

CITY OF SAN DIEGO  
M E M O R A N D U M

DATE: June 11, 2015

TO: Historical Resources Board and Interested Parties

FROM: Jodie Brown, AICP, Senior Planner

SUBJECT: **ITEM 7 – 502-522 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue**

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The property was previously docketed for review by the Historical Resources Board on April 24, 2014 at which time staff recommended against designation due to a lack of significance relating to the style or any significant African-American association. The item was not heard at the April hearing, and was continued by the Board for 30 days at the request of Save Our Heritage Organization (SOHO). At the May 22, 2014 hearing the property was withdrawn altogether. After the item was withdrawn from consideration, HRB staff was contacted by an independent consultant who noted that there was a Japanese-American association with the building that should be investigated.

The applicant's consultant addendum dated April 2015 provided additional information on the Japanese-American association. Between 1914 and 1934 the Western Hotel was managed by six people of Asian descent. During this time period the property was owned by Phebe B. Powell, Robert W. Powell, Hampton Nichols and Geneva Nichols who are not of Japanese ancestry. While the managers were Japanese, they were not allowed to own property at this time. No biographical information related to the Japanese-American managers could be located nor could any evidence on Japanese-American lodgers be located. Additionally, the property has not been identified by Japanese American Historical Society of San Diego in association with a significant cultural, social or economic significance. Given the lack of evidence to indicate any significance related to the Japanese-American association, the staff recommendation to not designate under any HRB Criteria due to a lack of significance remains unchanged.



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Jodie Brown, AICP  
Senior Planner



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Kelley Stanco  
Senior Planner/HRB Liaison

JB/ks

Attachments: 1.) Staff Report No. HRB-14-027  
2.) Applicant's Addendum dated April 2015 (under separate cover)  
3.) Applicant's Consultant Report (under separate cover)



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO  
**Historical Resources Board**

DATE ISSUED: April 17, 2014 REPORT NO. HRB-14-027

ATTENTION: Historical Resources Board  
Agenda of April 24

SUBJECT: **ITEM #6 – 502-522 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue**

APPLICANT: 7<sup>th</sup> and Island LLC represented by Scott A. Moomjian

LOCATION: 502-522 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue, 92101, Downtown Community, Council District 3

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the property located at 502-522 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue as a historical resource.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Do not designate the property at 502-522 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue under any adopted HRB Criteria.

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. The corner property is located in an area of commercial and residential development.

The building is located on APN 535-111-08-00. The property was identified in the 2005 Warehouse Thematic Historic District Draft survey and given a Status Code of 5D3, “Appears to be a contributor to a district that appears eligible for local listing or designation through survey evaluation.” In February 2006, the HRB did not establish the historic district, and more specifically, excluded this building, as “not to be considered contributors for purposes of designation within the aforementioned Warehouse Thematic Historic District.” The property was also identified in the 2004 African American Heritage Study (<http://www.sandiego.gov/planning/programs/historical/pdf/surveydocs/africanamericanheritagestudy.pdf>) and noted as a contributor to a potential historic district.

## ANALYSIS

A historical resource research report was prepared by Scott Moomjian, 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.*

The property was identified in the 2004 African American Heritage Study as a contributor to a potential district. The study notes that the building represents a cross-section of the many African American migrants who traveled to San Diego in the first decades of the 1900s. The study notes that 13 residents of the hotel were African-American by 1920 and by 1930 there were seven residents of the same racial diversity. Shortly after 1930 when the property changed hands, no more African American residents were identified at the hotel.

In the 1860s, post-Civil War, freemen and African Americans journeyed to San Diego to start a new life and find economic gain. By 1890, there were 289 persons listed in the San Diego census as "Colored" or "Negro." Of that total 63 lived in downtown San Diego. The void left by Native Americans, who were relocated to reservations, for cheap and unskilled labor was partially filled by African Americans. People were also relocating to the city for the construction of the California Southern Railroad. Once here, a number of migrants created temporary settlements such as Squattersville at Kettner and D (Broadway) Street. The largest concentration of African Americans was located between Ash and Market Streets with 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue at the east with State Street at the west. At this time, many African Americans lived either at their place of business, rented properties downtown, or lived on their employer's property.

