THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

Report to the Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: November 7, 2025 REPORT NO. HRB-25-059

HEARING DATE: November 20, 2025

SUBJECT: **ITEM #4 – BENJAMIN AND LOIS TORGERSON/BENJAMIN TORGERSON SPEC HOUSE #1**

RESOURCE INFO: California Historical Resources Inventory Database (CHRID) link

APPLICANT: James Mamer and Jessica Puma, represented by Landmark Historic Preservation

LOCATION: 3575 Alabama Street, 92104, North Park Community, Council District 3
APN 453-301-23-00

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the Benjamin and Lois Torgerson/Benjamin Torgerson Spec House #1 located at 3575 Alabama Street as a historical resource.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate the Benjamin and Lois Torgerson Spec House #1 House located at 3575 Alabama Street as a historical resource with a period of significance of 1927 under HRB Criteria C and D. The designation excludes the 1957 and 2014 rear additions constructed outside the period of significance. This recommendation is based on the following findings:

1. The resource embodies the distinctive characteristics through the retention of character defining features of the Craftsman style and retains integrity from its 1927 period of significance. Specifically, the resource features a medium-pitched, jerkinhead front-gabled roof with wide unenclosed eaves, exposed rafter tails, horizontal wood clapboard siding, an asymmetrical primary façade, a partial-width front porch featuring a jerkinhead front-gabled roof and square battered wood columns, a brick chimney, and fenestration consisting of wood single-lite double-hung windows in singles and pairs.

2. The resource is representative of the notable work of Master Builder Benjamin Torgerson and retains integrity as it relates to the original design. The resource is an early and rare example of Torgerson's work in the Craftsman style and continues to convey his skill as a builder through its quality construction and craftsmanship. The resource is also an example of Torgerson's work building small, single-family homes before progressing to build larger sized homes, multifamily projects and large commercial buildings.

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 property was located within the boundary of the *2016 North Park Community Plan Area Historic Resources Survey*, but was not identified in the survey because it was not evaluated.

The historic name of the resource, the Benjamin and Lois Torgerson/Benjamin Torgerson Spec House #1, has been identified consistent with the Board's adopted naming policy and reflects the name of Benjamin and Lois Torgerson, who constructed the house as a speculation house and the name of Benjamin Torgerson, a Master Builder.

In order to be eligible for designation and listing on the City's Register, a resource must meet one or more of the City's designation criteria as specified in the Historical Resources Guidelines of the Land Development Manual and retain integrity as it relates to the significance of the resource. Integrity is the ability of a property to convey its significance, which requires an understanding of the physical features and characteristics that existed during the resource's period of significance. The National, California, and City of San Diego Registers recognize location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association as the seven aspects of historical integrity.

Although not all seven aspects of integrity need to be present for a property to be eligible for designation, the record must demonstrate that the property retains enough physical and design characteristics to reflect and convey the significance of the property. Each resource depends on certain aspects of integrity, more than others, to express its historic significance. Determining which of the aspects are most important to a particular property requires an understanding of the property's significance and its essential physical features. The *Guidelines for the Application of Historical Resources Board Designation Criteria* provide information regarding the City's designation criteria, as well as guidance on their application and how to evaluate the integrity of a resource.

ANALYSIS

The property located at 3575 Alabama Street is a one-story, single-family Craftsman style home constructed in 1927 in the North Park Community Planning Area. Other buildings and structures present on site include a detached garage on the south side of the property. The property is located on the east side of Alabama Street in a residentially zoned neighborhood. The property is in its original location.

Since its construction in 1927, the property has been modified as follows: in 1957, a small addition was added to the rear elevation and in 1980, vinyl siding was added on top of the original wood clapboard siding on the home and garage. At an unknown date, the original front door was replaced with a wooden door featuring three fixed windows; a window on the north elevation was replaced with a garden window in its original opening; a door on the north elevation was modified to create a Dutch-style opening, and the chimney was repaired and repointed. The vinyl siding was removed from the home and garage in 2014, and the original wood siding was repaired. In 2014, a building permit was issued for the remodeling of the family room and bathroom, as well as the addition of a master bedroom, bathroom, and closet, along with other work, including the replacement of a non-historic garden window with a pair of wood double-hung windows

and the replacement of the existing Dutch door with a new Dutch door. This work was reviewed and deemed consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation by Heritage Preservation staff. In 2015, two square battered piers were added to the front porch railing, and solar panels were installed on the roof in 2016.

A Historical Resource Research was prepared by Landmark Historic Preservation, which concludes that the resource is significant under HRB Criteria C and D, and staff concurs. This determination is consistent with the *Guidelines for the Application of Historical Resources Board Designation Criteria*, as follows.

CRITERION 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 resource is a one-story, single-family residence with a detached garage constructed in 1927 in the Craftsman style. The house features a medium-pitched, jerkinhead front-gabled roof with wide, unenclosed eaves and exposed rafter tails, a brick chimney, and horizontal wood clapboard siding. The property's primary elevation faces west on Alabama Street on a sloping lot, with concrete steps leading from the driveway and connecting to the east-west facing steps to the front porch. The asymmetrical front façade features a partial-width front porch with a jerkinhead front-gabled roof supported by two square battered columns, a wooden railing with square battered piers, a wooden entry door with three fixed windows, and a pair of single-lite, wood double-hung windows. Fenestration consists primarily of wood single-lite double-hung windows in singles and pairs.

