



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

## Report to the Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: January 9, 2020 REPORT NO. HRB-20-001

HEARING DATE: January 23, 2020

SUBJECT: **ITEM #10 – Bowlero**

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

APPLICANT: Lars Andersen and Associates, Inc.; represented by Heritage Architecture and Planning

LOCATION: 1895 Camino del Rio South, Mission Valley Community, Council District 7  
APN 438-090-3300

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the Bowlero located at 1895 Camino del Rio South as a historical resource.

### STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate the Bowlero located at 1895 Camino del Rio South as a historical resource under HRB Criterion A, with a period of significance of 1957-1964, and under HRB Criterion C, with a period of significance of 1957. The designation excludes the circa 1965 and 1970 rear additions which were constructed after the building ceased to be used as a bowling alley. This recommendation is based on the following findings:

1. The Bowlero is a special element of the historical, social and economic development of Mission Valley and the City as a whole and retains integrity to its 1957-1964 period of significance. Specifically, at the time of its construction in 1957 the resource, which featured 56 bowling lanes and a variety of dining and entertainment amenities within a striking modernist, Googie-style building, was touted as the largest fully automatic bowling center in the U.S.; and served as a regional draw to the emerging Mission Valley community, which was establishing itself as a commercial and recreational destination. The Bowlero in Mission Valley is the only surviving former bowling center of this era in the City of San Diego and continues to convey the significant character defining features from its period of significance, which spans from 1957 to 1964, when the Bowlero ceased operations.
2. The resource embodies the distinctive characteristics through the retention of character defining features of the Googie style and retains integrity to its 1957 date of construction and period of significance. Specifically, the resource features a monumental porte cochere that utilizes abstract and angular shapes, a stepped gabled roof and boomerang columns;

large aluminum windows at the primary entrance; and a location and unique design that allow the building to function as its own billboard.

## BACKGROUND

This item is being brought before the Historical Resources Board in conjunction with a preliminary review application to determine whether or not the building is historically significant as part of a constraints analysis for future development. Currently known as the Scottish Rite Event Center, the subject resource is a one story, former bowling alley constructed adjacent to Interstate 8 in Mission Valley. The structure, completed in 1957, was designed in the Googie style by well-known local architect C. J. Paderewski.

The property was located within the boundary of the 2019 *Mission Valley Community Plan Historic Context Statement* but was not evaluated because a formal survey was not conducted as part of the study. However, the property was identified as being associated with the commercialism of Mission Valley and the subtheme of Sports, Recreation and Leisure as well as for its association with architect CJ Paderewski.

The historic name of the resource, the Bowlero, has been identified consistent with the Board's adopted naming policy and reflects the name of the tenant that originally constructed and occupied the property.

## ANALYSIS

A Historical Resource Technical Report (HRTR) was prepared by Heritage Architecture & Planning, which concludes that the resource is significant under HRB Criteria A and C 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.*

The 2019 *Mission Valley Community Plan Historic Context Statement* discusses the transformation of Mission Valley into its current state and identifies themes and sub-themes significant to the development of Mission Valley and the City of San Diego as a whole. One significant theme identified in the context statement is the theme of "Modern Commercialization, Tourism, and Commercialization of the Valley (1940-1970)" and the sub-theme of "Sports, Recreation & Leisure." The HRTR evaluated the subject property within this theme and sub-theme, expanding the analysis to provide additional historical context on the development of bowling alleys as a highly popular recreational activity in the post-WWII era. Relevant excerpts from the analysis in the HRTR are summarized below.

Mission Valley's character as it exists today, began to take shape during the Post-WWII era. Prior to World War II, commercial development around Mission Valley was random and sparse and mostly serviced the local farmers. Open areas around the major principle traffic arteries attracted early businesses, which were initially mostly recreational related. Post-WWII expansion of the roadway and freeway systems through the valley created a connection from downtown and older suburbs to

the new Post-World War II auto-oriented suburbia. The increased flow of traffic helped set the stage for the development of Mission Valley as a commercial and recreational destination.

