



## PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

### STAFF REPORT

**DATE:** OCTOBER 18, 2022

**TO:** HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

**FROM:** JENNIFER PAIGE, AICP, ACTING DIRECTOR OF PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

**SUBJECT:** APPLICATION FOR DESIGNATION AS A LANDMARK  
673 SOUTH LOS ROBLES AVENUE (JAMES L. LEE HOUSE)

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#### 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 single-family residence and detached carriage house at 673 South Los Robles Avenue, historically known as the James L. Lee House, meet Criterion "C" for designation as a landmark pursuant to Pasadena Municipal Code (PMC) Section 17.62.040.D.2 because they embody the distinctive characteristics of a historic resource property type, period, and architectural style. The house is a Folk Victorian house with Queen Anne detailing with a detached carriage house, both from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century;
3. Recommend that the City Council approve the designation of the property located at 673 South Los Robles Avenue as a Landmark.

#### BACKGROUND:

On March 30, 2021, property owner Joseph Flores submitted an application for Landmark Designation of the single-family residence located at 673 South Los Robles Avenue. City staff evaluated the property according to the criteria in Title 17 of the PMC and determined that the building qualifies as a landmark under Criterion C as an intact example of Folk Victorian

residential architecture with Queen Anne detailing and a detached carriage house, and as an increasingly rare example of buildings constructed in the late 1800s. The property has previously been surveyed as eligible for individual listing in the National Register of Historic Places and as a contributor to the eligible Madison Heights Landmark District.

## **DESCRIPTION:**

### Property Data

- Address: 673 South Los Robles Avenue (AIN: 5720-030-015)
- Location: West side of South Los Robles Avenue, approximately mid-block between East California Boulevard to the north and Fillmore Street to the south
- Date of Start of Construction: No record on file
- Date of Construction Completion: ca. 1895 (source: Building Description Blank)
- Period of Significance: ca. 1895 (original construction)
- Original Architect: No record on file
- Original Builder: No record on file
- Original Owner: James L. Lee (Source: 1902 Assessor Map Field Book No. 3)
- Original / Present Use: Single-family residence
- Property size: 12,219 square feet (source: County Assessor)
- Building size: 1,778 square feet (original house; source: County Assessor, 2020); 2,618 square feet (source: building permits, after 2021 addition)

## **Architectural Description:**

### The Site

The property is located on a relatively flat rectangular-shaped lot on the west side of South Los Robles Avenue, approximately mid-block between East California Boulevard to the north and Fillmore Street to the south; to the immediate west of the property is Langford Alley. The house is located within a single-family zoning district (RS-6), with an existing surrounding context of single-family residences to the north, east, south and west. To the immediate north of the subject property is a Vernacular Hipped Cottage, constructed ca. 1905. To the immediate south is a two-story Prairie Style residence, constructed in 1914. To the east, across South Los Robles Avenue are two California Bungalows, constructed in 1909 and 1910. To the west, and across Langford Alley, is a gabled vernacular single-family residence constructed in 1949, and a California Bungalow constructed in 1916.

The property was subdivided as part of the Langford Subdivision (Block A of C.E. Langford's Subdivision), whose proprietor was Maria Langford, who resided nearby at 627 South Euclid Avenue. The total lot size is approximately 66 feet wide, and 185 feet in depth. The house is sited within the property to have an approximately 25-foot wide south side yard setback, a 12-foot north side yard setback, and a 30-foot front yard setback.

The front yard of the property features a low cobblestone retaining wall, a Hollywood driveway, and concrete walkways and steps aligned with the front entry. Several mature trees exist on the property along with new plantings. An original 1-1/2-story carriage house is located at the northwest corner of the rear yard.

### Exterior Features of the Buildings

This two-story single-family residence is an excellent, intact, example of a Folk Victorian house with Queen Anne style architectural detailing. The hybridized style house is of the “Free Classic” Queen Anne subtype style due to its classical Doric columns and square peg balusters, and it is of the “Gable Front and Wing” Folk Victorian subtype due to the configuration of the upper floor massing.

