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Date: 10 | 15 | 24
Submitted in PLUM Committee
Council File No 23-0497
Findings 8
Deputy: Luna

1848 Gramercy Appeal

The planning department erred in deeming the case complete for a number of reasons.

1848 S. Gramercy Place was identified in the 1996 survey conducted for the Planning Department as a contributor to the 18th Street Angelus Vista historic district. The district comprises a significant concentration of Craftsman and Period Revival style dwellings exhibiting quality of craftsmanship and distinctive features. By its location, the subject property establishes a gateway to the district.-

Between 1908 and 1910 the City's population more than doubled, leading to a building explosion. Most homes in the Angelus Vista tract date from this period. Washington Boulevard, envisioned as the future grand boulevard from Los Angeles to the Pacific Ocean, played a key role in the development of the community. In September 1902 the Washington Boulevard rail line was extended through West Adams Heights, prompting developers to lay out residential tracts along the main thoroughfare to Santa Monica and the sea.

The neighborhood represents a shared period of development exemplifying cultural and architectural cohesion. This cohesion is also exhibited by uniform setbacks and block faces of the neighboring properties. These factors are obvious and unaccounted for in the prior determinations of the subject property.

1848 S. Gramercy Place exhibits Craftsman style design elements including a steeply-pitched side-gabled roof, wide overhanging eaves, and exposed rafter tails. The primary, west-facing elevation features a large bay window on the lower level, a second story projecting front gable with decorative half-timbering, and a small recessed balcony with lattice railing. The entryway is off-centered and accessed via a protruding porch with a gabled roof and square columns. There is a porte-cochere of cross-truss construction attached to the south-facing elevation of the building. Fenestration consists of double-hung wood windows, multi-lite wood fixed and casement and hopper-style windows.

To reiterate, the subject property was identified as eligible for historic designation as a contributor to a historic district in the June 21, 1996 Historic Resources Final Report for the South Central Los Angeles District Plan Area prepared by Richard Starzak of Myra L. Frank & Associates.

Had the site not been zoned industrial (CM), the subject property would also have been included in the adjacent Angelus Vista Historic District, identified through SurveyLA in 2012. The Angelus Vista Historic District is significant for its associations under the themes of Architecture and Engineering - 1850-1980; Housing the Masses - 1880-1975; Arts and Crafts Neighborhoods - 1890-1930; and Residential Suburbs and Subdivisions.

These themes attest to the fact that this property is important to telling the story of the development of Los Angeles. The location and siting are a direct result of its proximity to a streetcar line and the westward expansion of the City.

Alteration of the site would cause the neighborhood's feeling, setting, design and association of original streetscape features to be compromised should this project be approved. This proposed infill development would interfere and disrupt the residential character of the identified historic district. As a whole, the property is an excellent example of an early 20th century tract subdivided specifically due to its adjacency to the streetcar line, and retains the area's sense of place that evokes an early 20th century suburb. Allowing this project to move forward compromises a property that has a known value that we believe was under-represented in multiple historic assessments, causing the planning department to err as it relates to properly identifying the subject property as contributing to the surrounding district.

This flawed review of the property is the basis on which the applicant seeks to demolish the subject building. The project application should have never received a categorical exemption under CEQA. The project has proceeded to this point based on disjointed, misinformed decisions by the Planning Department based on gross misrepresentations of the site's history, legal framework, applicability of CEQA and the Housing Accountability Act. Unfortunately, the Planning Commission based their decision on this flawed information and misguided advice from the Planning Department and the City Attorney's office on what the Commission could do as it related to this application. This flawed legal advice is on the record and has been debunked by the case of Snowball West Investments v. City of Los Angeles which affirmed that the City is not beholden to approve such applications that are inconsistent with local zoning. The City Planning Commission then acted under duress owing to the hastily provided advice of the Planning Department and the City Attorney.

It was requested that a new and independent historic survey be completed to re-evaluate the merits of the subject property. The applicant furnished a report from the same consultant reaching the same conclusion. It was also requested that the applicant make their case for mitigating the noise and air quality for the construction phases of the project, and returned reports that did not include sufficient evidence that the projects construction phases would be mitigated to less than significant for the surrounding properties, some of which are officially on the City's list of Historic - Cultural Monuments, and those that contribute to the surrounding district. It is thus foreseeable that such a project will have significant unavoidable impacts on surrounding properties as well as the identified historic district and nearby designated properties.