



PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

STAFF REPORT

DATE: JUNE 7, 2022

TO: HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

FROM: DAVID M. REYES, DIRECTOR OF PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

SUBJECT: APPLICATION FOR DESIGNATION AS A LANDMARK
73-87 ½ N. CATALINA AVENUE (NORMAN VILLA)

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the Historic Preservation Commission:

1. Find that the designation of a historic resource is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Section 15308, Class 8 pertaining to Actions by Regulatory Agencies for Protection of the Environment such as designation of historic resources;
2. Find that the original 1928-1929 multi-family residential complex, historically known as Norman Villa, at 73-87 ½ N. Catalina Avenue meets Criterion "C" for designation as a landmark pursuant to Pasadena Municipal Code (PMC) Section 17.62.040(D)(2) because it embodies the distinctive characteristics of a locally significant property type, architectural style and period.
3. Recommend that the City Council approve the designation of the Norman Villa at 73-87 ½ North Catalina Avenue as a Landmark.

BACKGROUND:

On March 15, 2022, property owner Sandra Avila, on behalf of the Norman Villa Homeowner's Association, submitted an application for Landmark Designation of the multi-family residential complex located at 73-87 ½ North Catalina Avenue (Norman Villa). City staff evaluated the property according to the criteria in Title 17 of the PMC and determined that the building qualifies as a landmark.

DESCRIPTION:

Property Data

- Address: 73-87 ½ N. Catalina Avenue (AIN: 5738-003-073)
- Location: West side of North Catalina Avenue, approximately mid-block between Union Street to the north and East Colorado Boulevard to the south.
- Date of Start of Construction: 1928 (source: Southwest Builder and Contractor)
- Date of Construction Completion: ca. 1928 (source: 1928 Sanborn Map)
- Period of Significance: 1928 (beginning of construction)
- Original Architect: Walter Sidney Orme (source: Original Building Permit)
- Original Builder/Contractor: A.S. O'Neil Construction Company, Inc. (Source: Original Building Permit)
- Original / Present Use: Multi-Family Residential Apartments/Condominiums
- Property size: 18,057 square feet (source: County Assessor)
- Building size: approximately 3,250 square feet each (source: Building Description Blanks)

Architectural Description:

The Neighborhood

The current surrounding neighborhood includes a two-story Greene and Greene-designed single-family residence constructed in 1905 that is currently used as a commercial office immediately to the south and a two-story-over garage condominium complex constructed in 1982 immediately to the north. The context across the street includes two- to three-story multi-family residential complexes.

The Site

The property is located on a rectangular lot on the west side of North Catalina Avenue, at the northern portion of the block bounded by East Union Street to the north and East Colorado Boulevard to the south. The property consists of two two-story multi-family residential buildings that sit at the north and south sides of the property respectively, and a one-story garage structure to the west (rear) of the site.

The site is slightly raised above the street and sidewalk levels but is relatively flat with a landscaped front yard setback of approximately 15 feet from the east property line. The north building sits set back from the north property line by approximately 11 feet and the south building sits set back from the south property line by approximately 15 feet. A driveway is located within the southern 15-foot setback. The west side of the property, the rear, is paved and includes a one-story multi-car garage structure. The buildings are separated by a linear landscaped courtyard that runs east to west and spans approximately 25 feet in width and 127 feet in length.

Exterior Features of the Buildings

Both buildings are two-stories in height and are designed in the Tudor Revival architectural style. Constructed in 1928-1929, the multi-unit residential buildings were designed by local Southern California architect W. Sidney Orme, who was also the original owner of the property. The massing of both buildings is composed of two-story generally rectangular volumes with steeply sloping gabled-roof forms facing N. Catalina Avenue and the rear of the property. Steeply pitched cross gables are located at the eastern volumes of each building. The buildings are clad in stucco and half-timbering can be found at the second floors within the cross gabled area(s), some of which project slightly from the main building volume at the second floor and have a row of sculpted wood corbels beneath. The roof forms are finished in brown composition shingles.

The north façade of the southern building and south façade of the northern building are comprised of individual raised entries at the ground floor for each unit off of the central courtyard consisting of concrete stairs, landings, and shed- or gable-roofed porch coverings finished in brown composition shingles. Fenestration at these facades generally consists of regularized rectangular punched openings with double multi-lite casement windows that appear to have original wood sashes. Entry doors are solid with a small, rectangular centralized glazed opening at head height. A smaller dormer with half timbering and steeply sloping pitch can be found near the center of each façade. A pair of larger dormers with half timbering and steeply sloping pitches are located near the west end of each building facing onto the central courtyard.

The north façade of the north building and south façade of the south building, both facing the central courtyard, are similar in design and composition. Each façade contains four bay windows at the first floor that each correspond to or extend spaces across two units. The bay windows are finished in the same stucco found elsewhere on each building and have four punched openings at the face of each bay with similar wood sash windows found elsewhere on the buildings. The bays are capped with fairly steeply sloped roofs finished in composition shingles.

