Panic of 1873 left the Texas and Pacific Railway unable to fund the construction of a rail line and San Diego's real estate market slowed down significantly. While many parcels in Uptown, including Hillcrest, had been sold prior to the bust, very little construction had taken place. In its early years, therefore, Uptown failed to evolve into the neighborhood envisioned by investors.<sup>3</sup>

### RAILROAD BOOM AND EARLY RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT: 1885-1909

With the failed Texas and Pacific Railway Company, developers turned to the construction of the California Southern Railroad connecting San Diego with the Santa Fe Railroad in San Bernardino. Its ultimate completion spurred the "Great Boom" between the years 1885-1887, wherein the city experienced a population increase, nearly doubling, which was unparalleled. The construction of the railroad pushed development north of downtown to Uptown mesa.

In addition, the development of public transportation through the completion of the University Motor Road began in 1888 and provided accessibility to the area. The steam powered streetcar line traveled through the southeast section of San Diego connecting present-day Hillcrest, University

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Heights, Balboa Park, and downtown. Hillcrest was subdivided along the area of the developing trolley line, though minimal construction was completed during this period.<sup>4</sup> Most of the real estate transactions were speculative and involved the sale of vacant parcels, most often at inflated rates. Any new construction were sparse and exclusively single-family homes in styles common to the Victorian era, like the Hall-Sherman residence located at 3718-3720 First Avenue constructed in 1891 by master builder John Sherman.<sup>5</sup> In effect, Hillcrest mostly remained rural during this period. Full development would not be realized until the next decade.<sup>6</sup> Prior to 1900, the Hillcrest area remained mostly desolate. However, the construction onset of roads and bridges, mass transit lines, hospitals, and parks fueled growth in the area.<sup>7</sup> The earliest building in Hillcrest was the County Hospital (now UCSD Medical Center), which opened in 1904.<sup>8</sup>

Development of Hillcrest began in 1906 when William Wesley Whitson purchased 40-acres from the George Hill estate roughly located between First, Sixth, and Lewis Streets, and University Avenue. The Hillcrest Company was formed by Whitson with sales offices in downtown and at the corner of University and Fifth. Whitson's sister-in-law, Laura Anderson, who had recommended that he purchase the land, named the subdivision "Hillcrest."<sup>9</sup> A map for the Hillcrest subdivision soon followed which contained approximately 200 lots set in a rectilinear grid of streets except for a few lots along Hillcrest Drive. The subdivision was located north of the existing 1889 Brookes' Addition and the 1890 Nutts Addition and east of the 1891 North Side Addition.

In 1907 when the Hillcrest Company began to subdivide, there was one church, one chapel, one store, and a hospital in the area for a few scattered residents. The area was not paved, nor were sidewalks laid. Almost immediately, the Hillcrest Company installed sidewalks and curbs. Early advertisement also noted immediate available infrastructure for the subdivided lots. The Hillcrest Company as well as the Folsom Bros. Company, a real estate enterprise, were responsible for selling of the lots early on. Circulating flyers stated, "THE TRACT BEAUTIFUL...Lots of ample size, with alleys. Houses all back a proper distance from the street." Lots sizes ranged from 40x135, 50x135, or 50x100 and were sold according to the size and location beginning from \$800-\$2,000.<sup>10</sup>

Hillcrest was advertised as a "restricted tract" including building setbacks, fence regulations, minimal architectural requirements, and land use limitations.<sup>11</sup> Development focused on single residents and young couples in the middle-income range working downtown, which was unique to Hillcrest. Advertisements catered to moderately priced modern homes with easy terms and convenient access via the streetcar line.<sup>12</sup>

As development continued, the Hillcrest Company established its own planning mill at Sixth Avenue between Washington Street and University Avenue. The intent was for the company to complete its

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own mill work for the proposed buildings in order to save time and expense.<sup>13</sup> "We own and operate our own wholesale and retail lumber yard, have one of the largest planning mills in the city, buy our lumber in cargo lots from the northern forest mills, build our own buffets, etc, in our own shops, with power machinery available for all labor savings and time and expense savings."<sup>14</sup>

By 1910, developed lots, including detached garages, were sold between \$2,500 to \$3,750 based upon the location and size of the house. Many of the houses were designed in the Craftsman style of architecture, popular during this period. Accordingly, the Hillcrest Company included the following amenities to their designed homes:

All finished with hardwood floors throughout, including closets—not in one or two rooms only, as is often the case—but all the floors throughout are hardwood—with built-in buffets, book cases, kitchen cabinets, etc., and with gas, electricity and sewer connections, also hot and cold water; finest electric fixtures; shades to all windows; beautiful and expensive front doors; open fireplaces, with brick or cobblestone chimneys; commodious and pretty porches, with brick or cobblestone buttresses; solid concrete foundations; plastered with hard plaster; bathrooms and kitchens wainscoted with smooth hard plaster and enameled; beautifully selected grain finish in all living rooms and dining rooms; bedroom finish white enamel; all rooms beautifully tinted; picture molding and plate rails where needed.<sup>15</sup>

Although residential buildings were designed and built by the Hillcrest Company, others were also designed by noted builders and architects including William Hebbard, Irving Gill, Carleton Winslow, Frank Mead, and Richard Requa.

Steady growth continued in Hillcrest and soon Florence Elementary School was established at the corner of University and First Avenues in 1908 to accommodate the influx of residents to the surrounding community. Businesses were also spurred from construction of the University Bank, Hillcrest's first bank, located at University Avenue. The Kahn Building at the corner of Sixth and University Avenue was constructed in 1909 along the newly developing commercial district. By 1910, University Avenue was completely paved. One year later, Washington Street would also be completely paved. Ornate churches, often occupying prominent corners, also serviced the growing area during this period. In 1912, the All Saints Episcopal Church on Sixth and Pennsylvania, designed by William Hebbard and Carleton Winslow, Sr., as well as the First Church of the United Brethren in Christ on Third and Robinson, were erected.

THE PANAMA-CALIFORNIA EXPOSITION AND STREETCAR SUBURBS: 1909-1929

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Hillcrest experienced steady growth between 1910s-1920s. The opening of the Panama-California Exposition in 1915 set forth another wave of mostly residential development through the 1920s.<sup>16</sup> New construction began to expand beyond the streetcar lines to the outlying areas which reflected the growing popularity of the automobile. Built in order to accommodate the onslaught of exposition visitors, residential flats, rooming houses, and apartments began to emerge throughout the built landscape. Residential construction styles were influenced by the Churrigueresque motifs of the Exposition grounds and sparked a widespread interest in Spanish architecture. As a result, many of the homes erected during this era were designed in the Spanish Eclectic and Mission Revival styles, such as the four-plex flats at 3750-3756 Fourth Avenue and 3744-3746 Fourth Avenue built in 1925; though others continued to assume Craftsman-style characteristics. Other institutional and commercial buildings followed suit such as the 1924 St. Joseph's medical center, now Mercy Hospital, by architect Ilton E. Loveless which was designed in the Mediterranean Revival style and located along Fifth Avenue and Washington Street.