The ease of access brought on by the freeways facilitated the growth and development of destinations for retirement and tourist related entertainment and recreation including golf courses, resort hotels, and open space. Mission Valley's location was also key due to its close proximity to other major tourist attractions such as Balboa Park, Mission Bay and Shelter Island. A substantial number of commercial and recreational establishments were constructed in direct response to traffic along major roads such as Camino del Rio and Hotel Circle. Developers hired modernist architects and designers to design their commercial buildings in a variety of styles such as Ranch, Contemporary, Tiki-Polynesian, Futurist/Googie, and Brutalist.

Resources associated with the sub-theme of sports, recreation and leisure include equestrian facilities, stadiums, golf courses, and bowling alleys. Prior to 1920, bowling alleys in America were dark and dingy places typically located in urban areas, in or near saloons. They were seen as places where working-class men gathered to drink and gamble and take part in disreputable, unproductive, and sometimes criminal behavior. Women, and men who considered themselves respectable citizens, rarely entered early bowling establishments. With the advent of Prohibition in 1920, owners of saloons with bowling alleys had to appeal to a broader market to survive without alcohol sales, and efforts were made to clean up the sport's sordid reputation. During World War II, there was a surge in popularity in bowling because the United States military constructed approximately 4,500 lanes on military bases to provide servicemen with recreation. This was often the first exposure to the game for many soldiers. Meanwhile, "ladies leagues" filled bowling alleys back home. After the war ended, men and women started to bowl together in leagues for the first time. After the war, in 1948, there were 20 million bowlers across the nation.

The 1950s and 1960s were considered the golden age of bowling when participation was at its peak and new bowling centers were being constructed at a furious pace. By the 1950s, the bowling industry had successfully established itself as a form of entertainment suitable for all members of the family and, at this point, bowling establishments entered an era of the modern bowling center. Bowling centers were typically constructed in upwardly-mobile middle class postwar suburbs, where they were designed to serve as visual landmarks in these communities. They often reflected the modern aesthetic of the suburbs and many were designed by noted architects in the Googie style with sweeping roofs, modern materials, futuristic details, and flashy signs.

Bowling provided an important social opportunity for women in postwar suburban America. Childcare, laundry, and grocery shopping services were introduced at bowling centers to attract housewives during the day. With suburban women convinced of the wholesomeness of bowling, they allowed their children to participate in the sport. Prior to World War II, children rarely bowled. After the war, junior leagues filled the lanes after school, and membership in the Junior Congress bowling association totaled nearly 400,000 children in 1959. After the bowling heyday of the 1950s and 1960s, many bowling establishments went out of business. This occurred for a variety of reasons, including oversaturation in the market, decreasing popularity, falling attendance as women entered the workforce in the 1970s, and rising land values.

Bowling in San Diego somewhat paralleled the national trends but did not really take off until the 1940s. By the 1950s, bowling establishments began to expand to the suburbs. Bowlero of California

was incorporated in 1955 and soon developed two Bowleros, one in Mission Valley in 1957 and a smaller version a year later in La Mesa in 1958 (now demolished). Both were designed by the noted architectural firm Paderewski, Mitchell, and Dean. At its completion, the \$2 million dollar, 56-lane Bowlero in Mission Valley was advertised as America's largest fully automatic bowling center, and featured locker rooms, powder rooms, cocktail bar, restaurant and kitchen, offices, billiard rooms and beauty parlors. It's dramatic, eye-catching Googie design became a landmark easily seen by passing motorists. By the mid-1960s, attendance at Bowlero began to decline as most bowling centers did nationwide. By 1964, the property transferred ownership to Title Insurance and Trust Company. Scottish Rite began tenant improvements that same year and began occupancy by the following year. In 1969, the property was deeded to the Scottish Rite Cathedral of San Diego, Inc., the current owner.

