



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO  
Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: September 21, 2012 REPORT NO. HRB 12-054  
ATTENTION: Historical Resources Board  
Agenda of September 27, 2012  
SUBJECT: **ITEM #5 - 3902 Ninth Avenue**  
APPLICANT: City of San Diego  
LOCATION: 3902 Ninth Avenue, Uptown Community, Council District 3  
DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the Fire Station #5 located at 3902 Ninth Avenue as a historical resource.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Do not designate the property located at 3902 Ninth Avenue under any adopted HRB Designation 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 building is a one story municipal Fire Station constructed in 1951 at the northwest corner of University Avenue and Ninth Avenue in the Estudillo and Capron's Addition.

ANALYSIS

A historical resource research report was prepared by Historical Resources staff, which concludes that the resource is not significant under any adopted HRB Designation Criteria. 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 subject building reflects the redevelopment activity occurring in Uptown in the postwar years. However, there doesn't appear to be anything special or unique regarding the redevelopment of the Fire Station site. Absent any evidence to support that Fire Station #5 reflects postwar redevelopment to any greater degree than other buildings constructed at the same time, the subject building is not eligible for designation under HRB Criterion A.

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

The subject building was built as a municipal Fire Station in 1951 and has functioned as such for the past 61 years. There is no evidence to suggest that the building is associated with persons or events significant in local, state or national history. 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 building is a one story Fire Station constructed in 1951. The building is of Modernist design, constructed of reinforced concrete block on a poured concrete foundation, with an extremely low-pitch wood truss roof system finished with asphalt roofing. The building is constructed in three parts, with the center part being taller than the two outer parts. The first part fronting onto University Avenue contains spaces for recreation and living, the middle, taller part fronting onto Ninth Avenue contains the firefighting apparatus room, and the third part fronting onto the rear alley contains dormitories, locker rooms and the hose tower. Steel frame and sash fixed and casement windows in multi-lite configurations are present around the building. Modifications consist primarily of vinyl window replacements on the south, north and west facades.

The subject building is not clearly identifiable as a distinct architectural style. It was designed in the Modern period and exhibits Modernist design influences, including rectilinear form, use of concrete block materials, horizontally divided steel casement and fixed windows, and some horizontal detailing. However, these features do not coalesce into coherent and distinct design. An evaluation of the building under the two closest architectural styles, Streamline Moderne and Contemporary, is provided in the historical report.

Fire Station #5 exhibits some, but not all, of the primary character defining features and a few of the secondary character defining features of Streamline Moderne architecture. However, the building lacks two significant primary character defining features – a flat roof with coping or flat parapet and smooth stucco or concrete exterior – and all of the remaining secondary character defining features. While the building does have a generally flat roof, the parapet over the apparatus room has a shaped parapet that rises to a point in the center, which is inconsistent with the Streamline Modern style and disrupts the emphasis on horizontality. Second, the use of blocks creates wall texture and vertical lines that are inconsistent with the Streamline Moderne style.

Fire Station #5 exhibits the primary character defining features, to a greater or lesser degree, and one of the secondary character defining features of Contemporary architecture. However, the

building lacks nearly all of the secondary character defining features, as it is minimally ornamented. Given that the building exhibits very few of the character defining features of the style, and that those features are expressed in a very limited manner (i.e. a flat roof without overhangs and only one large window), the building cannot be considered to embody the distinctive characteristics of Contemporary architecture in a significant way.

In addition to style, a resource can be determined to be significant under HRB Criterion C if it embodies a period or type of construction, in this instance Modernist-era fire stations. In order to provide a consistent framework for the evaluation of Modernist-era resources, the Modernism Context statement focuses specifically on sub-styles as a means of evaluating the resource and establishing significance. This allows for a more meaningful analysis of what constitutes a Modernist resource, and more importantly, a significant Modernist resource, as not all buildings of the Modernist era are significant. As demonstrated in the discussion above, Fire Station #5 does not exhibit the character defining features of any of the sub-styles of Modernism, and is therefore not considered to embody the Modernist era or period in significant way. In regard to type of construction, the City of San Diego does not have a context for evaluation of Fire Stations or other civic/institutional buildings beyond the contexts prepared as part of the Community Plan updates. The Draft Uptown Context Statement provides little discussion of civic and institutional buildings, other than to state that an institutional building dating to the postwar period should be evaluated using the San Diego Modernism Context Statement. That analysis has been provided and demonstrates that the building is not architecturally significant. Therefore, the building cannot be considered to embody a period or type of construction in a significant way.

While clearly constructed within the Modern period and exhibiting a Modernist aesthetic, the subject building does not embody the character defining features of a style, type, period or method of construction in a historically significant manner. Therefore, the property is not eligible for 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.*

The original architectural plans dated 12/5/1950 were drawn by architect Frank R. George. George has not been established as a Master Architect, and no additional information could be found which would support his establishment as a Master Architect. The identity of the builder could not be obtained. Therefore, the property is not eligible for designation under HRB Criterion D.

## CONCLUSION

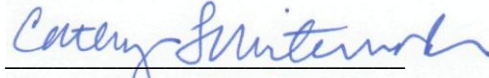
Based on the information submitted and staff's field check, it is recommended that Fire Station #5 located at 3902 Ninth Avenue not be designated under any adopted HRB Designation Criteria. Designation brings with it the responsibility of maintaining the building in accordance with the Secretary of the 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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Attachment: 1. Historical Report under separate cover