The rise of residential construction prompted the development of small commercial nodes along Fifth Avenue, University Avenue, and Washington Street in the Hillcrest neighborhood. The commercial development pattern followed the streetcar route, but later reflected the proliferation of the automobile after World War I. In 1921 the Hillcrest Business Men's Association was established, a co-operative group of business men and women whose objective was to advance the interest of the Hillcrest neighborhood as a district entity and conduct numerous promotional neighborhood activities throughout the year.<sup>17</sup> By 1925, Hillcrest's business district included more than 200 firms that catered to the needs of the neighborhood of about 30,000 in population.<sup>18</sup>

#### GREAT DEPRESSION AND WORLD WAR II: 1929-1948

The onset of the stock market crash in 1929 halted growth within the area as communities were impacted by the spiraling economy and unemployment. To curb the effects of the Great Depression and to stimulate economy, the Chamber of Commerce proposed that the city host a second exposition in 1935. The California-Pacific International Exposition utilized many of the existing Spanish Baroque structures retained from the previous exposition and featured several vernacular buildings designed by Master Architect Richard Requa. Although the 1935 Expo was a success, it did not significantly influence the built environment within the area as much as the initial exposition as Hillcrest was nearly fully developed. Any improvements in Hillcrest thereafter were primarily remodels of existing structures, infill properties and redevelopment. Many of infill commercial properties were infilled with Modern architectural styles including Art Deco and Art Moderne influenced buildings. In addition, just on the outskirts of the original Hillcrest subdivision commercial buildings came in the form of automobile service buildings, often occupying corner lots for ease of access. They often included gasoline stations and automotive repair shops. These buildings

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generally featured flat roofs and vehicular bays. They typically were one-story and embodied a variety of architectural styles but with restrained ornamentation.

The city's population grew rapidly during and after World War II. Between 1940 and 1950, San Diego's population boomed from approximately 203,000 to 334,000 as people moved to the city for work in the military and aerospace industry and then as servicemen returned from the war. Wartime restrictions on building materials limited construction and change in the built environment.<sup>19</sup> The shortage of housing that resulted from this population influx was often solved by the conversion of single-family residences into multi-family residences. Numerous residences in Hillcrest were converted during this period.

The construction of the Cabrillo Parkway, present day State Route 163, through Balboa Park and some of Hillcrest occurred during the 1940s. As a result of the parkway that separated portions of the neighborhood, and several overpasses were built along Washington Street (1942), Robinson Avenue (1942), and University Avenue (1947) to ease the flow of east-west traffic through the community.

#### POSTWAR DEVELOPMENT, SUBURBANIZATION, THE AUTOMOBILE & MODERNISM: 1948-1970

In the late 1940s, San Diego became the first major city in the southwest United States to decommission its entire electrical streetcars in exchange for buses. The last operable streetcar line that had serviced Hillcrest made its final pass through the University Avenue corridor in 1949. By the 1950s many of the older buildings were razed in favor of contemporary structures. Newer buildings reflected the shift away from traditional revival styles for more of the popular modernist trends such as Contemporary and Minimal Traditional styles. These buildings were constructed amidst older structures in the neighborhoods.

The preeminence of the automobile continued to fuel changes in postwar development. In the postwar period, San Diego's downtown district entered a period of economic decline, as was the fate of many downtown districts during the time. The city became increasingly decentralized with the construction of suburban shopping centers and the freeways that made these new areas more easily accessible.<sup>20</sup> This included the construction of Mission Valley Shopping Mall, which opened in 1961.

Hillcrest's business district was sustained in the postwar period in part because of the presence of the County and University Hospitals and its proximity to Balboa Park. It did not see the same degree of economic decline in the 1950s that downtown did. In 1950, Sears, Roebuck and Company announced its plans to relocate its downtown store to a larger 12-acre site in Hillcrest. Sears' new

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store opened in 1953 between Richmond, Cleveland, and Washington Streets, adjacent to the Cabrillo Parkway. It offered a large expanse of parking lots and drew customers away from the area's commercial nodes, including Hillcrest's business district, which remained pedestrian-oriented with Fifth Avenue serving as the main thoroughfare.

A substantial number of doctor's offices, medical clinics, and nursing homes were also constructed in the Hillcrest neighborhood, presumably because of their proximity to County and Mercy Hospitals. Most of these medical facilities were concentrated along Fourth and Fifth Avenues, just south of the study area, though several were also sited on adjacent streets. With time, Fourth and Fifth Avenue corridors became known as "Pill Row." By 1956, the County Hospital, constructed in 1904, was in need of replacement. After years of planning and construction, a new 11-story hospital was completed in 1963 at the northern terminus of Front Street, now UCSD Medical Center. In 1966, Mercy Hospital also constructed an 11-storied structure at Washington Street and Fifth Avenue, now Scripps Mercy Hospital. Each of these buildings exemplified Modern architectural styles of the times.

The effects of the postwar suburbanization began to slowly transition Hillcrest. Though the business district remained vibrant, the area's population had transitioned to one that was predominately elderly. Many of the residents who had moved to Hillcrest in the 1920s and 1930s remained in the area into the 1960s. At the same time, younger residents left for new suburbs, and older residents passed away and were not immediately replaced. This resulted in higher vacancy rates, which in turn translated into lower housing costs.

#### NEIGHBORHOOD REVITALIZATION AND THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY: 1970-1990

Prior to the 1960s, San Diego's LGBTQ+ community was mostly dispersed. At a time when members of the gay community faced frequent harassment from both police and the general public and LGBTQ+-oriented support groups did not yet exist, they tried to call as little attention to themselves as possible.<sup>21</sup> Any interactions that occurred had to be conducted carefully and in places that would not be detected. Bars and clubs in the downtown area were the primary social venues for the community until this time. However, the economic decline of downtown in the postwar period made it increasingly unsafe. As they searched for a safer place to meet, they turned to Hillcrest.<sup>22</sup> Because much of the area's population was elderly, there was less pedestrian and vehicular traffic, lowering the likelihood of confrontation.<sup>23</sup> Hillcrest provided a place in which the LGBTQ+ community could find a sense of safety and anonymity. In addition, the area's proximity to Balboa Park, a popular meeting place for gay men in the 1960s and 1970s, made it an attractive and convenient place to live and congregate.<sup>24</sup> This multitude of factors made Hillcrest the center of the LGBTQ+ community in San Diego from the 1970s through the remainder of the 20th century.

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A convergence of factors was responsible for the rise of Hillcrest as the center of San Diego's LGBTQ+ community. As people discovered that Hillcrest provided a safe haven, businesses and institutions that had been concentrated downtown began slowly moving into the area. Among the earliest businesses to move into Hillcrest were bars and clubs, followed by restaurants, coffee shops, and bookstores.<sup>25</sup> The transition of the LGBTQ+ community to Hillcrest took place over a relatively long period of time, with many establishments remaining downtown; into the 1970s, there were still more gay bars and bathhouses on downtown's India Street than there were in Hillcrest.<sup>26</sup>

Hillcrest's emerging gay-friendly business district drew people to the area on a temporary basis, and the affordable housing led them to stay.<sup>27</sup> The area's higher than usual concentration of single-occupancy housing was perfect for single people and couples looking for affordable housing. Public transit in the area made it unnecessary to own a car, and Hillcrest remained pedestrian-oriented, reinforcing a strong sense of community that could be found "as one walks through the home-town atmosphere of shaded streets, tiny old houses, large old houses, [and] the artery of the community: Fifth Avenue."<sup>28</sup> Contemporary accounts report a business district that continued to thrive and many of the businesses that had been in the area for decades remained, reaching the status of community institutions.

As the demographics of the neighborhood began to shift, Hillcrest residents noticed the opening of new LGBTQ+ -oriented businesses. By the 1980s, Hillcrest was firmly at the center of San Diego's LGBTQ+ community.<sup>29</sup> As late as 1988, it was described as:

"a haven by the many older folks who live here, some of whom have called Hillcrest home for 50 years. [...] Upscale folks go to Hillcrest to check out the restaurants that have made the area the critic's choice for dining in San Diego. [...] The artsy intellectual crowd goes to Hillcrest to browse through rare and used tomes in the community's several bookstores [...] and] Homophobes and homosexuals alike think of Hillcrest as San Diego's gay community. Everyone in the neighborhood knows the Brass Rail is a gay bar and the Crest Café is a gay restaurant."<sup>30</sup>

The San Diego Union reported on a similar feeling in the area, noting that "Hillcrest is a blend. The population is diverse and the different kinds of people who chose to live or visit here co-exist very well."<sup>31</sup> It was not merely San Diego's gay community, according to those who lived and did business there. It had an identity that was "far more encompassing than that."<sup>32</sup>

#### LGBTQ+ SOCIAL LIFE IN HILLCREST

In the decades before the gay liberation movement, social life remained highly sequestered out of necessity. LGBTQ+ people were targets of discrimination, violence, police raids, and harassment,

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and had to be extremely careful when meeting socially. Venues including bars, clubs, and coffeehouses provided a place for LGBTQ+ people to truly be themselves among their peers and played an important role in early community activism and protest.

