



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO
Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: October 14, 2011 REPORT NO. HRB-11-068

ATTENTION: Historical Resources Board
Agenda of October 27, 2011

SUBJECT: **Item 9 –The LIFE House**

APPLICANT: Witt Family Trust represented by Vonn Marie May

LOCATION: 6025 Waverly Avenue, 92037, La Jolla Community, Council District 1

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of The LIFE House located at 6025 Waverly Avenue as a historical resource.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate The LIFE House located at 6025 Waverly Avenue as a historical resource with a period of significance of 1939 under HRB Criteria A and C. The designation excludes the 337 sq. ft. 1970's addition. This recommendation is based on the following findings:

1. The resource is a special element of the City's economic and architectural development and retains integrity. Specifically, the home design, reflective of the Small House Movement, was a part of a LIFE magazine program which featured home designs to fit a variety of depression era family budgets.
2. The resource embodies the distinctive characteristics through the retention of character defining features of Minimal Traditional style architecture and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its 1939 period of significance. Specifically, the resource retains its hipped roof with moderate eave overhang and bracket supports, composition shingles, California Colonial style recessed entryway, stucco cladding and fenestration consisting of fixed, bay, and double-hung windows flanked by shutters.

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 subject property is at 6025 Waverly Avenue in the La Jolla Community and consists of a one story Minimal Traditional style home and detached two car garage.

The historic name of the resource, The LIFE House, has been identified consistent with the Board's adopted naming policy and reflects the name the house has been known by in the La Jolla community since its 1939 period of significance, as documented in newspaper articles from the date of construction and after the date of construction.

ANALYSIS

A historical resource research was prepared by Vonn Marie May, which concludes that the resource is significant under HRB Criteria A and C. Staff concurs that the site is a significant historical resource under HRB Criteria A and C. 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 house at 6025 Waverly Avenue exemplifies a special element of the economic and architectural development of San Diego during the Depression Era. Starting after WWI, focus shifted towards increasing the quality of life for many Americans through homeownership which included building homes which were of quality design, compact and efficient, while still being affordable. The Small House Movement became increasingly important with the onset of the Great Depression when many Americans were on an extremely limited budget. The Federal Housing Administration implemented different housing standards in 1934 to try and increase homeownership including distributing a publication entitled *Planning Small Houses* in 1936 which offered different housing types for different ranges of incomes. These plans set a precedent of building homes which were large enough to meet the needs of the family yet efficiently small enough to be affordable in a hard economic time. The Small House Movement became a national phenomenon and many organizations and publications set off to cater to the demands of potential homeowners.

In 1938 LIFE Magazine, in collaboration with The Architectural Forum, launched a National campaign to feature an article on ways to own a home in hard economic times, presenting different housing types for different income levels in different areas of the United States. One of the designs was the "Kelley-Calvert 'traditional'" home built in the "California Colonial" style, meant for an income level of \$3,000-\$4,000. The original house was built in Los Angeles, California by Architect H. Roy Kelley and was featured in the September 1938 issue of LIFE magazine. San Diego architect Benjamin M. Torgerson was able to obtain the plans for the house through a LIFE Houses publication entitled "The Architectural Forum". He originally used the exact plans to recreate the home in the La Jolla community as a speculation home but after several open house sessions decided to reformulate the property based on potential buyer comments. This included building a detached garage set back on the North end of the property, creating living space from the former garage, moving the chimney, bringing the front elevation forward slightly, and rearranging the door and fenestration so that the door was further north and no longer flanked by the two multi-light windows with shutters. The fact that Torgerson was willing to redesign the house based on buyer comment is a unique reflection of the economic environment of the time when not a lot of people were building or purchasing homes. Both the

original house and modifications were done within the same year, 1939. The house became known in the community as the LIFE house as indicated in several newspapers before and after construction as well as in more recent years. The LIFE house is a special element of Depression era economic and architectural development in San Diego embodying the Small House Movement which aimed at increasing home ownership during an economically difficult period of San Diego's history. Therefore staff recommends designation under Criterion A.