The modifications undertaken to convert the Bowlero to the Scottish Rite Center are detailed in the HRTR and the discussion of Criterion C below. They include the removal of the free-standing "Bowlero" sign, the removal of the diamond shields from the primary façade; and additions to secondary facades. While these modifications impact integrity of design, materials, workmanship and feeling, they do not impact these aspects of integrity to such a degree that the building loses its overall integrity or its ability to convey its significance under HRB Criterion A. While the HRTR identifies a period of significance of 1957-1965, the report states and documents through primary records that permits to remodel the building as the Scottish Rite Center had been issued by the end of 1964, and that the building had ceased to operate as a bowling alley by this time. Therefore, staff recommends that the period of significance under Criterion A be established as 1957-1964.

Significance Statement: The Bowlero is a special element of the historical, social and economic development of Mission Valley and the City as a whole and retains integrity to its 1957-1964 period of significance. Specifically, at the time of its construction in 1957 the resource, which featured 56 bowling lanes and a variety of dining and entertainment amenities within a striking modernist, Googie-style building, was touted as the largest fully automatic bowling center in the U.S.; and served as a regional draw to the emerging Mission Valley community, which was establishing itself as a commercial and recreational destination. The Bowlero in Mission Valley is the only surviving former bowling center of this era in the City of San Diego and continues to convey the significant character defining features from its period of significance, which spans from 1957 to 1964, when the Bowlero ceased operations. Therefore, staff recommends 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 1895 Camino del Rio South 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.*

Originally constructed as a bowling alley, the subject resource is a one-story structure constructed in 1957 adjacent to Interstate 8. A large surface parking lot is located to the west of the building. The large rectangular building is highly visible from the I-8 and consists of a steel frame with concrete

walls and foundation. The exterior walls of the main portion of the structure are comprised of painted concrete tilt up walls. The central portion of the roof is arched while the remainder of the roof is flat with a parapet. Conducive to its original function as a bowling alley, the structure has few windows and doors.

The majority of the subject resource is simple in design; however, consistent with Modernist commercial structures of this scale, the main entrance provides the primary architectural interest. A monumental gabled porte cochere shelters the building's primary entrance on the west façade. The porte cochere's design consists of an inverted "flying V" roof supported by large boomerang columns. The roof features a unique stepped design that creates a group of concentric hourglass shaped figures when viewed from above. A concrete pedestrian path connecting the parking lot to the entrance runs beneath the porte cochere. The main entrance consists of three doors set within an aluminum storefront with a triangular clerestory above. To the south of the entrance are original divided lite aluminum windows and to the north is an original four-foot-tall planter. The site's original signage has been removed; however, the original lava rock base is intact.

Several modifications have been made to the building since its 1957 date of construction. In 1960 while the building was operating as the Bowlero, a large addition was added at the south end of the structure. Other additions were constructed at the rear of the building circa 1965 and 1970 once the Bowlero operations had ceased. Historic photos reveal that the west façade was originally covered in metal shields which currently do not exist on the building. Additionally, the original stand-alone exterior signage was removed at an unknown date. The metal entry doors have been replaced; however, the original frames are intact. The entry has been modified by the addition of benches and a geometric pattern painted onto the concrete pathway. Other minor modifications are noted in the HRTR. The HRTR concludes that these modifications do not significantly impair integrity of design, material, workmanship and feeling as it relates to HRB Criterion C, and staff concurs.

Googie architecture, also known as Futurist architecture, began after World War II as Americans became entranced with technology and the space age. At that time America was also being transformed by the car culture. As automobile use increased, roadside architecture evolved. It was intended to attract the consumer with bright colors, oversized lighted signage, and exaggerated forms. The Futurist style was used overwhelmingly on coffee shops, gas stations, motels, restaurants, and retail buildings. The name "Googie" comes from the well-known coffee shop in Los Angeles named Googies, which was designed by renowned Modernist architect John Lautner in 1949. Futurist architecture was popular throughout the 1950s and fell out of favor by the mid-60s, as America became more sophisticated in its understanding and interpretation of space travel and futurist technology. According to the *San Diego Modernism Historic Context Statement* primary character defining features of the style include abstract, angular or curved shapes; expressive roof forms (flat, gabled, upswept, butterfly, parabolic, boomerang, or folded); large windows (aluminum framed); and prominent signage. Secondary features consist of the use of a variety of exterior finishes including stucco, concrete block, brick, stone, plastic and wood siding; bright colors; screen block and shadow block accents; asymmetrical facades; and the concept of the building as a billboard.