During this time, one of the primary social venues for the LGBTQ+ community were bars and clubs. Although most were not exclusively known as either “gay” or “straight,” they were considered “the only central institutions of the gay community.”<sup>33</sup> Initially, many of these bars and clubs in San Diego were located downtown, but were among the first LGBTQ+ institutions to move into Hillcrest. One of the earliest was the Brass Rail. The bar opened around 1934 just outside downtown San Diego and evolved into a gay-friendly bar with its largely military clientele during World War II. Lou Arko, who purchased the business in 1958, openly served gays at a time when the city would not issue licenses to bars catering to gays and lesbians.<sup>34</sup> The Brass Rail moved out of downtown San Diego to the corner of Fifth Avenue and Robinson in 1963 and then again to 3796 Fifth Avenue and is only gay bar from the original downtown concentration still in operation.

Adult movie theaters fulfilled a role similar to the bathhouses and private clubs, as one of few places for gay men to have discreet sexual encounters in relative safety. The Guild Theater at 3825 Fifth Avenue started as a 1920s movie house and “later evolved into having the ‘Lavender Theater at midnight on weekends showing soft-core adult films and eventually became a fulltime adult theater.”<sup>35</sup>

Discussions that began at bars, clubs, and coffeehouses evolved into the creation of dedicated community organizations and events, which contributed to the growing (and increasingly visible) sense of community.<sup>36</sup> This solidarity would aid the community as it mobilized to push for greater acceptance and access to healthcare during the AIDS epidemic that began in the early 1980s. In the late 1980s, the number of bars and other social establishments began to decrease in San Diego in general. The Lambda Archives suggest that “Perhaps as AIDS started taking its toll, it reduced the number of patrons.”<sup>37</sup> However, LGBTQ+ persons in Hillcrest increasingly had new opportunities to meet one another and feel safe socializing in public, even in straight bars and restaurants, not to mention the increased freedom brought about by the internet.

#### LGBTQ+ ARTS AND CULTURE IN HILLCREST

The arts served as a means of expressing tolerance for sexual diversity and as a platform for LGBTQ+ persons to tell their stories. The venues in which works created by LGBTQ+ persons were shared, displayed, bought, sold, and performed are crucial to understanding the significance of arts and culture to the LGBTQ+ community. They served as meeting places and access points for



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literature, poetry, plays, and other works banned elsewhere. In addition, they helped form a communal network and facilitated political organization.

The arts in Hillcrest also encompassed the written word, which allows LGBTQ+ persons to tell their stories. The physical venues most closely associated with literature are bookstores that not only sell written works but also host readings by authors and poets. Historically, they have become recognized as a critical component of the lesbian feminist movement. In San Diego, LGBTQ+-friendly and LGBTQ+-owned bookstores have had an important place in the community's artistic and cultural life since at least the early 1960s when William Peccolo opened the Blue Door Bookstore in the Hillcrest neighborhood.<sup>38</sup> A seller of used books, it opened in 1961 and specialized in theater, poetry, gay and lesbian literature, as well as talented but lesser known authors of the 20th century.<sup>39</sup> It also featured books about the works of local artists such as Tim Grummon, who designed the early logo for the Lambda Archives. It was part of what became unofficially known as Book Row on Fifth Avenue and was one of the only bookstores in San Diego to stay open at night, and a little later still for crowds from the Guild Theatre. The establishment closed its doors in 2001.<sup>40</sup>

#### LGBTQ+ BUSINESS AND COMMERCE

As Hillcrest transitioned to the center of the LGBTQ+ community in San Diego, its business district also transformed. Fifth Avenue continued to serve as the neighborhood's main thoroughfare, but in the late 1960s, more businesses began catering to the incoming LGBTQ+ population or at least accepting them, though this was not always the case. As discussed previously, the first LGBTQ+-oriented businesses to open in Hillcrest were bars and clubs, followed soon after by establishments such as restaurants, coffeeshops, and bookstores. The comparatively low rents in Hillcrest made it easier for small businesses owned by, operated by, and friendly to the LGBTQ+ community to establish themselves in the area. Many became centers for social life and contributed to the sense of Hillcrest as a unique place.

As more of these businesses opened, it became clear that Hillcrest not only offered a sense of safety, but also a sense of community reinforced by LGBTQ+-owned and -friendly businesses. Though speaking later, Nicole Murray-Ramirez's thoughts on the importance of gay-owned businesses in Hillcrest applies to the 1970s and 1980s:

Like any other minority, people like to be among their own. Gays and lesbians have the luxury in many ways of being able to fit into any neighborhood they want, [but] it's a choice that I think a lot of them want to go in and create a gay friendly neighborhood. It's ... an attitude of being part of a neighborhood, being comfortable, knowing that you can go into any restaurant that's gay-owned, go into a travel agency that you know is

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gay-owned, go into a coffee shop that you know is gay-owned ... Being able to go in and be reminded of your culture, and being able to share it.<sup>41</sup>

Hillcrest's LGBTQ+-oriented business district grew in the 1970s, and throughout San Diego, the presence of LGBTQ+-owned and -oriented businesses increased. In 1979, several gay businessmen, including Ron Umbaugh, owner of the Crypt, Frank Stiriti, owner of the Vulcan Steam & Sauna (located outside Hillcrest), and Fred Acheson, owner of several bars, founded the Greater San Diego Business Association (GSDBA). This was a major step towards integrating newly emerging LGBTQ+ businesses into the general San Diego business community. In 2000, it was the first LGBTQ+ chamber in the nation to sign a Memorandum of Understanding with the U.S. Small Business Administration, recognizing the GSDBA's status as a minority business association.<sup>42</sup> The GSDBA changed its name to the San Diego Equality Business Association in May 2018.<sup>43</sup> Today, it remains the second largest gay and lesbian chamber in the country.

By the early 1980s, the LGBTQ+ community was firmly established in Hillcrest. Population growth during the decade accelerated, jumping from 12,687 in 1980 to 14,076 in 1990 and reflecting "the neighborhood's renaissance and the rediscovered popularity of central city living."<sup>44</sup> Likely in response to the growing population, commercial and residential construction in Hillcrest also increased in the 1980s.<sup>45</sup> Area residents could walk, bike, or take public transit to Hillcrest's business district, a trend uncommon in the automobile-focused landscape found in much of San Diego. A number of businesses that became institutions in the LGBTQ+ community opened during the 1980s, including #1 Fifth Avenue and the Crest Café.<sup>46</sup>

In 1983, community activist and organizer Joyce Beers led a petition drive to urge City Council to form the Hillcrest Business Improvement District (BID). The Hillcrest Business Improvement Association (HBIA) or Hillcrest Business Association (HBA) was formed the next year, with Beers as the first executive director. The HBA continues to function to the present day and offers promotional services for its members, security patrols in the commercial area, and pays the electricity bills for the Hillcrest sign.<sup>47</sup>

The same year that Beers petitioned for the formation of the HBID, she also spearheaded an effort to refurbish the Hillcrest sign. The sign was taken down for repairs, and area volunteers rallied to raise money for its repair. They eventually raised more than \$4,000. The sign was officially lit about a year later in August 1984, with the ceremony attended by the mayor and local officials.