The garage is accessed from the driveway and is situated toward the rear of the property on the south elevation. The garage features include a gable roof, carriage-style wood garage doors, and horizontal clapboard siding. The 2014 addition to the home is located on the north side of the rear elevation and is differentiated from the resource by wider horizontal wood siding.

With origins in the British Arts and Crafts movement, which was born in response to the overly ornate Victorian aesthetic and the highly mechanized Industrial Revolution, Craftsman style architecture was popular in the United States largely between 1905 and 1930. Early examples by Greene and Greene were highly publicized in magazines, thus familiarizing the rest of the nation with the style. Character defining features of Craftsman architecture include a low-pitched, gabled roof with wide, unenclosed eave overhang; exposed roof rafters; decorative beams or braces; full or partial-width porches supported by tapered square columns or pedestals; wood or stucco cladding; and wood frame and sash windows in fixed, double hung and casement varieties.

Of the seven aspects of integrity, design, materials, and workmanship are the most critical to the property's ability to convey significance under HRB Criterion C as a resource that embodies the distinctive characteristics of Craftsman style. The modifications, which include the 1957 and 2014 rear additions, the addition of solar panels to the roof in 2016, and the modifications to a door on the north elevation at an unknown date do not impact significant character defining features. At an unknown date, an extended garden window on the north elevation was added in the original opening. In 1980, vinyl siding was added on top of the original siding on the home and garage. In 2014, the vinyl siding was removed from the home and garage and the original wood siding was repaired. Modifications made to the front elevation, including the replacement of the front door at an unknown date and the addition of two square battered piers in 2015, do not significantly impair the resource's ability to convey significance under Criterion C. As part of a permit issued in 2014, a rear addition was constructed, the existing Dutch door on the north elevation was replaced

with a new Dutch door, and the non-historic garden window on the north elevation was replaced with a pair of wood double-hung windows. This work was deemed consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards by Heritage Preservation staff. Therefore, the property retains integrity to its 1927 period of significance under HRB Criterion C.

Significance Statement: The house continues to convey the historic significance of the Craftsman style by embodying the historic characteristics associated with the style, including a medium-pitched, jerkinhead front-gabled roof with wide unenclosed eaves, exposed rafter tails, horizontal wood clapboard siding, an asymmetrical primary façade, a partial-width front porch featuring a jerkinhead front-gabled roof and square battered wood columns, a brick chimney, and fenestration consisting of wood single-lite double-hung windows in singles and pairs. Therefore, staff recommends designation under HRB Criterion C.

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

Benjamin M. Torgerson was born in Iowa in 1894. He first visited San Diego in 1915 to go to the Panama-California Exposition. In 1925, he moved to San Diego. His earliest known building permit is from 1927. The 1929 City Directory lists him as a carpenter. One of his early projects was a house designed by Irving Gill, which has since been demolished.

From about 1930 to 1935, Torgerson partnered with George E. Cooley. The partners built modest houses in response to buyers' needs during the Great Depression. However, they also took advantage of depressed building material costs and skilled workers seeking employment to build high-end custom houses in University Heights, Kensington Heights, Talmadge Park, and North Park. In addition to single-family houses, they built commercial buildings and multi-unit apartment buildings.

Torgerson worked independently from 1935 until his retirement in 1942. Around 1937, he established himself as a prominent builder in San Diego's rebounding real estate market. Due to his wife's connections to *Life Magazine*, he won the commission to build one of the magazine's "Life Houses" in La Jolla in 1937. The Life Houses grew out of *Life Magazine*'s promotion of small, affordable houses built in the Minimal Traditional style with Colonial Revival influences, which was part of the 1930s Better Homes Movement. Torgerson built revised versions of his Life House elsewhere in the city, developing his "California Colonial" style. He incorporated the style into FHA-funded Minimal Traditional houses built in keeping with the design principles of the Better Homes Movement.

In addition to modest houses, Torgerson continued to build grander custom houses, apartment buildings, bungalow courts and commercial buildings. He built at least 98 buildings over the course of his career. The architectural range of Torgerson's buildings spans Craftsman, English Tudor, French Provincial, Spanish Eclectic, Spanish Renaissance, Monterey/Colonial and Minimal Traditional styles.

At least four of Benjamin Torgerson's works have been designated as historical resources by the City of San Diego Historical Resources Board, including the George and Bertha Cooley/Lois and Benjamin Torgerson Spec House #1 (HRB #1039), which established him as a Master Builder in 2012:

- HRB # 749– Benjamin Torgerson/George Cooley Spec House #1 (4343 Adams Avenue), 1930
- HRB #1025– The Life House (6025 Waverly Street), 1939

- HRB #1039– George and Bertha Cooley/Lois and Benjamin Torgerson Spec House #1 (5158 Marlborough Drive), 1931
- HRB #1152– Earle and Helen Brucker/Benjamin Torgerson House (2555 Plum Street), 1940

Lois and Benjamin Torgerson constructed the resource for speculation in 1927. The resource is an early and rare example of Torgerson's work in the Craftsman style and continues to convey his skill as a builder through its quality construction and craftsmanship. The resource is also an example of Torgerson's work building small, single-family homes before progressing to build larger sized homes, multifamily projects, large commercial buildings.