The house features a full-width front porch with classical tapered Doric columns and simple square peg porch balusters. The square peg balusters can also be found at the Juliette balcony of the front-facing dormer, and the north side gable. A hipped roof caps the first floor, before transitioning into the upper floor which is capped by a steeply-pitched cross gable roof. The asymmetrical front facade also features a bay window, with a full-height bay also found at the south elevation gable, and another bay located at the north-facing gable of the upper floor. The house also features multi-textured walls consisting of a Rustic-V siding at the first floor before transitioning to hexagonal wood shingles at the upper floor; the Rustic-V siding also wraps the boxed piers at the base of the porch columns. The front and south gable ends also feature vertical bead board siding in addition to the hexagonal shingles. The eaves are fully enclosed, and vertically-elongated and curving corbels adorn the front-facing gables. Double-hung wood windows are located throughout the house, with a divided lite hopper window located at the north end of the front façade within the front porch, as well as a picture window with divided lite transom located at the front of the porch bay window. Arroyo stone clads the exposed foundation wall, capped by a simple wood waterboard. Arroyo stone piers can also be found flanking the concrete steps leading to the front porch. An original 1-1/2 story carriage house is located at the northwest of the rear yard. The carriage house has a side-gabled roof with a single shed-roof dormer with a pair of multi-lite wood windows, is clad in matching Rustic-V siding and features a barn-style sliding door as well as a non-original roll-up door.

### Documented Changes to the Property

The house and carriage house retain integrity, as outlined further below. However, the building and grounds have undergone several minor alterations including the following:

- Partial demolition of non-original rear additions, including an enclosed rear porch, were removed for a two-story 840 square foot rear addition constructed in 2021.
- The openings to the original carriage house have been altered and its doors have been replaced.
- Attached appurtenant structures (indicated by the Sanborn Maps) to the carriage house have been removed.
- An original detached building (possibly the original outhouse) located directly to the rear of the house has been removed.
- The wood shake roof has been replaced with composition shingles.
- New property walls, fencing, and landscaping have been installed as part of the 2021 addition.
- A non-original wood pergola is attached to the south elevation of the house.

### Current Conditions, Use, and Proposed Plans

The house was originally constructed as a single-family residence as the retirement home of James L. Lee, and has remained in use as a single-family residence to the present day. The house was sold in 2020 to new owners, who intend to continue its use as a single-family residence. The owner has also concurrently applied for inclusion in the City's Mills Act program.

### **Historical Overview:**

#### Pasadena in the Late 19<sup>th</sup> Century<sup>1</sup>

The real estate and development boom of the 1800s transformed Pasadena from an agricultural community into a growing resort town with an expanding year-round and seasonal population. It was during this decade that the City incorporated on June 19, 1886. The transition from agricultural community to resort town was made possible by the new railroad system that connected Los Angeles, and Pasadena, to the Midwest and East Coast, allowing an influx of wealthy seasonal and year-round residents that heralded from out-of-state. Nationally, the boom period of the 1880s ended in 1888, resulting in an economic depression that lasted through the late 1890s. However, Pasadena as a whole managed to weather the economic downturn and continued to show signs of growth, in part due to the influx of wealthy residents choosing to reside year round. The continued growth of the City in the 1890s resulted in the founding of California Institute of Technology in 1891, the founding of the Tournament of Roses in 1890, and the formation of the Pasadena and Los Angeles Electric Railroad in 1894, which brought connecting streetcar lines to the City from Los Angeles.

#### Residential Architecture in Pasadena (1883-1904)<sup>2</sup>:

Residential architecture in Pasadena of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries evoked the zeitgeist of national trends alongside local phenomena including the availability of materials, advancements in technology, and the influence of European, Midwest and East Coast architectural styles that were promoted by European-trained American architects, and wealthy American transplants. Advancement in building construction technologies such as the balloon frame, led to the development of new architectural styles that were distinctly American, or influenced by the European architecture, with an American translation. Balloon frame construction which grew out of the advancement of the mechanization of the Industrial Revolution and the mass production of nails, windows, doors, decorative details, and milled lumber, allowed for faster construction and, importantly, more complex building forms. Also during this time, Pasadena became a localized hub of building trades resulting in several lumber yards, brick manufacturers, and planing mills being established within the City.

In Pasadena, there were two categories of residential architecture: high-style and vernacular. According to the "Late 19<sup>th</sup> and Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Development and Architecture in Pasadena" context statement, "Vernacular houses were relatively simple in style, and were constructed out of pragmatism, without any conscious attempt to mimic current architectural fashion. In contrast, high-style houses were often created by trained architects and builders, with the style stemming from a commonality of shared, basic characteristics that mark historic architectural

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<sup>1</sup> Late 19<sup>th</sup> and Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Development and Architecture in Pasadena; pp. 5-9

<sup>2</sup> Late 19<sup>th</sup> and Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Development and Architecture in Pasadena; pp. 10-13

periods.” As a result, of this transformative development of housing typology that was typically rooted in European style overlaid with American and regionalistic design parameters, many houses of style were hybrids, incorporating elements of two or more architectural styles.