In more recent years, Hillcrest has experienced continued waves of redevelopment, with the construction of new housing and mixed-use buildings. Rising rents led some older businesses to move or close. However, despite these changes, Hillcrest's business district continued to thrive, and newer gay-owned businesses have moved in. At the same time, several longtime gay-owned or -

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friendly businesses remain in Hillcrest, including the Brass Rail (now called simply the Rail), the Blue Door Bookstore, and the Crest Café.

### Property Types and Architectural Styles

The Hillcrest Historic District is characterized by commercial properties and commercial mixed-use properties that include residential components, typically on upper floors. Many of these buildings are One-Part Commercial Block or Two-Part Commercial Block buildings with stylistic influences popular at the time of construction, such as Spanish Colonial Revival or Art Deco. The following is a brief summary of the property types and styles/stylistic influences that were documented and evaluated as historically, culturally, or architecturally significant within the Hillcrest Historic District.

#### COMMERCIAL PROPERTIES (1880-1950)<sup>48</sup>

##### One-Part Commercial Block

One-story commercial buildings characterized by a configuration akin to the lower zone of a two-part commercial block. The type appears to have emerged during the mid-nineteenth century as a means of imparting urban over-tones to new communities and to rapidly developing service nodes in outlying areas of older settlements. It continued to be used into the mid-twentieth century in places where land values remained relatively low. Some common features include:

- One-story height
- Storefront with transoms and display windows
- Storefront windows resting on bulkheads
- Flat roof, some with parapets

##### Two-Part Commercial Block

Two-Part Commercial Block is generally limited to buildings of two- to four-stories and is characterized by a horizontal division into two distinct zones. Each zone receives its own treatment, often with little direct relation to the other. The division reflects differences in use: the one-story lower zone tends to contain more public spaces, the upper zone more private ones. The type came into common usage during the first half of the nineteenth century and remained popular into the mid-twentieth century. Features include:

- Two- to four-stories in height.
- Lower storefronts are largely transparent and consist of display windows resting on bulkheads, transoms, and entrances with glass and wood doors.

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- Upper facades have one or more floors of windows and decorative detailing such as brick, concrete, or terra cotta panels and cornices at rooflines.

#### Enframed Window Wall

This commercial style is used for one-story and sometimes taller buildings. It is characterized by a larger center section—often made of glass—that almost always suggests a thin membrane. This center is surrounded on three sides by a wide, more or less continuous border. The entire front is treated as a single compositional unit. The type began to be used around the turn of the twentieth century and maintained currency for about five decades. Features include:

- Use of consistent exterior material, such as brick, stone, terra cotta, or glass panels that surround the storefront.
- One-story or taller building.

#### STYLES AND STYLISTIC INFLUENCES

##### Beaux Arts (1890-1930)

The Beaux Arts style is an eclectic classical revival style favored by the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris. Landmark examples in the West were influenced by late nineteenth century Parisian Renaissance Revival and neo-Baroque elements and a renewed American interest in Roman Imperial architecture characteristic of the Gilded Age. In California, the style is mostly associated with banks, railroad stations, and government buildings. These are often symmetrically arranged in civic groupings around formal plazas and axial boulevards inspired by the Chicago Columbian Exposition of 1893.

In Hillcrest, the style is quite rare. It is mostly associated with commercial buildings and the occasional residence. It has two domestic subtypes: flat or low pitched roof and mansard roof. The flat or low-pitch subtype is based on Italian Renaissance or French Baroque models following structuralist architectural theories and pavilion mode design. The mansard subtype is based upon French Renaissance models and their 17th and 18th century successors. The style is identified with the following features:

- Wall surfaces with decorative garlands, floral patterns, shields.
- Facades with quoins, pilasters, or columns, usually paired and with Ionic or Corinthian capitals.
- Walls of smooth light-colored masonry.

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- Exaggerated stonework joints.
- Symmetrical façade.
- Robust porch or attic balustrades.
- Symmetrically arranged paired French doors.
- Oculus windows.
- Attic sculpture.
- Formally designed gardens with Classically-inspired sculpture and garden art.
- Cornice lines accented by elaborate moldings, dentils, and modillions.

Mission Revival (1890-1940)<sup>49</sup>

The Mission Revival style is “the California counterpart” of the Colonial Revival that was then gaining popularity in the northeastern states. Rather than copy the East’s revival of its own colonial past, California turned to its Hispanic heritage for architectural inspiration. Also associated with the Arts & Crafts interest in regionalism, the style began in California in the 1890s and by 1900 examples were built across the country. The style’s popularity was bolstered when the Santa Fe and Southern Pacific Railways adopted the style for stations and hotels throughout the West.

There are two principal subtypes: symmetrical and asymmetrical. The characteristic elements in the Mission Revival style are:

- Shaped parapets, dormers, arches, and quatrefoil windows.
- Red tile roof covering.
- Widely overhanging heavy eaves with exposed rafter tails.
- Open porch supported by round arched arcades.
- Stucco exterior.
- Paired bell towers.
- Ornament cast in terracotta or concrete with Islamic and Sullivanesque elements.

Neoclassical (1895-1940)<sup>50</sup>

The 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago generated interest in the Neoclassical style. The exposition’s planners mandated a classical theme, and the event was widely photographed. The style soon spread to residential neighborhoods but was never as popular as the closely related Colonial Revival style.

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The Neoclassical buildings in Hillcrest are institutional buildings, like schools, churches or banks. A few residential examples exist. There are five principal subtypes: full height entry porch, full-height entry porch with lower full-width porch, front-gabled roof, full façade porch, and one-story. The style is identified through:

- A façade dominated by a full-height porch with the roof supported by classical columns.
- Columns with Ionic or Corinthian capitals.
- Symmetrically balanced windows and doors on the façade.
- Doorways with elaborate, decorative surrounds based on Greek Revival, Adam, or Georgian precedents.
- Boxed eave cornices with moderate overhang, dentils, modillions, or a wide frieze band beneath the cornice.
- Rectangular windows with double-hung sashes and with six or nine panes to each sash.

The presence of transomed, bay, paired, tripled, or arched windows differentiate Neoclassical from Greek Revival or early Classical Revival examples. Many of the full-height entry porch subtypes feature a high-pitched triangular tympanum. This variant is known as the Neoclassical Temple Front, similar to examples seen in many classical revival styles.

#### Spanish Colonial Revival (1900-1945)<sup>51</sup>

Also known as *Spanish Revival*, *Mediterranean Revival*, *Spanish Villa*, *Spanish Hacienda*, and *Spanish Eclectic (1910-1945)*, Spanish Colonial Revival is most common in southwestern states with a Hispanic past, particularly California, Arizona, and Florida. It was a direct outgrowth of the earlier Mission Revival style. The style achieved tremendous popularity following the Panama-California Exposition, when New York architect Betram Grosvenor Goodhue designed numerous landmark examples in Balboa Park. The style uses decorative details influenced by Moorish, Byzantine, Gothic, or Renaissance designs.<sup>52</sup>

There are five principal sub-types: Side-gabled roof, cross-gabled roof, combined hipped-and-gabled roofs, hipped roof, and flat roof. Spanish Colonial Revival buildings typically feature:

- Low-pitched roofs.
- Red tile roof covering.
- Prominent deeply cut arches above principal windows and doors.

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- Stucco exterior.
- Asymmetrical façades.
- Tripartite arch-topped windows.
- Casement windows.
- Relationship to outdoors through use of pergolas, French doors, and terraces.
- Brick or tile vents and window grilles.
- Commercial building facades organized in deep-set vertical bands with recessed windows.
- Ornamental metal work (gates, railings, window grills, lighting).
- Decorative tiles around doors and windows and on stair risers.
- Tiled wall dados, fountains and benches.
- Churrigueresque ornament of cast concrete or terracotta.<sup>53</sup>

#### Art Moderne (1920-1941)<sup>54</sup>

Also known as *Streamline Modern*.