Of the seven aspects of integrity, design, materials, and workmanship are the most critical to the property's ability to convey significance under HRB Criterion D as a resource that represents the notable work of Master Builder Benjamin Torgerson.

The modifications, which include the 1957 and 2014 rear additions, the addition of solar panels to the roof in 2016, the modifications to a door on the north elevation at an unknown date, the replacement of a window on the north elevation with an extended garden window at an unknown date, the replacement of the front door at an unknown date, and the addition of battered wood piers to the front porch in 2015, do not significantly impair the resource's ability to convey its significance as a resource that represents the notable work of Master Builder Benjamin Torgerson. In 1980, vinyl siding was added on top of the original siding on the home and garage. In 2014, the vinyl siding was removed from the home and garage and the original wood siding was repaired. As part of a permit issued in 2014, a rear addition was constructed, the existing Dutch door on the north elevation was replaced with a new Dutch door, and the non-historic garden window on the north elevation was replaced with a pair of wood double-hung windows. This work was deemed consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards by Heritage Preservation staff. Therefore, the property retains integrity to its 1927 period of significance under HRB Criterion D.

Significance Statement: The subject resource is representative of the notable work of Master Builder Benjamin Torgerson and retains integrity as it relates to the original design. Specifically, the resource is an early and rare example of Torgerson's work in the Craftsman style and continues to convey his skill as a builder through its quality construction and craftsmanship. The resource is also an example of Torgerson's work building small, single-family homes before progressing to build larger sized homes, multifamily projects and large commercial buildings. Therefore, staff recommends designation under HRB Criterion D.

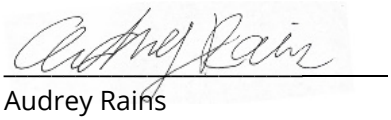
OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

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

CONCLUSION

Based on the information submitted and staff's field check, it is recommended that the BENJAMIN AND LOIS TORGERSON/BENJAMIN TORGERSON SPEC HOUSE # 1located at 3575 Alabama Street be designated with a period of significance of 1927 under HRB Criterion C as a resource that embodies the distinctive

characteristics of the Craftsman style and Criterion D as a resource that represents the notable work of Master Builder Benjamin Torgerson. The designation excludes the 1957 and 2014 rear additions constructed outside the period of significance.



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City Planning Department

AR/ss

Attachment(s):

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

RESOLUTION NUMBER N/A
ADOPTED ON 11/20/2025

WHEREAS, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego held a noticed public hearing on 11/20/2025, to consider the historical designation of the **– BENJAMIN AND LOIS TORGERSON/BENJAMIN TORGERSON SPEC HOUSE #1** (owned by James M Mamer & Jessica T Puma, 3575 Alabama Street, San Diego, CA 92104) located at **3575 Alabama Street**, **San Diego, CA 92104**, APN: **453-301-2300,** further described as BLK 13 LOTS 43 & 44 /EXC ALLEY/ CLSD ST ADJ & in the City of San Diego, County of San Diego, State of California; and

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

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

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

NOW, THEREFORE,

BE IT RESOLVED, the Historical Resources Board based its designation of the BENJAMIN AND LOIS TORGERSON SPEC HOUSE #1 on the following findings:

(1) The property is historically significant under CRITERION C for its distinctive characteristics through the retention of character defining features of the Craftsman style and retains integrity to its 1927 period of significance. Specifically, the resource features a medium-pitched, jerkinhead front-gabled roof with wide unenclosed eaves, exposed rafter tails, horizontal wood clapboard siding, an asymmetrical primary façade, a partial-width front porch featuring a jerkinhead front-gabled roof and square battered wood columns, a brick chimney, and fenestration consisting of wood single-lite double-hung windows in singles and pairs. This finding is further supported by the staff report, the historical research report, and written and oral evidence presented at the designation hearing.

(2) The property is historically significant under CRITERION D as a notable work of Master Builder Benjamin Torgerson and retains integrity as it relates to the original design. Specifically, The resource is an early and rare example of Torgerson's work in the Craftsman style and continues to convey his skill as a builder through its quality construction and craftsmanship. The resource is also an example of Torgerson's work building small, single-family homes before progressing to build larger sized homes, multifamily projects and large commercial buildings. This finding is further supported by the staff report, the historical research report, and written and oral evidence presented at the designation hearing.

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

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the designation shall exclude the 1957 and 2014 rear additions constructed outside the period of significance.

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

Vote:

BY: _____
KRISTI BYERS, Chair
Historical Resources Board

APPROVED: HEATHER FERBERT,
CITY ATTORNEY

BY: _____
LINDSEY SEBASTIAN,
Deputy City Attorney

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