As the African American community began to grow, several Black owned or managed businesses developed to serve the African American community, and in some cases the larger white population. The businesses that served both communities were generally limited to service related enterprises such as tonsorial, boot black, restaurant and drayage businesses. With the economic improvement, some African Americans began to move out of the downtown area to more expensive areas such as Logan Heights.

In the early 1900s a new wave of African Americans came to southern California. Many were fleeing the increasing racial tensions of the south and the failing southern cotton economy and looking for jobs with the railway. Many new arrivals took positions as domestic and transportation workers. A number of the residents of the 502-522 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue property were employed by the rail lines and served as dining car waiters or porters.

The period of 1920 to 1940 saw a large increase in the African American population in San Diego from 1,200 to 4,400. By 1920, restrictive covenants led to a shift in residential settlement from the center to the southeast area of downtown. With the onset of the Great Depression overt

racism took hold of southern California and many Blacks continued the migration to southeastern San Diego. Despite the healthy migration to southern California in the years leading up to 1940, the downtown area contained fewer than 2% of the population. The downtown area remained a place for entertainment and dining, but the lack of residential opportunities pushed many African Americans to the east. With the start of World War II, the state's African American population increased by 272% with San Diego a recipient of a large portion of the influx. Many of the migrants were employed in jobs related to the wartime effort. After the war, the population continued to increase and by 1960 African Americans had grown to 6.8% of San Diego's population with up to 80% living in the East Village and Southeast San Diego.

When the African American Heritage Study was completed in 2004, it identified 16 extant buildings in the downtown area and a further 21 properties that are no longer extant. Of the 16 properties noted in the survey, six of the properties were previously identified and designated as part of the Gaslamp Historic District; one property was identified and designated as part of the Asian Pacific Thematic Historic District; two of the properties were designated individually for their African American association (The Clermont/Coast Hotel, 501 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue, HRB Site #509 and the Carter Hotel, 1401 J Street, HRB Site #632); and one property the Lillian Grant Properties at 1431-1437 J Street was designated in 2002 and partially overturned by the City Council in 2002. The site remained designated under HRB Criterion A and the houses were demolished in late 2004. Of the remaining six buildings still extant downtown linked to the African American history of the area only two of the buildings served as hotels, the Latonia and the Western (502-522 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue).

Although there are a finite number of resources directly associated with the African American legacy in the downtown core, there is no evidence that the property at 502-522 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue exemplifies a special element of the development of downtown or San Diego as a whole. The upper floor of the building has always been a hotel, but was not historically owned or operated by an African American. The property did not provide a catalyst to development or have any impact on other developments in the area or on the entrepreneurship of African Americans. 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.*

Chain of Title and City Directory research revealed past owners and tenants of the subject building, none of which appear to be historically significant individuals. Therefore, staff does not recommend 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.*

Constructed in 1914, the subject property is a two story, Two-Part Commercial Block building. Located at the northwest corner of 7<sup>th</sup> and Island Avenue, the building has a stucco façade with commercial storefronts on the first floor and hotel units on the second floor. The east façade

features six storefront areas with three business entries and three with metal roll up doors. The south elevation features three entries with windows adjacent to the entries. The second floor features window openings in pairs spaced evenly throughout the east and south facades.

There have been several modifications to the building which have negatively impact the character-defining features of the building. The windows on the second floor have been replaced, as well as a number of the storefront entries. Given the number of modifications, 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 property is not associated with a master builder, designer, architect, engineer, landscape architect, interior designer, artist or craftsman. Therefore, staff does not recommend designation under 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 has not been listed on or determined eligible for listing on the State or National Registers, and is therefore 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 is not located within a designated historic district, and is therefore not eligible for designation under HRB Criterion F.

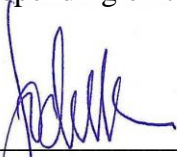
#### OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

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

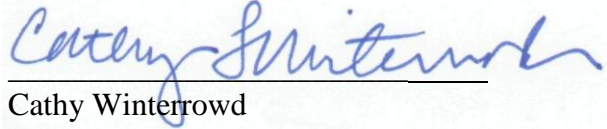
Based on the information submitted and staff's field check, it is not recommended that the property located at 502-522 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue be designated under any HRB Criteria. Designation

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.



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Cathy Winterrowd  
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Attachment(s):

Applicant's Historical Report under separate cover