After the 1920s, Art Moderne became the prevalent style of Modernistic homes and its popularity continued until the 1940s.<sup>55</sup> Art Moderne was a domestic interpretation of the Art Deco style and was used widely for houses. An emphasis on sleek rounded forms, horizontal lines, and taut surfaces reflects a more popular version of the high art International Style, as well as the influence of commercial product design "streamlining," where transportation metaphors from land, sea and air imply that stationary objects might be able to move.

Character defining features of Art Moderne designs include:

- Smooth stucco wall surfaces.
- Flat roofs.
- Horizontal grooves or lines in walls, emphasizing horizontal elements of the resource.
- Horizontal balustrade elements.
- Curved building corners.
- Continuous windows around corners.
- Glass blocks windows or walls.
- Small round windows.<sup>56</sup>

#### Art Deco (1920-1940)<sup>57</sup>

Art Deco was common in commercial buildings during the 1920s. The style received its first major impetus in 1922 when the *Chicago Tribune* held a world-wide competition for its new

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headquarters. The second prize was awarded to an Art Deco design by Finnish architect Eliel Saarinen. The design received tremendous publicity and Art Deco soon became a fashionable style. In 1925, the style was influenced by the *Paris Exposition des Art Decoratif* and many of the later designs by Frank Lloyd Wright in the 1910s through the 1920s. Many consider Art Deco a late phase of Art Nouveau, where its sinuous curvilinear ornament was flattened, stylized, and geometricized under the influence of the 1922 discovery of King Tut's tomb.

Art Deco buildings in Hillcrest are primarily commercial edifices. Art Deco designs are associated with:

- Smooth wall surfaces and surfaced volumes.
- Windows arranged in sunken vertical panels.
- Symmetry and balance for each elevation.
- Flat roofs with parapet walls.
- Stucco exteriors.
- Zigzags, chevrons, sunbursts, and other stylized and geometric motifs as decorative elements on the façade.
- Towers and other vertical projections above the roof line that give a vertical emphasis.<sup>58</sup>

#### Monterey Revival (1924-1956)<sup>59</sup>

The Monterey Revival style is a free revival of the Anglo-influenced Spanish Colonial houses of northern California. The revival version fuses Spanish Eclectic and Colonial Revival details. Earlier examples from 1925 through 1940 tend to favor Spanish detailing, while examples from the 1940s and 1950s emphasized English cottage details. The style was favored in domestic buildings, and in Uptown it is typically associated with single-family residences. The style is characterized by:

- Two-story buildings with low-pitched gable roofs.
- Second-story cantilevered balconies covered by a principal roof.
- Paired windows with false shutters.
- Balconies featuring wooden columns or balustrades.
- Stucco walls and surfaces.
- Low-pitched gable roof.
- Double-hung and casement wood windows with mullions.
- Paneled doors with sidelights, fanlights, and recessed panels.



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- French doors and bay windows.

#### New Traditional (1970-Present)<sup>60</sup>

The 1970s was a renewed interest in historical styles that produced what today are called New Traditional houses. The first houses little resembled the earlier styled homes that they sought to emulate. Early architect-designed examples often featured abstracted Postmodern historic details. By the 1990s, however, New Traditional houses were more historically accurate proportions, forms, and details were being sought by clients and designed in nearly all the earlier styles.

Homes are commonly based on styles popular during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century—Colonial Revival, Tudor, Neoclassical, French, Italian Renaissance, Spanish, Craftsman, and Prairie. Romantic- and Victorian-era styles are also found, with Shingle style being by far the most common of these. In San Diego, these tend to emulate Victorian (introduced around the 1980s), Craftsman (began about the 1990s), and Mediterranean (gained popularity about the 2000s) styles. Features include:

- Intermixed wall cladding material
- Window materials are generally vinyl, fiberglass, aluminum, or metal clad wood
- Shutters are generally of vinyl, wood, or composite that resembles wood
- Front facing garage incorporated into main body of house
- Slab foundation with first floor on ground level
- Shallow porches
- Interactive rear facades to gardens and views often with large windows, complete window walls, porches, balconies, decks, and terraces.

#### **Methods for Evaluating Integrity**

Integrity is the ability of a resource to convey its significance. It is the authenticity of a resource's historic identity as evidenced by the survival of important physical characteristics that existed during the resource's period of significance. In order for the district as a whole to retain integrity and convey its significance under HRB Criteria A and C, a clear majority of properties within the district boundary must retain the relevant aspects of integrity needed to contribute to and convey the district's significance.

Contributing resources/properties:

- Were constructed within the identified Period of Significance for the district;
- Relate to the theme(s) for which the district is identified as being significant; and
- Retain the relevant aspects of integrity required to convey the significance of the district.

Non-Contributing resources/properties:

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- Were constructed outside the identified Period of Significance for the district; or
- Do not represent the theme for which the district was identified as being significant; or
- Have been altered so that they no longer retain the relevant aspects of integrity required to convey the significance of the district.

Historic districts composed of property types that are common in an area have a higher integrity threshold than those that are composed of types that are rarer. The built environment of Hillcrest encompasses residential with neighborhood commercial development occurring in small nodes primarily along historical streetcar routes. Due to the nature of commercial properties, most storefronts of the surviving properties have been altered. The retention of essential features is determined by the identified significance and period of significance. Depending upon the association, certain aspects of integrity, such as feeling, location, setting, or association, may have a higher importance than the physical aspect of integrity such as material, design, and workmanship. Within historic districts, the threshold of integrity for contributing buildings is lower and takes into account the expected level of change inherent in commercial districts, particularly at the storefront.

Properties associated with a significant event or person, or with a cultural group, should retain sufficient integrity such that “a historical contemporary would recognize the property as it exists today.”<sup>61</sup> In general, a lower threshold of integrity is appropriate for properties significant for an association with an event, person(s), or cultural group, provided there is sufficient historic fabric to convey the association. Buildings that are significant solely for architecture, must retain a higher of materials, design, and workmanship.

Integrity evaluations of properties significant to LGBTQ+ history in the Hillcrest neighborhood are addressed on a case-by-case basis. Many properties significant to LGBTQ+ history in Hillcrest have undergone some changes in ownership and tenants over the years. Building styles and functions often change over time. Commercial storefronts are commonly reconfigured. Because of this, properties significant to LGBTQ+ history may present substantial exterior and interior alterations—but exterior and interior alterations alone should not disqualify a property for eligibility. Most of the properties significant to LGBTQ+ history in Hillcrest are eligible for their associations with important people, organizations, events or patterns of events, or cultural or social traditions. The aspects of integrity important for such properties are location, association, and feeling. Aspects that are less critical are design, setting, materials, and workmanship. It is also worth noting that standard historic preservation guidance acknowledges that material alterations or changes to a property “may themselves have historical, cultural, or architectural significance.”<sup>62</sup>

### Statement of Significance

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The Hillcrest Historic District is associated with Hillcrest's development as a streetcar suburb in the early-to-mid 20th century, serving as a primary commercial node along the streetcar line that supported the residential development that began in the early part of the century; and with San Diego's LGBTQ+ community, who revitalized an aging Hillcrest in the 1970s and 80s creating a safe space that would become the heart of San Diego's LGBTQ+ community.

The Hillcrest Historic District is directly associated with themes outlined in the Historic Context Statement included in the Uptown Community Plan Area 2016 Historic Resources Survey Report (2016 Uptown Context Statement), including "The Railroad Boom and Early Residential Development: 1885-1909", "The Panama-California Exposition and Streetcar Suburbs: 1909-1929", "Great Depression and World War II: 1929-1948", and "Neighborhood Revitalization and the LGBTQ+ Community: 1970-1990." The Hillcrest Historic District is also directly associated with the themes outlined in the 2021 Hillcrest Focused Plan Amendment LGBTQ+ Historic Context Statement (Hillcrest LGBTQ+ Context Statement), including "LGBTQ+ Social Life in Hillcrest", "LGBTQ+ Arts and Culture in Hillcrest", and "LGBTQ Business and Commerce."