The east and west facades of each building, facing the street and rear of the property, are simple in composition and include limited punched openings with similar wood sash casement windows found elsewhere on the buildings and a front-facing steeply pitched gabled roof form at each end. The facades are finished in the same stucco found elsewhere. Notably, there are no residential unit entries on the street-facing facades.

The one-story garage structure at the west side of the lot runs north-south and is a simple vernacular structure. Based on the 1910-1928 Sanborn Maps, the garage appears to have been constructed at the same time as the residential buildings. The garage is finished in stucco at the exterior facades and includes twelve pairs of carriage doors at the east façade. The roof is finished with a simple parapet capped with red clay tile coping.

The site also consists of a central linear courtyard that runs east to west. The courtyard is comprised of concrete pedestrian walkways along the fronts of the buildings which connect to the street. Grass makes up the majority of the courtyard and at the west (rear) end of the courtyard is a water feature, additional landscaping and a decorative archway with iron gates and capped with sloped roofs finished in brown composition shingles flanking the courtyard. The gateways lead to the driveway and garages beyond. The water feature and decorative archways

were part of the original construction, as was the sign at the front of the property that reads “Norman Villa, 73-87 ½.” In general, their character appears Mediterranean rather than Tudor.

Documented Changes to the Property

The exteriors of both residential buildings at the subject property remain largely intact and retain significant character-defining features. However, the buildings have undergone some alterations including re-roofing using composition shingles at an unknown early date and again in 1956. The garage structure was re-covered in gray crushed rock at the roof and the tiles were replaced along the edges of the garage roof. Various electrical and plumbing permits were filed with the City since construction, however these scopes of work did not affect the exterior of the buildings. Upon visual inspection, both buildings appear to have also undergone minor window replacements in original openings on secondary facades, including the north façade of the north building and the south façade of the south building. These changes include replacement materials such as vinyl and painted aluminum or metal and casement, double hung or jalousie operations.

Current Conditions, Use, and Proposed Plans

The exteriors of the buildings are largely intact as evidenced by historical aerials and inspection of current conditions. The buildings remain in good condition. The buildings have remained in use as a multi-family residential complex, which was its original use. It is unknown when the units were converted from rental apartments to condominiums. There is no current proposed project for the site.

Historical Overview:

Tudor Revival Architecture¹

Tudor Revival is used to describe residences that display half-timbering at exterior facades. The style draws influence from early 16th century English architecture, although most homes were inspired by building techniques from the Elizabethan era. The style began to appear in Pasadena in the 1910s and was typically used for single family residences and larger estates. However, by the 1920s, the style began to be utilized by developers wanting to incorporate more decorative styles into multi-family residential developments to attract buyers and tenants looking for affordable housing options.

Tudor Revival homes typically feature decorative timbers, including half-timbering, which reference medieval building techniques. Half-timbering in Tudor Revival homes usually is combined with stucco or patterned brick in between the timbers. Other common features of Tudor Revival homes include steeply pitched side gabled roof forms, facades dominated by one or more prominent front-facing gables, and windows usually in multiple groups with multi-pane glazing. Examples of Tudor Revival residences in Pasadena include 880 La Loma Road (1915, Marston & Van Pelt), 160 South San Rafael Avenue (1923, Paul Williams); and 141 North Grand Avenue (1922).

¹ Residential Period Revival Architecture and Development in Pasadena from 1915 – 1942, page 33.

Character-defining features of the Tudor Revival architectural style include:

- Asymmetrical facades
- One to two-story massing
- Steeply pitched gabled roof forms
- Single- and multi-pane wood sash windows in casement and/or double hung operations
- Decorative half-timbering
- Stucco or brick finished exterior between the half-timbering

Multi-Family Residential Development²

The introduction of multi-family residential developments in Pasadena began in the early part of the twentieth century. Multi-family residential development allowed speculator-developers to construct denser residences to provide affordable housing options to those who were not otherwise able to afford to construct their own detached single-family homes. Developments such as the Bungalow/Cottage Courtyard, Garden Apartment, and larger multi-family apartment buildings provided affordable housing options and often incorporated features from high-style designs and various landscape and open space amenities to attract potential buyers or tenants.

Character-defining features of garden apartment buildings and complexes include:

- Small-scale multi-family development
- U or L shaped plan
- Emphasis on landscape
- Auxiliary parking structure (garage or carport)

W. Sidney Orme³

Walter Sidney Orme (W. Sidney Orme) was born in Osage County, Kansas in 1887. He practiced architecture throughout Kansas for most of his life and career until he and his family moved to Los Angeles in the late 1920s. Upon arriving to California, Orme and his family settled in Pasadena and developed the subject property as his primary residence. Upon completion, Orme resided at 73 ½ N. Catalina Avenue and appears to have rented out the other residential units. Orme established his own firm in southern California and was commissioned for various projects throughout the area, including the City of Hawthorne's City Hall #2 (1935), the Vernon Avenue Congregational Church in Los Angeles (1927), and a Streamline Moderne Duplex at 803 N. Mansfield in Los Angeles (1937). Various advertisements found in the Los Angeles Times indicate that he also partnered with local construction companies (such as Quality Construction Company) to offer services to help prospective developers design and execute new construction projects. While Orme appears to have had a significant architectural presence in the larger Los Angeles area, the extent of his works in Pasadena is unknown beyond the subject property and he does not appear to have influenced local stylistic trends such that he would be considered a master architect.