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 house at 6025 Waverly Avenue was built in the Minimal Traditional or "California Colonial" style in 1939 by Benjamin M. Torgeson. The house features a hipped roof with composition shingles and modest eave overhang and decorative bracket eave supports. Fenestration consists of casement windows and multi-light fixed and double-hung windows many featuring wooden shutters. The house features a small brick porch stoop leading to a recessed front door entry way with Colonial style detailed wood paneling surrounding a large wooden door with multi-light windows. On the rear of the home are original multi-light bay windows flanking a multi-light French door leading to the rear courtyard. The house is clad in stucco with exception to the brick chimney located in the center of the house. A detached garage is found on the North end of the property and features the same characteristics of the home with a hipped roof and stucco cladding.

Benjamin Torgeson originally followed the plans from a LIFE magazine article to build the original house as a Speculation house in 1939. After several comments from potential buyers he decided to reformulate the house to adapt to the constraints of the sloping lot. Changes to the original design included converting the original attached garage to living space, moving the brick chimney, and building a set-back detached garage on the North end of the property. Other changes included bumping the front elevation up five to six feet and the front door, originally flanked by two multi-light windows with shutters, was moved north while the two windows were shifted south to be arranged side by side. These changes were done within the 1939 period of significance and still reflect significant character defining features of the Minimal Traditional architectural style.

Other modifications in later years include a 337 sq. ft. addition to the rear of the home sometime in the 1970's. In the same time era the house underwent a roof replacement with a shake roof and was replaced again in more recent years with a composition shingle. Both the front door and garage door have been replaced at an unknown time. The last known modification to the home includes adding brick work to the porch, walkway, and pillars surrounding the yard connected by a white picket fence. A gate and small trellis were also added to the driveway leading to the detached garage. These modifications do not significantly impact the integrity of the home. Therefore staff recommends designation under Criterion C excluding the 337 sq ft. 1970's addition.

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.

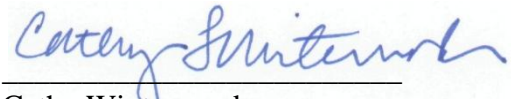
CONCLUSION

Based on the information submitted and staff's field check, it is recommended that the LIFE House located at 6025 Waverly Avenue be designated with a period of significance of 1939 under HRB Criteria A and C. The designation excludes the 337 sq. ft. 1970's addition. 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.



for

Jennifer Feeley
Planning Intern



Cathy Winterrowd
Principal Planner/HRB Liaison

JF/cw

Attachment(s):

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

RESOLUTION NUMBER N/A
ADOPTED ON 10/27/2011

WHEREAS, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego held a noticed public hearing on 10/27/2011, to consider the historical designation of **The LIFE House** (owned by Witt Family Trust 04-19-11, 6025 Waverly Avenue, San Diego, CA 92037) located at **6025 Waverly Avenue, San Diego, CA 92037**, APN: **357-181-04-00**, further described as BLK 35 LOT 12 POR 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 LIFE House on the following findings:

(1) The property is historically significant under CRITERION A as an important element to the City's economic and architectural development during the Depression Era. Specifically, the home design was part of the Small House Movement as a part of a LIFE magazine program which featured home designs to fit a variety of depression era family budgets. 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 Minimal Traditional style architecture and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its 1939 period of significance. Specifically, the resource retains its hipped roof with moderate eave overhang and bracket supports, composition shingles, California Colonial style recessed entryway, stucco cladding and fenestration consisting of fixed, bay, and double-hung windows flanked by shutters. There is also a set-back detached two-car garage also with a hipped roof. 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: _____
JOHN LEMMO, Chair
Historical Resources Board

APPROVED AS TO FORM AND
LEGALITY: JAN I. GOLDSMITH,
CITY ATTORNEY

BY: _____
KEITH BAUERLE
Deputy City Attorney