Between the years 1885-1887, San Diego experienced a "Great Boom" brought on by the completion of the railroad linking San Diego to the rest of the country, which pushed development north of downtown to the Uptown mesa. This, coupled with the expansion of the streetcar, created a lot of speculative real estate transactions and subdivisions, but the Hillcrest area remained mostly rural until the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Among the speculative subdivisions was Nutt's Addition, filed in 1890, which includes the portions of the Hillcrest Historic District located south of University Avenue. Development of the area began in earnest when William Wesley Whitson purchased 40 acres of land north of Nutt's Addition which he named "Hillcrest." This includes portions of the Hillcrest Historic District located north of University Avenue. Whitson's Hillcrest Company began subdividing and installing improvements such as paving and sidewalks in 1907.

The rise of residential construction prompted the development of small commercial nodes along Fifth Avenue, University Avenue, and Washington Street in the Hillcrest neighborhood. The initial commercial development pattern followed the streetcar route, and exhibited styles and stylistic influences of the day, including Beaux Arts, Spanish Colonial Revival, and Mission Revival. By 1925, Hillcrest's business district included more than 200 firms that catered to the needs of the neighborhood of about 30,000 in population.

The onset of the stock market crash in 1929 halted growth within the area, and to curb the effects of the Great Depression the Chamber of Commerce proposed that the city host a second exposition in 1935.

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Although the 1935 Expo was a success, it did not significantly influence the built environment as Hillcrest was nearly fully developed. Any improvements in Hillcrest thereafter were primarily infill properties, remodeling efforts, and redevelopment, usually done in Modern architectural styles including Art Deco and Art Moderne.

In the 1970s and 1980s, prior to the establishment of advocacy groups, Hillcrest provided relative safety for the LGBTQ+ within its elderly and isolated community. In addition, the area's proximity to Balboa Park, a popular meeting place for gay men in the 1960s and 1970s, made it an attractive and convenient place to live and congregate. This multitude of factors made Hillcrest the center of the LGBTQ+ community in San Diego from the 1970s through the remainder of the 20th century.

In the decades before the gay liberation movement, social life remained highly sequestered out of necessity. Venues including bars, clubs, and coffeehouses provided a place for LGBTQ+ people to truly be themselves among their peers and played an important role in early community activism and protest. Discussions that began at bars, clubs, and coffeehouses evolved into the creation of dedicated community organizations and events, which contributed to the growing (and increasingly visible) sense of community. This solidarity would aid the community as it mobilized to push for greater acceptance and access to healthcare during the AIDS epidemic that began in the early 1980s.

The arts served as a means of expressing tolerance for sexual diversity and as a platform for LGBTQ+ persons to tell their stories. The venues in which works created by LGBTQ+ persons were shared, displayed, bought, sold, and performed are crucial to understanding the significance of arts and culture to the LGBTQ+ community. The arts in Hillcrest also encompassed the written word, which allows LGBTQ+ persons to tell their stories. In San Diego, LGBTQ+-friendly and LGBTQ+-owned bookstores have had an important place in the community's artistic and cultural life since at least the early 1960s.

As Hillcrest transitioned to the center of the LGBTQ+ community in San Diego, its business district also transformed. Fifth Avenue continued to serve as the neighborhood's main thoroughfare, but in the late 1960s, more businesses began catering to the incoming LGBTQ+ population or at least accepting them, though this was not always the case. As discussed previously, the first LGBTQ+-oriented businesses to open in Hillcrest were bars and clubs, followed soon after by establishments such as restaurants, coffeshops, and bookstores. The comparatively low rents in Hillcrest made it easier for small businesses owned by, operated by, and friendly to the LGBTQ+ community to establish themselves in the area. Many became centers for social life and contributed to the sense of Hillcrest as a unique place.

As businesses such as bars, coffee houses, and bookstores opened, it became clear that Hillcrest not only offered a sense of safety, but also a sense of community reinforced by LGBTQ+-owned and -friendly

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businesses. Hillcrest's LGBTQ+-oriented business district grew in the 1970s, and throughout San Diego, the presence of LGBTQ+-owned and -oriented businesses increased. By the early 1980s, the LGBTQ+ community was firmly established in Hillcrest. Population growth during the decade accelerated, jumping from 12,687 in 1980 to 14,076 in 1990 and reflecting "the neighborhood's renaissance and the rediscovered popularity of central city living." Likely in response to the growing population, commercial and residential construction in Hillcrest also increased in the 1980s.

In more recent years, Hillcrest has experienced continued waves of redevelopment, with the construction of new housing and mixed-use buildings. Rising rents led some older businesses to move or close. However, despite these changes, Hillcrest's business district continued to thrive, and newer gay-owned businesses have moved in. At the same time, several longtime gay-owned or -friendly businesses remain in Hillcrest, including the Brass Rail (now called simply the Rail), the Blue Door Bookstore, and the Crest Café.

Within the City of San Diego, commercial historic districts and historic districts with high concentrations of commercial properties are rare, with Gaslamp being the primary example. Some of the City's predominantly residential historic districts - such as South Park and Fort Stockton Line - do have commercial buildings within them, but they are not the primary building type within the district. Additionally, few potential historic districts comprised entirely or primarily of commercial properties have been identified as part of reconnaissance survey work. Hillcrest is distinctive for the collective significance of its contributors, which reflect the commercial core that supported the development of a streetcar suburb in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Hillcrest Historic district is also highly unique - and perhaps singular in San Diego - for its strong association with the LGBTQ+ community, their revitalization of the community, and their struggle for basic civil rights and acceptance through the 1970s and 1980s.

Therefore, the Hillcrest Historic District, which served as the commercial core of the Hillcrest community from its initial development through the end of World War II and contains an intact concentration of commercial building typologies constructed in styles popular in the Pre-World War II period including Beaux Arts, Mission Revival, Spanish Colonial Revival, Art Moderne, and Art Deco, is significant under HRB Criterion A in the areas of historical and architectural development, and under HRB Criterion C as a resource that reflects several styles of commercial architecture popular during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The period of significance related to these aspects of the district's significance begins in 1908 after the subdivision of Hillcrest and the development efforts of the Hillcrest Company spurred significant development activity in the area and ends with the general build-out of the district in 1948 and a shifting focus to auto-oriented shopping centers. The Hillcrest Historic District is also significant under HRB Criterion A in the areas of historical and cultural development for its strong association with

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the LGBTQ+ community, who found relative safety and affordability in an aging Hillcrest and revitalized the neighborhood while establishing a strong sense of community and advocating for basic civil rights and acceptance. The period of significance related to this aspect of the district's significance begins in 1970 when members of the LGBTQ+ community first began living, working, and recreating in Hillcrest in significant numbers, and ends in 1990 in order to provide an end date that provides sufficient passage of time for objective evaluation in accordance with best practices in historic preservation.

**\*D7. References** (Give full citations including the names and addresses of any informants, where possible.):

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\*D8. Evaluator: San Diego City Planning Department Date: January 2024

**Affiliation and Address:**

202 C Street, MS 413 San Diego, CA 92101

<sup>1</sup> City of San Diego, "Uptown Community Plan Area Historic Resources Survey Report." 2016.

<sup>2</sup> IS Architecture, "Uptown Historic Context Statement and Oral History Report." Prepared for the City of San Diego, November 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Kathleen Flanigan, "Hall-Sherman House 3718-3724 First Avenue San Diego, California 92103." October 2000. HRB #445.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>10</sup> "Hillcrest the Tract Beautiful." *The San Diego Union*. November 24, 1907.

