



GILBERT A. CEDILLO
COUNCILMEMBER
FIRST DISTRICT

October 31, 2022

Councilmember Marqueece Harris-Dawson, Chair
Planning and Land Use Management Committee
Los Angeles City Council
200 North Spring Street
Los Angeles, CA. 90012

Dear Councilmember Harris-Dawson:

**Re: Item No. 11, PLUM Committee Agenda, November 1, 2022, Meeting
Council File No. 20-1341
Nomination of Morris Kight Residence as City Historic-Cultural Monument
1844 West Fourth Street**

Morris Kight was a leading figure of the history of gay and civil rights activism in Los Angeles. Kight was a cofounder of Christopher Street West and Parade, Gay and Lesbian Community Services of Los Angeles, and the West Coast/Los Angeles Chapter of the Gay Liberation Front in 1969. The Gay Liberation Front was formed on the East Coast in response to the Stonewall Riots in that same year.

Morris Kight lived in many residences in Los Angeles and West Hollywood during his period of activism, beginning in Bunker Hill in the late 1950s. The second place he lived was at 1822 W. 4th Street ("4th St House"), which is the property under consideration for Historic Cultural Monument Designation by City Council at this time. He lived there from 1966 to 1973. He then moved to 1428 McCadden ("McCadden House"), where he lived from 1973 until at least 1987. Kight passed away in 2003 and was residing in an apartment in West Hollywood at that time. A Historic Cultural Monument nomination for the McCadden House property has been deemed complete and will be initially reviewed by the City of Los Angeles Cultural Heritage Commission on November 3, 2022.

In considering whether either or both houses should be designated as Historic Cultural Monuments, two factors are important: first, which house is more closely associated with Mr. Kight's major accomplishments; and second, whether either or both retain sufficient historic and architectural integrity to reflect the property's associations with Kight and his endeavors.

As for the association with Kight, during his years at the 4th St House, he cofounded the Gay Liberation Front and ran a health clinic out of the home. However, after moving to the McCadden House, which was previously occupied by the Human Relations Institute, he served on the LA Human Rights Commission, headed the Barney's Beanery Protest; cofounded the Stonewall Democratic Club; planted trees to commemorate the deaths of friends and colleagues related to AIDS; and was filmed for the documentary *Live on Tape: The Life and Times of Morris Kite, Liberator*. This was the home that was visited by numerous celebrities and dignitaries. It also housed his extensive art collection, which he named the "3,000-piece McCadden Collection" and which he donated to the ONE Institute upon his passing.

Kight's association with the McCadden House was memorialized in the documentary, *Live on Tape: The Life and Times of Morris Kight, Liberator*, where Kight was interviewed in the backyard. In the documentary, Kight described how he planted trees in the backyard of the McCadden property to commemorate the AIDS-related deaths of friends and colleagues. These trees still remain. The documentary does not mention the 4th Street House, and none of the contemporary newspaper articles and archival research indicates that Kight had any great affinity for the 4th St House. Finally, Kight resided at the McCadden House twice as long as he did at the 4th St House.

For these reasons and all the other reasons in the McCadden House Monument Nomination, the McCadden House is more closely associated with the events and the period of time during which Mr. Kight gained importance.

As for integrity, the 4th St House has sustained numerous alterations that dramatically impacted the ability of the 4th St House to convey historic associations with Kight's work during the short time he lived there. Alterations to the living room, where meetings would have taken place, include laminate flooring, wall changes resulting in a changed interior circulation pattern, and the retention of very little historic fabric. Kitchen alterations include laminate flooring, new countertops, and counter and cooking spaces have been reconfigured. There have been rear additions, and the original garage was demolished. The 4th Street House has been altered and does not retain a physical expression of Kight's years of occupancy.

The Cultural Heritage Commission's report to the Council was transmitted to the Council on October 12, 2020—over two years ago. It has been held under the Mayor's Executive Directive tolling the deadline for Council action. While the matter was tolled, Council Office staff worked extensively with the property owner, the nominator, and interested parties to determine if preservation would be feasible by retention of the house and new construction of housing behind it. The property owner secured the pro bono assistance of an architectural firm expert in preservation and site planning to accommodate new construction. Council Office staff convened a number of meetings with the participation of the property owner's team and the nominator and, at times, with the Office of Historic Resources. Furthermore, the property owner committed to selling the property at cost without profit to an entity able to preserve it and add new construction.

While preliminary plans were developed that demonstrated what might be built, an extensive effort was made to identify an entity who would undertake a project to preserve the

house. Council Office staff spoke with real estate developers and other City departments. Furthermore, the property owner solicited interest with fifteen LGBTQ community organizations. None of these efforts resulted in any interest.

The City of Los Angeles' Cultural Heritage Ordinance does not prohibit demolition or alteration of designated Monuments. Instead, it provides a stay on demolition to determine if preservation can be accomplished. As set forth in Administrative Code Section 22.171.15, the Commission can stay demolition or alteration up to 180 days, during which time the Commission can take steps to determine if preservation is feasible. If the Commission determines that preservation of the Monument cannot be fully accomplished within the 180-day stay, it may recommend to the Council that the Council impose an additional stay of up to 180 days for a total maximum stay of one year.

In this case, over two years went into the effort to preserve the house. This was an intensive effort far beyond a typical case, and far beyond the tools and resources the Cultural Heritage Commission or the City could or would bring to bear. The exploration of alternatives was much more detailed than analysis of alternatives under the California Environmental Quality Act.

At the time of the Cultural Heritage Commission consideration of the nomination, the property owner's representative suggested that, in light of all the factors, including the lack of integrity of the 4th St House, that the McCadden House is more closely associated with Kight, and that the Cultural Heritage Ordinance expressly authorizes site-only designations, the Commission should consider designation of the site only rather than the physical improvements. Furthermore, the Commission was informed of the property owner's plan to include onsite commemoration of the importance of Mr. Kight's efforts. When the nominator objected to this approach, the Commission did not further consider it.

Now it is time to allow for construction of housing on the site without further delay.

Therefore, I request that the PLUM Committee recommend that the Council:

1. Designate the site only and not the physical improvements at 1822 W. 4th Street.
2. Subject to the property owner obtaining a demolition permit, authorize demolition of the physical improvements without any stay or further review under the Cultural Heritage Ordinance.
3. If the owner proceeds with commemoration, the Office of Historic Resources shall provide input on the commemorative measures.
4. Adopt the following findings:
 - a. 1822 W. 4th Street is not the property most closely associated with the role of Morris Kight in Los Angeles history.

- b. Even if the structure were historically significant, it fails to retain sufficient integrity to be considered eligible.
- c. The physical improvements, therefore, are not historically significant or eligible for designation as a Historic Cultural Monument.
- d. Site-only designation is authorized under the Cultural Heritage Ordinance.
- e. Among the City's list of Monuments, at least 13 are site-only designations.
- f. Designation of the site only along with potential commemorative measures is the most appropriate way to honor Morris Kight, and to inform the public of his role in Los Angeles history.
- g. After a delay of over two years, designation of the site only will facilitate construction of critically important housing.
- h. The two-year effort of the Council Office, the property owner, and interested parties to identify preservation alternatives and to identify an entity that would undertake the preservation of the house fully satisfies the goals and purposes of the Cultural Heritage Ordinance.
- i. Through this effort there is substantial evidence that preservation is not feasible.
- j. No public purpose would be served by further delay in the redevelopment of the site for housing.

Sincerely,



Gilbert A. Cedillo
Council Member, First District