Together with these advancements in building technologies, the proliferation of localized and readily available building materials, European and transcontinental stylistic influences, and the increasing accessibility of how-to designs found in architectural pattern books, the residential architecture of this period began to reflect broader trends of the Victorian Era including Queen Anne, Eastlake, Stick, Second Empire, Shingle, and Folk Victorian architectural styles.

### Victorian Architecture<sup>3,4</sup>

Relative to American architectural history, the Victorian era refers to the architectural styles that grew from the last decades of Britain’s Queen Elizabeth’s reign, particularly the period of 1860 to 1900. During this time in Pasadena, there was uncommonly high demand for high-style residential architecture and the style iterations of the Victorian Era, in part due to the influx of wealthy residents.

According to the “Late 19th and Early 20th Century Development and Architecture in Pasadena” context statement, “the Queen Anne style was developed by Scottish architect Richard Norman Shaw, which referenced medieval building forms with dramatic, steeply-pitched gabled roofs, asymmetrical plans, and multi-textured walls, multi-colored walls” (p. 13). Furthermore, there are four common subtypes of this style pertaining to decorative architectural detailing, including Spindework, Free Classic, Half-timbered, and Patterned Masonry (McAlester, pp. 345-346).

The Folk Victorian style was developed as a low-cost housing solution consisting of simplified rectangular or L-shaped forms, modeled after the Folk House style, and facades adorned with decorative, often off-the-shelf detailing reflective of Victorian Era aesthetics and new woodcraft available from burgeoning technologies. Identifying features of this house style include porches with spindework, patterned trim, and cornice line brackets. There are five subtypes of the Folk Victorian, and with the exception of the Gabled Front and Wing subtype, all are typically symmetrical in nature. The remaining four subtypes are: Front-Gabled Roof; Side-Gabled Roof, One-Story; Side-Gabled Roof, Two-Story; and Pyramidal (McAlester, pp 397-98).

### The James L. Lee House

The James L. Lee house exhibits a hybridized Victorian-era architecture consisting of the Folk Victorian style in form, superimposed with Queen Anne style detailing. The original volumetric patterning of the house consists of a square ground floor with hipped roof that transitions into the second floor which is capped by a steeply-pitched cross-gable roof, evocative of Folk Victorian massing. Additional identifiers of Folk Victorian style found on the house include the decorative corbels at the front gables, and the full-width front porch. Queen Anne identifiers found on the house include the classical Doric columns at the front porch, the simple square peg balusters found at the porch and balcony railings, the varied wall texture of the Rustic-V siding at the first floor and the hexagonal shingles at the upper floor, the protruding bay window volumes, the steep pitch of the upper floor gables, the asymmetrical composition of windows

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<sup>3</sup> Late 19<sup>th</sup> and Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Development and Architecture in Pasadena; pp. 13

<sup>4</sup> A Field Guide to American Houses, McAlester; pp. 345-346; 397-398

and the upper floor massing, and the front-facing dormer. Given that the house has Doric columns, and squared balusters, along with its upper-floor composition, the James L. Lee House evokes the stylings of the Queen Anne “Free Classic” subtype, and the Folk Victorian “Gable Front and Wing” subtype.

#### Character-Defining Features of the James L. Lee House

The residence at 673 South Los Robles Avenue retains significant character-defining features reflective of its hybridized Folk Victorian and Queen Anne architecture. These character-defining features include:

- Rustic-V siding at the ground floor and octagonal wood shake siding at the upper level.
- Full-width front porch and asymmetrical plan.
- Projecting window bays and gabled dormer.
- Double-hung wood windows and wood casement trim with octagonal apron blocks.
- Front gable corbels.
- Arroyo stone foundation wall and piers flanking the front porch steps.
- Square post peg balusters at the front porch and balconies, and tapered Doric porch columns.
- Original detached rear yard carriage house.