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<sup>13</sup> "Hillcrest Co. Takes Out 10 Permits Today." *The Evening Tribune*. February 2, 1910.

<sup>14</sup> "Bungalow Homes of Quality." *The San Diego Union*. May 12, 1912.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> The Hillcrest Business Association is still functioning today.

<sup>18</sup> "Hillcrest is One of San Diego's Most Prosperous Business Areas." *The San Diego Union*. January 1, 1929.

<sup>19</sup> City of San Diego, HP-142.

<sup>20</sup> IS Architecture, B.42.

<sup>21</sup> Dillinger, 154-155.

<sup>22</sup> Dillinger, 154.

<sup>23</sup> Dillinger, 154.

<sup>24</sup> Dillinger, 156.

<sup>25</sup> Dillinger, 156.

<sup>26</sup> GPA Consulting, San Diego Citywide LGBTQ Historic Context Statement, prepared for the City of San Diego Department of City Planning, September 2016, 33-34.

<sup>27</sup> Dillinger, 157.

<sup>28</sup> Betty Soloff, "Hillcrest," 1977, p.1.

<sup>29</sup> City of San Diego, HP-144.

<sup>30</sup> The Citizen, February 24, 1988, qtd. in IS Architecture, B.47-B.48.

<sup>31</sup> San Diego Union, August 14, 1988, qtd. in IS Architecture, B.48.



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<sup>32</sup> Lori Weisberg and Roger M. Showley, "Community takes pride in its eclectic mix," San Diego Union Tribune, July 27, 1997, A-19.

<sup>33</sup> Dillinger, 155.

<sup>34</sup> GPA Consulting, 19-20.

<sup>35</sup> Excerpted from GPA Consulting, 35; Walking Tour Script, 4.

<sup>36</sup> Dillinger, 158.

<sup>37</sup> Walking Tour Script, 1.

<sup>38</sup> "Peccolo, 59, Bookstore Owner, Dies," Los Angeles Times, October 10, 1987.

<sup>39</sup> Mike Granberry, "5 Little Bookstores All in a Row," Los Angeles Times, April 19, 1982; "Peccolo."

<sup>40</sup> Tony Perry, "Door Closes on a Literary Tradition in San Diego," Los Angeles Times, February 13, 2001, <http://articles.latimes.com/2001/feb/13/news/mn-24747>. Excerpted from GPA Consulting, 106.

<sup>41</sup> Matthew Lickona, "Hillcrest, Homosexuality, History," San Diego Reader, June 10, 1999, accessed April 15, 2020, <https://www.sandiegoreader.com/news/1999/jun/10/cover-pay-rent/>.

<sup>42</sup> Excerpted from GPA Consulting, 56.

<sup>43</sup> "About Us," San Diego Equality Business Association, accessed April 10, 2020, <https://www.sdeba.org/pages/AboutUs>; "Frequently Asked Questions," San Diego Equality Business Association, accessed April 10, 2020, <https://www.sdeba.org/pages/FAQS>.

<sup>44</sup> Susan Pamela Mains, "There's No Place Like Home: Social Diversity and the Evolution of Housing in Hillcrest, San Diego" (Master's Thesis, San Diego State University, 1990), 118-119.

<sup>45</sup> IS Architecture, B.47.

<sup>46</sup> "Hillcrest History," Hillcrest History, accessed April 16, 2020, <https://www.hillcresthhistory.org/timelines/hillcrest-timeline/>.

<sup>47</sup> "Hillcrest Business Association," Hillquest, accessed April 10, 2020, <http://www.hillquest.com/hba/>.

<sup>48</sup> Richard Longstreth, "Compositional Types in American Commercial Architecture." *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture*. Vol. 2, Vernacular Architecture Forum, 1986. Accessed February 2021. [www.jstor.org/stable/3514312](http://www.jstor.org/stable/3514312).

<sup>49</sup> City of San Diego, "Uptown Community Plan Area Historic Resources Survey Report." 2016.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> McAlester, 324.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 417-418.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 417-418.

<sup>54</sup> City of San Diego, "Uptown Community Plan Area Historic Resources Survey Report." 2016.

<sup>55</sup> McAlester, 465.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> City of San Diego, "Uptown Community Plan Area Historic Resources Survey Report." 2016.

<sup>58</sup> McAlester, 465.

<sup>59</sup> City of San Diego, "Uptown Community Plan Area Historic Resources Survey Report." 2016.

<sup>60</sup> McAlester, 716-750.

<sup>61</sup> National Park Service, Bulletin No. 15.

<sup>62</sup> California Department of Parks and Recreation, Office of Historic Preservation, Technical Assistance Bulletin #7, How to Nominate a Resource to the California Register of Historical Resources (Sacramento, CA: 2001), 11.

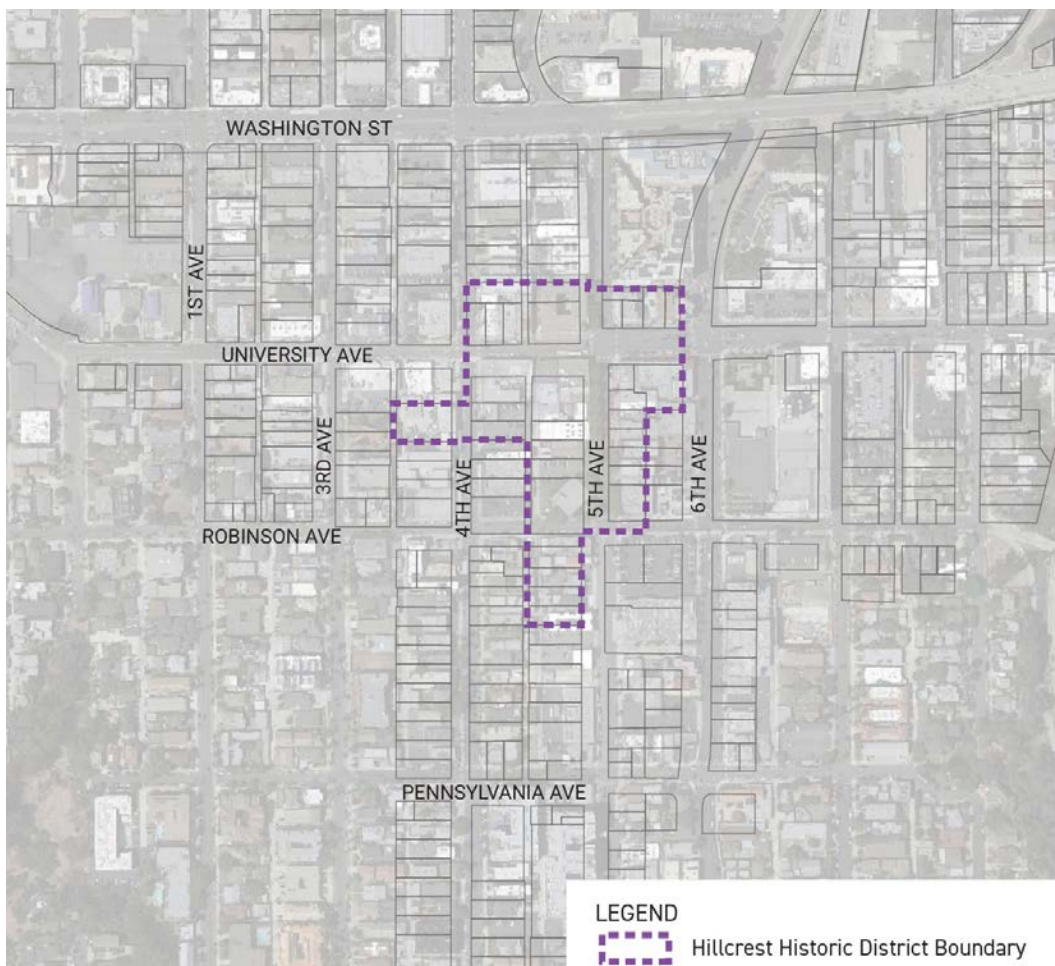
## HILLCREST HISTORIC DISTRICT

The following SDRs supplement the Historical Resources Regulations in San Diego Municipal Code Chapter 14, Article 3, Division 2 and only apply to the Hillcrest Historic District as shown in Figure 12-3. The purpose of these SDRs is to preserve the essential historic features and characteristics important to the significance of the Hillcrest Historic District while providing a clear path for new development. Development that complies with these SDRs may be considered a minor alteration under the Historical Resources Regulations.