ANALYSIS:

² Architectural/Historical Development of the City of Pasadena, Historic Context/Property Type Report, page 56-57

³ "W. Sidney Orme, Architect," Pacific Coast Architecture Database (PCAD), accessed 16 March 2022.

The Norman Villa at 73-87 ½ N. Catalina Avenue are eligible for designation as a landmark under Criterion C of PMC Section 17.62.040.D.2, which states:

[The property] embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, architectural style, period, or method of construction, or represents the work of an architect, designer, engineer, or builder whose work is of significance to the City or possesses artistic values of significance to the City.

Generally, in order to qualify under Criterion C, a property type would display most of the character-defining features of its style. It must retain integrity of design, materials, and workmanship that convey its period of construction. While most buildings undergo physical alterations over time, these alterations should not significantly change the historic appearance of the building.

Under Criterion C, the Norman Villa complex is significant because it is a locally significant, intact example of the Tudor Revival architectural style. The buildings retain a high level of architectural integrity (its ability to demonstrate why it is significant) through its location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association as follows:

- Location: The buildings and other site features are in their original locations.
- Design: The buildings retain their original form, massing and exterior configuration. The building retains clearly discernable character-defining features of the Tudor Revival style, including half-timbering, steeply pitched roof forms, and multi-pane wood sash windows. Although the roof materials have been replaced, the current materials do not detract from the original design intent of the buildings.
- Setting: At the time of the building's construction, the block of North Catalina Avenue between Colorado Boulevard and what is now Union Street was comprised of numerous single-family and multi-family residences, some of which remain, including a bungalow court apartment across the street at 48 N. Catalina Avenue. However, the majority of the setting has changed since the original development of the property. Many residences that were constructed around the same time as the property or shortly after have mostly been re-developed with modern in-fill multi-family complexes that do not maintain the historical setting. Therefore, the subject property does not retain integrity of setting. However, this does not preclude the property from maintaining or illustrating its historical significance as a Tudor Revival style garden apartment complex.
- Materials: The building is composed of finished stucco, wood sash windows, and half-timbering. These materials remain extant today.
- Workmanship: The buildings retain a significant amount of their original exterior finishes, and retain their overall form and high-level of design reflective of the Tudor Revival style. Minimal changes have occurred to the buildings that have impacted the original construction and unique architectural style. The building's workmanship remains intact.

- Feeling: The building retains significant integrity criteria, and therefore still evokes the feeling of a Tudor Revival residential complex.
- Association: The Norman Villa buildings retain integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, and feeling, and therefore, continues to convey its association with garden apartment style multi-family development in Pasadena, which gained traction in the 1920s and 1930s.

Based on the above, the multi-family residential buildings that comprise Norman Villa exhibit many of the features often found in Tudor Revival architecture including prominent decorative half-timbering, stucco finishes between the half-timbering, steeply pitched roof forms, and multi-pane glazed window groupings. Designed by W. Sidney Orme, the Norman Villa represents a uniquely designed multi-family residential complex illustrative of the Tudor Revival style. The Norman Villa buildings retain sufficient integrity to qualify for designation as a landmark under Criterion C as a prime example of an architectural style, Tudor Revival, and of a multi-family garden apartment residential development. The period of significance for the Norman Villa buildings is 1928-1929, when construction began and concluded. The contributing features to this designation include the buildings themselves, the central courtyard, the street-facing address sign, and the fountain and archways at the west end of the buildings. The detached multi-car garage at the west end of the lot also contributes to the significance of the site.

CHARACTER-DEFINING FEATURES OF 73-87 ½ N. CATALINA AVE:

- Orientation of buildings at the north and south sides of the property
- “Norman Villa” street-facing address sign
- Central landscaped and hardscaped courtyard
- Asymmetrical primary facades facing the central courtyard
- Fountain and archways at west end that connect the buildings
- Two-story massing
- Front-facing gables along N. Catalina Avenue
- Steeply sloped cross-gable roof at the north and south facades
- Multi-pane glazed wood sash windows in casement and/or fixed orientations facing the courtyards
- Single-pane wood sash double hung and casement windows on all other facades
- Decorative half-timbering
- Stucco finished exterior between the half-timbering
- Raised primary entries with original entry doors and pitched projecting awnings above
- Wrought iron railings at entries and gates
- Square bay windows at secondary facades

CONCLUSION:

The multi-family residential complex located at 73-87 ½ N. Catalina Avenue qualifies for designation as a landmark under Criterion C as an intact, locally significant example of the Tudor Revival Style applied to a multi-family garden apartment complex.

Respectfully Submitted,



for David M. Reyes
Director of Planning & Community
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Attachments:

- A. Application & Supplemental Research
- B. Vicinity & 1938, 1944 and Present Day Aerial Maps
- C. Original Tract Map and Current Parcel Map
- D. Sanborn Maps
- E. Building Permit Records
- F. Building Description Blanks
- G. Current Photographs
- H. Effects of Historic Designation