#### **ANALYSIS:**

The hybrid Folk Victorian and Queen Anne style single-family residence located at 673 South Los Robles Avenue, also known as the James L. Lee house, and its associated carriage house, 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 single-family residence located at 673 South Los Robles Avenue is significant because it is a locally significant, intact example of a hybridized high-style residence consisting of Folk Victorian and Queen Anne architectural styles, and an increasingly rare example of a pre-20<sup>th</sup> century structure that is original to the City, and in its original location. The building was previously evaluated as eligible for individual listing in the National Register of Historic Places and as a contributor to the eligible, non-designated Madison Heights Landmark District. The property has a high level of architectural integrity (its ability to demonstrate why it is significant) through its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association as follows:

- Location: The single-family residence and original detached carriage house are in their original locations. Thus the location remains intact.
- Design: The building retains its original form, massing and exterior configuration along its primary front and side facades. Though a two-story addition was constructed in 2021 at the rear of the house, the new construction was designed to be compatible and subservient to the original house, leaving the front portions of the side elevations intact; no alterations were executed to the front of the house, most of its sides or to its original form. Furthermore, the primary structure retains clearly discernable character-defining features of the Folk Victorian and Queen Anne architectural styles, including its multi-gabled roof, full-width front porch, multi-textured walls, corbels, classical Doric columns, square peg balusters, asymmetrical plan, Arroyo stone foundation walls, and double-hung wood windows. Thus the design remains intact.
- Setting: The property was developed during the transitional period of the late 1800s, towards the end of the Victorian era, and the progression towards the Arts and Crafts Period. The house was also one of the first developed properties of the Langford Tract, as evidenced by the earliest Sanborn Map of 1910. Additionally, the property and its extant structures are reflective of the transitional period of Pasadena from an agricultural and tourist community to a year-round residential city, brought on by a confluence of factors including connecting rail roads, real estate boosterism of residential property, locally expanding industries, and salubrious weather. Like this property, this particular block of South Los Robles Avenue was developed as a single-family residential neighborhood, and remains single-family residential in nature today. Thus the setting remains intact.
- Materials: The residence is composed of Rustic-V wood siding at the base, octagonal shake shingles at the upper floor, Arroyo stone foundation walls, double-hung, fixed and hopper wood windows, wood balustrades and wood Doric columns. These materials are original, and remain extant today. Therefore, the materials are intact.
- Workmanship: The residence retains nearly all of its original exterior finishes, and retains its overall building form visible from the street. Though the architect and builder of this house are unknown, it is an excellent example of high-style residential architecture from the 1800s, and reflects a superior craftsmanship brought on by the local phenomenon of an expanding craftsman construction trade, increasing availability of lumber, and local wood mills during the late 1800s. With the quality of the house's craftsmanship evidenced by the carefully-detailed wood exterior still existing, the workmanship remains intact.
- Feeling: The property retains significant criteria of integrity, and therefore still evokes the feeling of Pasadena's late 1800s transition to a year-round single-family residential community along with the characteristics of the Folk Victorian and Queen Anne architectural styles. Therefore, the feeling is intact.
- Association: The single-family property at 673 South Los Robles Avenue retains its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, and feeling, and therefore, continues to convey its association with transitional period of the Late 1800s and evoke

the characteristics of the Folk Victorian and Queen Anne architectural styles. Therefore, its association remains intact.

Based on the above, the single-family residential property, including the primary residence and original carriage house, known as the James L. Lee House, retains sufficient integrity to qualify for designation as a landmark under Criterion C as a prime example of a high-style hybridized residential design consisting of the Folk Victorian and Queen Anne architectural styles, and it is an increasingly rare extant structure from the 1800s reflective of the City's transitional period during that time.

The period of significance for the property is ca. 1895, its original date of construction. The contributing features to this designation include the two-story single-family residence, and the original detached rear yard carriage house. Other features of the site, including stone and concrete retaining walls, steps, pathways, driveway and landscaping are newer features and are therefore non-contributing.

**CONCLUSION:**

The single-family residence and carriage house located at 673 South Los Robles Avenue, known as the James L. Lee House, qualifies for designation as a landmark under Criterion C as an intact, locally significant example of a Folk Victorian single-family residence with Queen Anne detailing, and as an increasingly rare extant 19<sup>th</sup> century structure reflective of the City's transitional development of the late 1800s.

Respectfully Submitted,



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for Jennifer Paige, AICP  
Acting Director of Planning & Community  
Development Department

Prepared by:



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Edwar Sissi  
Planner

Reviewed by:



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Kevin Johnson  
Principal Planner

Attachments:

- A. Landmark Application
- B. Vicinity & Aerial Maps
- C. Tract Map, Assessor Field Notes, and Current Parcel Map
- D. Sanborn Maps
- E. Building Description Blanks & Archive Building Permit Records
- F. Current Photographs
- G. James L. Lee Obituary & Historical Documentation
- H. Effects of Historic Designation