



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

## Report to the Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: August 10, 2017 REPORT NO. HRB-17-048

HEARING DATE: August 24, 2017

SUBJECT: **ITEM #6 – Gordon B. Wells/Allen H. Hilton Bungalow Court Apartments**

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

APPLICANT: JMAN LLC represented by Heritage Architecture & Planning

LOCATION: 1525-1537 Union Street, 92101, Downtown Community, Council District 3  
APN 533-342-04

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the Gordon B. Wells/Allen H. Hilton Bungalow Court Apartments located at 1525-1537 Union Street as a historical resource.

### STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate the Gordon B. Wells/Allen H. Hilton Bungalow Court Apartments located at 1525-1537 Union Street as a historical resource with a period of significance of 1926 under HRB Criteria C and D. This recommendation is based on the following findings:

1. The resource embodies the distinctive characteristics through the retention of character defining features of a Spanish Eclectic style bungalow court apartment and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its 1926 period of significance. Specifically, the resource retains its original lay-out as a detached narrow court design with individual cottages laid out in a "U" shaped plan with six units facing each other and a duplex at the end; stucco exterior; small tiled and gabled roof entrance with flat roofs and stepped parapets on the majority of the roof; and wood frame windows.
2. The resource is representative of a notable work of Master Builder Allen H. Hilton and retains integrity as it relates to the original design. Specifically, the resource maintains its spatial relationship and design associated with bungalow court apartments as well as the features associated with a Spanish Eclectic style.

## 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 is a multi-family lot located in the downtown core in a mixed use area.

The historic name of the resource, the Gordon B. Wells/Allen H. Hilton Bungalow Court Apartments has been identified consistent with the Board's adopted naming policy and reflects the name of Gordon B. Wells who constructed the apartments and the name of Allen H. Hilton, a Master Builder.

## ANALYSIS

A Historical Resource Research Report was prepared by Heritage Architecture and Planning 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.*

According to an article in the Spring 1988 issue of the *Journal of San Diego History* entitled, "Bungalow Courts in San Diego: Monitoring a Sense of Place", bungalow courts first emerged in 1909 in Southern California (Attachment 1). *"Derived in all likelihood from Eastern resort communities, the typical bungalow court came to feature a group of six to ten small, individual houses placed around a communal garden."* The article goes on to classify bungalow courts into four categories based on variations in spatial arrangement: *"(1) detached, full court - the "classic" court consisting of individual cottages arranged around a spacious central garden (2) detached, narrow court - individual cottages arranged around a long, narrow, garden-like walkway (3) attached, full court - when two or more of the bungalows share a common wall, and (4) attached, narrow court. Since the term "court" implies an enclosed, designed space, in all cases the building arrangement included an end structure and a proper garden."*

Bungalow courts struck a balance between density and the need for private space, encouraging a sense of community and communal living while providing a unique and distinct space which could be personalized to the individual. Bungalow courts were seen as ideal for certain growing segments of the urban population in the 1920's, especially single women "who were unable or unwilling to invest in a single-family home but who might not like a large, impersonal apartment building either... The bungalows themselves were promoted as being full, albeit small, houses built like the inside of a yacht to maximize convenience in a minimum of space and furnished with the latest and most serviceable array of built-in features."

The authors noted that the bungalow court was slow to take hold outside of California, and the only significant concentrations of bungalow courts outside the state are located in south Florida and southern Arizona. The article states more bungalow courts were built in San Diego than any other city except Los Angeles. The construction of bungalow courts ceased by about 1940 with the onset of WWII. "During the war years, very little was built apart from military bases and associated

housing. When housing recovered in the late 1940s, builders concentrated on constructing single-family homes in newly-developing suburbs, especially in San Diego. Central city neighborhoods were ignored for more than a decade as few multi-unit projects of any kind were built. When central city apartment construction resumed in about 1960, the 'economics' had changed. Due to the development and unfathomable popularity of the two-story 'dingbat' apartment complex, eight units could now be crammed onto one city lot complete with off-street parking. Bungalow courts could not compete as new investments."

Following the 1915-1916 Panama-California Exposition, the romantic ideal of Spanish and Latin American architecture was revived. What resulted was the Spanish Eclectic style, which was the predominant style in Southern California between 1915 and 1940, significantly altering the architectural landscape until the Modernist movement took hold during and after WWII. The style uses decorative details borrowed from the entire history of Spanish architecture. These may be of Moorish, Byzantine, Gothic, or Renaissance inspirations, an unusually rich and varied series of decorative precedents. The style employed a variety of floor plans, as well as gabled, cross-gabled, gabled and hipped, hipped and flat roof forms with parapets. Other character defining features include Mission and Spanish clay tile; focal windows; arched windows and other openings; and accented entries.

In San Diego, bungalow courts are located primarily within the central area of the City in the communities surrounding Balboa Park. At the time the article was written in 1988, 217 of the original 278 full bungalow courts constructed in the central portion of the City which fell within one of the four bungalow court variations remained. No subsequent resource-specific surveys of bungalow courts have occurred within the last 20 years; however, bungalow courts were identified in the Uptown, North Park and Golden Hill Reconnaissance Surveys completed in 2016. Those surveys revealed approximately 256 bungalow or apartment courts in those three planning areas, which are comprised of roughly 20,533 land parcels.

