THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: April 12, 2007 REPORT NO. HRB-07-023

ATTENTION: Historical Resources Board
Agenda of April 26, 2007

SUBJECT: **ITEM # 11 – Dr. Chester Tanner Office Bungalow Court**

APPLICANT: Marie Burke Lia on behalf of Fourth & Thorn LLC, owner and Bruce Leidenberger, developer

LOCATION: 3235, 3245, 3251 and 3255 Fourth Avenue, Uptown Community, Council District 2

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the Dr. Chester Tanner Office Bungalow Court, located at 3235, 3251 and 3255 Fourth Avenue as a historical resource.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate the Dr. Chester Tanner Office Bungalow Court at 3235, 3245, 3251 and 3255 Fourth Avenue as a historical resource under HRB Criterion C, as an excellent example of both the Spanish Eclectic architectural style and as an example of a unique 1927-1935 Spanish Eclectic Office Bungalow Court.

BACKGROUND

This item is being brought before the Historical Resources Board in conjunction with a proposed major building modification (demolition) of structures of 45 years or more, located at 3235, 3245, 3251 and 3255 Fourth Avenue, under San Diego Municipal Code Section 143.0212.

ANALYSIS

A historical report was prepared by Scott Moomjian that concludes that the subject structures are not historic under any HRB Criteria. Staff does not concur. Staff believes that the site is a significant historical resource 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.*

As part of the Uptown Planners review of the proposed project, including demolition of the subject building, Janet O'Dea prepared a memo to the Uptown Planners Board dated January 30, 2007. The memo (attached to the Addendum to the Historical Assessment), requested, among other things, that further information about the development and medical use of the property be provided for analysis of significance under the Hillcrest context statement of the Draft 2007 Uptown Survey regarding the development of the medical community/corridor associated with the hospitals in this area.

HRB staff reviewed the memo and the Addendum to the Historical Assessment and concluded that, although this complex is somewhat separated from the medical nodes to the north, there may be an association due to the subject structure's location on a transportation corridor that leads to the medical facilities. However, there is insufficient information currently available to conclude that this association is significant and this issue could be considered at a later date when more information regarding this transportation connection has been studied.

Therefore, staff does not recommend designation of the Dr. Chester Tanner Office Bungalow Court based on HRB Criterion A.

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

The memo to the Uptown Planners Board dated January 30, 2007 also requested that further information be provided regarding Dr. Chester O. Tanner, who participated in the development of several buildings in this area, including the subject structures. A response regarding Dr. Chester O. Tanner has been provided in the Addendum and reviewed by HRB staff, and staff has concluded that Dr. Tanner's contribution to the City, state and national history does not rise to the level of Historical Person.

Dr. Tanner participated with several other doctors in the construction of the complex. He appears to not only have been the lead participant, but also the only participant who retained ownership of the subject structures from 1927 through 1935. As such, staff concluded that his name should be associated with this complex.

As staff believes that Dr. Tanner did not rise to the level of a Historic Person, staff recommends that the Dr. Chester Tanner Office Bungalow Court not be designated 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 indigenous materials or craftsmanship.*

The subject properties are identified on the Draft 2007 Uptown Survey as "locally significant both individually and as a contributor to a thematic district *(Court Thematic)* through survey evaluation. For purposes of the Land Development Code 45 year review, this property needs a research report to determine its potential historic significance." The research report is an attachment to this staff report.

The four Spanish Eclectic-style properties at 3235, 3245, 3251 and 3255 Fourth Avenue are not a typical Bungalow Court both in their development pattern and in their use as follows:

> The first structures initially were sited on two different adjacent lots and, to an extent, each property was developed independently of the other. The two structures on the southern site (3235 and 3245 Fourth Ave.) and the front structure on the northern one (3251) were constructed in 1927. When the rear structure on the northernmost site (3255 Fourth Avenue) was built in 1935, this L-shaped structure was built across the property line, consolidating the two lots. The Chain of Title indicates the same ownership for both lots on 3/5/27, Drs. B. J. O'Neill and C. O. Tanner. However, Dr. O'Neill sold his interest on that same date to Drs. Andrew Thornton and David Higbee.
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> It should be noted that without conscious thought to design the structures in this manner, the structures could not function well as a Bungalow Court, as they clearly do. Consequently, early in the process, it was intended to function as an office complex focused on a court.
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> Another unique aspect of this Bungalow Court is that the structures were initially developed as medical offices, not residential. They continue to function as medical/professional offices today. Although most Bungalow Courts were developed as residential complexes, some of these were later converted to offices, retaining the Bungalow Court configuration. This complex is the first known to be constructed as offices.
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> Currently, due to lot splits that occurred post 1956 (per the 1956 Sanborn map that shows a single lot, and the current Assessors Parcel map that shows four lots), each of the four structures is generally sited on its own lot, except the northern site rear structure which still straddles the property line. The function of the structures on the lots is typical of a Bungalow Court in that the building entries all face a central courtyard (although this court is offset at the rear) and the access to the office structures is via this shared courtyard.

The Dr. Chester Tanner Office Bungalow Court one-story structures were all constructed in the Spanish Eclectic architectural style, with many characteristics of the style including: stucco exterior wall surfaces over wood frame; shallow-medium pitch clay tile roofing, used both as mansards with a flat roof and as hip roof; clay tile attic vents; wood multi-pane windows in eased recesses with projecting stucco sills, predominantly multi-pane double-hung but also fixed;

arched (both flat arches and full arches) door openings with stucco mouldings; arched wood doors, some with glass panels; Spanish–style light fixtures; and wrought iron handrails at entry platform steps. The 1935 building at the north-east corner of the site is the only structure to have a combination of a flat roof with a parapet as well as a pitched tile roof.

There is a non-historic wrought iron fence and gate at the street that allows the courtyard to be secured at night. Within the offset courtyard, there is a relatively new heavy wood frame trellis as well as mature landscaping. The flooring in the rear of the courtyard is a basket-weave brick pattern and in the front portion of the court the flooring is concrete, modified for disabled ramps. The courtyard offset makes the rear courtyard and the structure facing the rear portion of the courtyard only minimally visible from the public right-of-way. Public visibility is not however a requirement for designation.

For this reason, staff recommends that the four structures that constitute the Dr. Chester Tanner Office Bungalow Court at 3225, 3245, 3251 and 3255 Fourth Avenue be designated as an excellent example of both the Spanish Eclectic architectural style and as an example of a unique 1927-1935 Spanish Eclectic Office Bungalow Court 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.*

Not applicable. The contractor is identified as Gunnar Johnson. He is not currently acknowledged as a Master Builder. The architect is not identified.

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.*

Not applicable. Although identified in the 2007 Uptown Survey as a potential contributor to a Court Thematic Historic District, the district does not exist at this time.

CONCLUSION

Based on the information submitted and staff's field check, it is recommended that the Dr. Chester Tanner Office Bungalow Court located at 3235, 3245, 3251 and 3255 Fourth Avenue be designated under HRB Criterion C as an excellent example of both the Spanish Eclectic architectural style and as an example of a unique 1927-1935 Spanish Eclectic Office Bungalow Court.

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.

Michael Tudury
Senior Planner/Architect

Cathy Winterrowd
Senior Planner/Program Coordinator

MT/cw

Attachments: 1. Applicant's Historical Report under separate cover
2. Addendum to Historical Report, addressing Mr. Moomjian's response to the January 30, 2007 Memo from Janet O'Dea, member of the Historical Resources Subcommittee of Uptown Planners