



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

## Report to the Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: February 11, 2021 REPORT NO. HRB-21-011

HEARING DATE: February 25, 2021

SUBJECT: **ITEM #6 – 550 Washington Street**

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

APPLICANT: Scripps Health; represented by Nexus Planning and Research

LOCATION: 550 Washington Street, Uptown Community, Council District 3  
APN 444-533-2500

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of 550 Washington Street as a historical resource.

### STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Do not designate the property located at 550 Washington Street under any adopted HRB Criteria.

### BACKGROUND

This item is being brought before the Historical Resources Board in conjunction with a proposed building modification or demolition of a structure of 45 years or more, consistent with San Diego Municipal Code Section 143.0212. The resource is a medical office building located on the corner of Washington Street and 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue in the Medical Complex neighborhood of Hillcrest in the Uptown Community. The building was designed in 1961 by Deems Martin and Associates with architect William Lewis, Jr. as the project's designer and completed in 1964.

The property was identified in the 2016 Uptown Community Plan Area Historic Resources Survey and given a Status Code of 7R, "Identified in Reconnaissance Level Survey; not evaluated."

### ANALYSIS

A Historical Resource Research Report was prepared by Nexus Planning and Research, which concludes that the resource is not significant under any HRB Criteria and staff concurs. This determination is consistent with the *Guidelines for the Application of Historical Resources Board Designation Criteria*, as follows.

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

Research into the history of the property at 550 Washington Street did not reveal any information to indicate that the property exemplifies or reflects special elements of the City's or Uptown's historical, archaeological, cultural, social, economic, political, aesthetic, engineering, landscaping or architectural development. Therefore, staff does not recommend designation under HRB Criterion A.

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

Research into the owners and tenants of the property at 550 Washington Street did not reveal any individuals who could be considered historically significant in local, state or national history. Furthermore, no events of local, state or national significance are known to have occurred at the subject property. Therefore, the property is not eligible for designation under HRB Criterion B.

*CRITERION C - Embodies distinctive characteristics of a style, type, period or method of construction or is a valuable example of the use of natural materials or craftsmanship.*

The subject resource is a medical office building consisting of a tower and two one-story wings designed by Deems Martin and Associates and completed in 1964 in the New Formalism style of architecture. The concrete tower element exhibits cast-concrete panels and aluminum tracery. The asymmetrical wings are also concrete with pre-cast concrete panels and fixed aluminum frame windows. Originally, the building had an open air pavilion beneath the tower which featured a designed landscape by Wimmer Yamada and Caughey and included terrazzo pedestrian bridges, raised planters, four reflecting pools, modernist pavers, geometrically arranged trees and monument signage. The open air pavilion no longer exists and the ground floor is enclosed by stucco walls and aluminum fixed frame windows.

Modifications to the resource since the date of construction are extensive and are thoroughly discussed in the Historical Resource Research Report. Significant alterations to the exterior of the structure include, the glass enclosure of the lobby in 1978, the addition of a surgery center in the formerly open space beneath the tower in 2003 and the modification of the exterior of the one story wings. Consequences of these modifications include the loss of the open-air lobby, reflecting pools, pedestrian bridges, terrazzo flooring and other lobby finishes, and the wrapping of the tower's slim columns.

New Formalism is an architectural style that emerged in the United States during the mid 1950's and 1960's. The style rejects the rigid form of Modernism and embraces Classical precedents such as building proportion and scale, classical columns, highly stylized entablatures, and colonnades. The newly discovered plastic-like qualities of concrete allowed the style to utilize new forms such as umbrella shells, waffle slabs and folded plates. New Formalism was typically used for high-profile cultural, institutional and civic buildings designed on a monumental urban scale. Other common features of New Formalism include buildings usually set on a podium; smooth wall surfaces; delicate details; a formal landscape that uses pools, fountains and sculpture within a central plaza and the use of traditionally rich materials, such as travertine, marble and granite. New Formalism was not

identified as a style in the *San Diego Modernism Historic Context Statement*; however, there are many good examples of the style throughout the City, particularly on institutional campuses and within the Downtown community.

The resource features many of the character defining features of the New Formalism style including design on a monumental scale, the use of classical building proportion and scale, smooth wall surfaces and delicate aluminum tracery. However, cumulative modifications to the property have greatly impacted the resource's integrity. Specifically, the addition of the surgery center resulted in the loss of the formal landscape, a character defining feature of the style. Also, the addition is in an inappropriate location and has resulted in the loss of the floating effect of the original design of the tower. These modifications to the structure significantly impair its integrity of design, materials and feeling to the extent that the building no longer retains integrity as a resource that embodies the distinctive characteristics of its original New Formalism design, and therefore staff does not recommend designation under Criterion C.

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

The subject property at 550 Washington Street was designed by Deems Martin and Associates in 1961 with architect William Lewis, Jr. as the project's designer. Bill Lewis was established by the Historical Resources Board as a Master Architect with the designation of HRB #1203, the May Company/William Lewis, Jr. Building. While the subject resource would likely have been considered a notable example of Lewis' work in its original condition, modifications have significantly impaired its integrity of design, materials, workmanship and feeling to the extent that it no longer retains integrity as it relates to HRB Criterion D.

The resource also originally featured a landscape designed by the firm of Wimmer Yamada and Caughey. Wimmer Yamada and Caughey has not been established by the Historical Resources Board as a Master Architect or Designer, and there is insufficient information to designate the firm as such at this time. Therefore, staff does not recommend designation under HRB Criterion D.

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

The property at 550 Washington Street has not been listed on or determined eligible for listing on the State or National Registers. Therefore, the property is not eligible for designation under HRB Criterion E.

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

The property at 550 Washington Street is not located within a designated historic district. Therefore, the property is not eligible for designation under HRB Criterion F.

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 property located at 550 Washington Street not be designated under any HRB Criteria.



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Development Services Department

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Attachment(s):

1. Applicant's Historical Report under separate cover