Constructed in 1926 in the downtown core and designed in the Spanish Eclectic style, the subject property is a bungalow court arranged in a "detached narrow court" fashion forming a "U" shaped plan. There are six separate, single story units that face each other with a duplex located at the end. A concrete walkway bifurcates the single units and leads to the duplex at the end. Stylistically, the units feature a stucco exterior and flat roofs with parapets. The parapet is raised slightly above the front entrance of each unit. The front entrances are delineated by a small gable roofed projection. The gable is sheathed with clay tile. The doors were replicated based on two original doors that were remaining. The doors are wood with a lower inset panel and three lights on the upper portion. Fenestration consists of wood single light casement windows. The two units fronting Union Street feature wing walls with an arched opening to access the side yard. The arched opening has had a wood gate installed for security purposes.

The bungalow court is largely intact with very few modifications. When recently purchased, the units required mostly cosmetic repairs. The window frames were intact, but the sashes had been replaced with an inappropriate material. The sashes have since been replaced with wood single light casement windows based on the original windows. Some exterior doors were removed previously, but the location of the door has been inset as evidence of its former use.

Significance Statement: The property continues to convey the historic significance of a Spanish Eclectic style bungalow court apartment by embodying the historic characteristics associated with the style and type; including its detached narrow court design with individual cottages laid out in a "U" shaped plan with six units facing each other and a duplex at the end; stucco exterior; small tiled and gabled roof entrance with flat roofs and stepped parapets on the majority of the roof; and wood framed windows. 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.*

Allen H. Hilton was born in 1890 in Oregon and arrived in San Diego in 1924. He had limited experience as a contractor from 1904-1908 while working for his father, and put that experience to use when he obtained his architect and contractor licenses in 1926. He appears to have designed buildings primarily in the Spanish Colonial Revival style and focused heavily on apartment building construction, with limited known examples of single family residential work. Known multi-family examples of Hilton's work include:

#### Apartment/Multi-Family Buildings

- The Adams Apartments, at 2448 Adams Avenue (HRB Site #713)
- El Tovar, at 1301 28<sup>th</sup> Street (extant)
- El Mirasol, at 303 Olive (extant)
- St. Theresa, at 3835 Third Avenue (extant)
- Loma Alta, at 3515 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue (extant)
- The Adelene, at 3597 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue
- Carmelita Court, at 1826 30<sup>th</sup> Street (extant)
- The Galvez, at 1422 University, identified as 1442 University in the Canada/Montes report (demolished)
- Casa Mia, at 3<sup>rd</sup> and Redwood (demolished)

Each of these properties has character defining features indicative of the Spanish Eclectic style. Hilton's articulation of the style is well recognized through his fine detailing throughout the interior and exterior of the buildings. Such features include smooth plaster walls, niches, decorative tiles, plaster grill work, beehive fireplaces, and courtyards with fountains, flowers, and shrubbery. In the Board's action to designate The Adams Apartments, the Board established Hilton as a Master Builder.

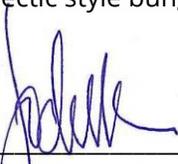
Significance Statement: The resource is representative of a notable work of Master Builder Allen H. Hilton and retains integrity as it relates to the original design. Specifically, the resource maintains its spatial relationship and design associated with bungalow court apartments as well as the features associated with a Spanish Eclectic style. Therefore, staff recommends that the property be designated under HRB Criterion D as a notable work of Master Builder Allen Hilton.

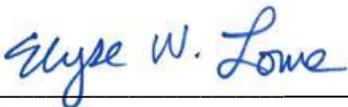
OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

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 Gordon B. Wells/Allen H. Hilton Bungalow Court Apartments located at 1525-1537 Union Street be designated with a period of significance of 1926 under HRB Criteria C and D as a good example of a Spanish Eclectic style bungalow court apartment designed by Allen H. Hilton.

  
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Jodie Brown, AICP  
Senior Planner

  
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Elyse W. Lowe  
Deputy Director  
Development Services Department

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Attachment(s):

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

RESOLUTION NUMBER N/A  
ADOPTED ON 8/24/2017

WHEREAS, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego held a noticed public hearing on 8/24/2017, to consider the historical designation of the **Gordon B. Wells/Allen H. Hilton Bungalow Court Apartments** (owned by JMAN LLC, 3000 Upas Street, Suite 101, San Diego, CA 92104) located at **1525-1537 Union Street, San Diego, CA 92101**, APN: **533-342-04-00**, further described as BLK 23 LOT 4 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 Gordon B. Wells/Allen H. Hilton Bungalow Court Apartments 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 a Spanish Eclectic style bungalow court apartments and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its 1926 period of significance. Specifically, the resource retains its original lay-out as a detached narrow court design with individual cottages laid out in a "U" shaped plan with six units facing each other and a duplex at the end; stucco exterior; small tiled and gabled roof entrance with flat roofs and stepped parapets on the majority of the roof; and wood frame windows. 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 Allen H. Hilton and retains integrity as it relates to the original design. Specifically, the resource maintains its spatial relationship and design associated with bungalow court apartments as well as the features associated with a Spanish Eclectic style. This finding is further supported by the staff report, the historical research report, and written and oral evidence presented at the designation hearing.

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

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

Vote: N/A

BY: \_\_\_\_\_  
DAVID MCCULLOUGH, Chair  
Historical Resources Board

APPROVED: MARA W. ELLIOTT,  
CITY ATTORNEY

BY: \_\_\_\_\_  
CORRINE NEUFFER,  
Deputy City Attorney