The *San Diego Modernism Historic Context Statement* provides additional guidance on the impact of modifications as it relates to evaluating the significance of the City's Googie architecture. Examples of the style with a high degree of integrity are rare due to its primary use on commercial buildings

and the frequency of tenant remodels. In order to be eligible for designation, a Googie style resource should retain the primary character defining features of the style. Secondary features that have been lost are not critical to conveying the historic significance of the style.

Significance Statement: The resource embodies the distinctive characteristics through the retention of character defining features of the Googie style and retains integrity to its 1957 date of construction and period of significance. Specifically, the resource features a monumental porte cochere that utilizes abstract and angular shapes, a stepped gabled roof and boomerang columns; large aluminum windows at the primary entrance; and a location and unique design that allow the building to function as its own billboard.

*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 1895 Camino del Rio South was designed by architect C. J. Paderewski. Paderewski has not been established by the Historical Resources Board as a Master Architect, Designer or Builder, and there is insufficient information to designate him as such at this time. The Historical Resource Technical Report provided an abundance of information regarding Paderewski and his known projects; however, an analysis of his body of work was not provided. Without substantial analysis it is not feasible to evaluate which resources are eligible for designation as a notable example of his work. Staff would likely support establishing Paderewski as a Master if more analysis is provided in a future nomination report. Therefore, staff does not recommend designation of the subject resource 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 1895 Camino del Rio South 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 1895 Camino del Rio South 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 Mission Valley Bowlero located at 1895 Camino del Rio South be designated under HRB Criterion A as a special element of the historical, social and economic development of Mission Valley and the City has a whole, with a period of significance of 1957-1964; and under HRB Criterion C as a good example of the Google style with a period of significance of 1957. The designation excludes the circa 1965 and 1970 rear additions constructed outside of the period of significance.

  
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Suzanne Segur  
Senior Planner

SS/SS

Attachment(s):

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

RESOLUTION NUMBER N/A  
ADOPTED ON 1/23/2020

WHEREAS, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego held a noticed public hearing on 1/23/2020, to consider the historical designation of the Bowlero (owned by Scottish Rite Cathedral of San Diego Inc, 1895 Camino Del Rio Unit S, San Diego, CA 92108) located at **1895 Camino del Rio South, San Diego, CA 92108**, APN: **438-090-33-00**, further described as LOT 1 (EX FRWY OPS & MAP 6327) 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 Bowlero on the following findings:

(1) The property is historically significant under CRITERION A for as a special element of the historical, social and economic development of Mission Valley and the City as a whole and retains integrity to its 1957-1964 period of significance. Specifically, at the time of its construction in 1957 the resource, which featured 56 bowling lanes and a variety of dining and entertainment amenities within a striking modernist, Google-style building, was touted as the largest fully automatic bowling center in the U.S.; and served as a regional draw to the emerging Mission Valley community, which was establishing itself as a commercial and recreational destination. The Bowlero in Mission Valley is the only surviving former bowling center of this era in the City of San Diego and continues to convey the significant character defining features from its period of significance, which spans from 1957 to 1964, when the Bowlero ceased operations. 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 C for its distinctive characteristics through the retention of character defining features of the Google style and retains integrity to its 1957 date of construction and period of significance. Specifically, the resource features a monumental porte cochere that utilizes abstract and angular shapes, a stepped gabled roof and boomerang columns; large aluminum windows at the primary entrance; and a location and unique design that allow the building to function as its own billboard. 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 circa 1965 and 1970 rear additions which were constructed after the building ceased to be used as a bowling alley.



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

APPROVED: MARA W. ELLIOTT,  
CITY ATTORNEY

BY: \_\_\_\_\_  
LINDSEY SEBASTIAN,  
Deputy City Attorney

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