**SDR-B.8: Regulations for Contributing Resources.** Contributing resources are designated as such by the Historical Resources Board and are properties within the district that contribute to the architectural, historical and/or cultural/LGBTQ+ significance of the historic district. The following regulations apply to contributing resources:

- a. Preservation of Historic Features:
  - i. Existing building facades along the street wall(s) shall be retained and preserved.
  - ii. Exterior materials and features associated with the architectural, historical and/or cultural/LGBTQ significance of a contributing resource shall be retained in their current location/appearance or restored to their historic location/appearance based on historical documentation. Such elements are described on the Primary Record and Building, Structure

FIGURE 12-3: HILLCREST HISTORIC DISTRICT BOUNDARY



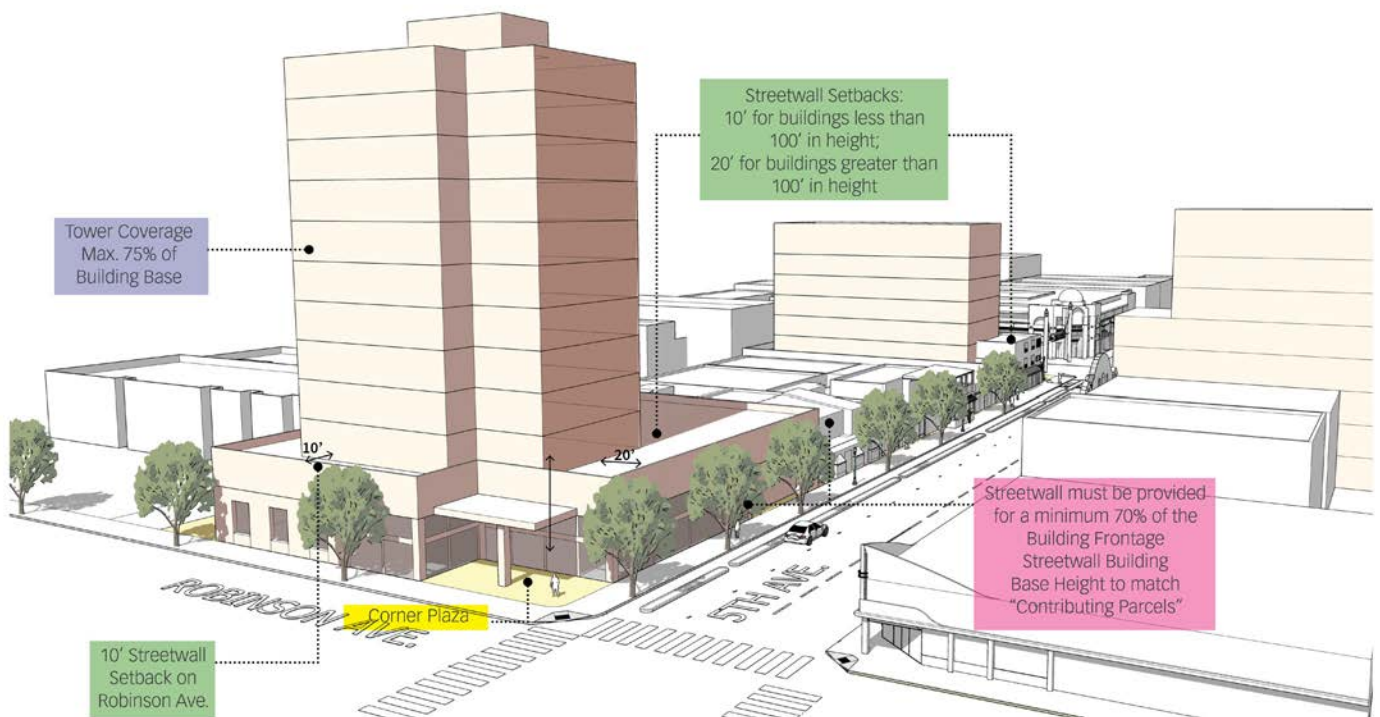
and Object Record prepared for each property as part of the historic district nomination, and includes, but is not limited to, the following elements:

1. Roofing and exposed roof elements such as rafter tails;
  2. Siding/cladding;
  3. Doors, windows, and storefront systems;
  4. Balconies and railings;
  5. Decorative detailing and accents.
- iii. Large fixed storefront windows with simple glazing patterns may be replaced within the original openings with roll-up or slide-up doors that match the appearance of the original windows.
- b. Additions and new construction shall comply with the building height and tower massing regulations in SDR-B.9 and SDR-B.10.

**SDR-B.9: Regulations for Non-Contributing Resources.** Non-contributing resources classified as such by the Historical Resources Board and are properties within the district that do not contribute to the significance of the historic district, either due to date of construction or loss of integrity. The following regulations apply to non-contributing resources:

- a. Setbacks. Front and street side setbacks shall be zero feet for the building base, with buildings placed at the property line.
- b. Street Walls:
  - i. The street frontages shall be defined by a maximum street wall of 30-feet.
  - ii. A continuous street wall shall be provided for 75 percent of the building frontage along the street, as illustrated in Figure 12-4. Exceptions are provided for the following:
    1. Parks and public space abutting the parkway; and

FIGURE 12-4: HILLCREST HISTORIC DISTRICT DESIGN



2. Recessed entrances up to a maximum of 25 feet in width.
3. Additions and new construction shall comply with the building height and tower massing regulations in SDR-B.10 and SDR-B.11.

**SDR-B.10: Building Height.** Building height shall not exceed a maximum of 100 feet. A maximum building envelope height shall be further defined as follows and as illustrated in Figure 12-4. Above the street walls, the maximum building envelope shall be defined by:

- a. A minimum setback of 20-feet above the 30-foot street wall along Fourth Avenue, Fifth Avenue and Sixth Avenue; and
- b. A minimum setback of 10-feet above the 30-foot street wall along Robinson Avenue and University Avenue.

**SDR-B.11: Tower Massing.** The coverage of a tower shall not exceed 75 percent of the building base, as shown in Figure 12-4.

## MIXED USE – COMMERCIAL ACTIVITY NOISE NOTICING

The purpose of this SDR is for new development to provide noticing to prospective buyers and renters within the area shown on Figure 12-5 regarding noise associated with commercial uses that include restaurants, bars, and entertainment uses

**SDR-B.12: Noticing.** New residential development within the area identified on Figure 12-5 shall provide the following Commercial Activity Notice to all persons considering purchasing or renting a residential dwelling unit prior to entering into an agreement to sell or rent the dwelling unit. This Commercial Activity Noise Notice shall also be prominently displayed in any onsite rental or sales offices.

### **Commercial Activity Notice**

*This property is located in a mixed use residential and commercial area with commercial uses that include restaurants, bars, and entertainment uses. For that reason, this property may be subject to some of the annoyances or inconveniences associated with proximity to restaurants, bars, and entertainment uses (for example, noise and vibration from music and outdoor dining during the evening and nighttime). Individual sensitivities to those annoyances can vary from person to person. You should consider what annoyances from restaurants, bars, entertainment uses in proximity to this property, if any, affect this property before you complete your purchase or rental agreement and whether they are acceptable to you.*