

M E M O R A N D U M

**PLANNING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
CITY OF SANTA MONICA
PLANNING DIVISION**

DATE: April 8, 2019
TO: The Honorable Landmarks Commission
FROM: Planning Staff
SUBJECT: **909-911 Montana Avenue, 19ENT-0050**

Consideration of Certificate of Appropriateness 19ENT-0050 for design approval of a one-story addition to an existing commercial building, and alterations to the residential portion of the property, including but not limited to demolition to accommodate two new parking spaces, window rehabilitation, stucco siding repair and building repaint, landscape, hardscape, and site lighting improvements at the subject residential and commercial courtyard complex, a designated City Landmark

APPLICANT: Howard Laks Architects
PROPERTY OWNER: Jeff Appel/United El Segundo, Inc.

INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

Proposed is the rehabilitation of a designated City Landmark, the former Mont Mar Apartments, consisting of a one-story addition to the front commercial building, demolition of portions of the easterly residential building to accommodate two new parking spaces, minor rehabilitation of the residential buildings, and alterations to the existing courtyard and landscaping. The subject parcel is comprised of three separate buildings: two one-to two-story multi-family residential buildings surrounding a central courtyard and a small one-story commercial building at the front of the courtyard facing Montana Avenue.

On June 12, 2017, the Landmarks Commission designated the three buildings on the site including the parcel as a rare 1940s courtyard apartment/commercial complex property type in Santa Monica. The designation recognized the site for its significance in representing the mixed-use development that started in the 1940s and continued into the 1950s within the Wilshire Montana/North of Montana neighborhoods, particularly along Montana Avenue, and for its unique hybrid of Spanish Colonial Revival and Streamline Moderne architectural styles. The designation specifically identified the following elements as its historic character-defining features:

- Overall symmetry and “U” shaped courtyard configuration with open stairs
- Streamline Moderne elements including:

- Stepped massing
- Curved corners, porch canopies, and pipe railings
- Horizontal speed lines
- Metal pipe support columns with intersecting disks

In specific regards to the small commercial building at the front of the courtyard, the following historic character-defining features were identified:

- Curved corners of the wall consisting of glass block
- Bulkhead tile in a triangular pattern
- Overall incorporation and placement at the front of the courtyard apartments

In 2017, the property was granted a Mills Act contract with the City consisting of a 10-year rehabilitation/restoration plan and an ongoing maintenance plan. The architect's report described the building as being in good condition with concerns regarding the site walls and stairs at the sidewalk that are in need of replacement. Exterior doors, windows, and finishes of all buildings were identified as in need of repair. With the exception of the proposed addition to the commercial building, the proposed scope of work is consistent with tasks identified in the rehabilitation plan set forth in the property's Mills Act contract.

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

The project is categorically exempt from the provisions of California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Section 15331, Class 31 of the State Implementation Guidelines in that the project consists of a building addition and site improvements which will be done in a manner consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitating, Restoring, and Reconstructing Historic Buildings (1995), Weeks and Grimmer.

PUBLIC NOTIFICATION

Notice of this hearing was provided as required by Section 9.56.170(c) of the Landmarks Ordinance, with notice sent to all owners and occupants within a 300-foot radius and a newspaper notice published in the Santa Monica Daily Press at least 10 days prior to the hearing (Attachment A).

PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The proposed project involves the rehabilitation of and improvements to a designated City Landmark, the former Mont Mar Apartments. The scope of work includes a 700 square foot addition to the one-story front commercial building, demolition of a storage room and portions of two units on the east elevation of the easterly residential building to accommodate two parking spaces required for the commercial addition, and alterations to the courtyard and landscaping.

As further outlined on the proposed plans, the scope of work includes the following:

- Construction of a one-story addition to the front commercial building. The addition will be U-shaped and connected to the secondary west, north, and east elevations. The addition will be setback approximately 6.5 feet from the front (south) elevation and is slightly lower in building height with the existing commercial building. The addition would consist of exterior walls clad in stucco and its front (south) facing elevations will have an aluminum storefront with a singular piece of curved glass on both sides. The addition will require the removal of the courtyard lawn area, concrete breeze block screen walls, both sets of stairs to the east and west of the building, and a palm tree to the west of the commercial building.
- Demolition of a 27 square foot storage room and 80 square feet of two existing residential units on the east elevation of the easterly residential building totaling 107 square feet. These areas will be utilized to accommodate two new parking spaces required by the commercial addition. Both will be accessed from the side alley (9th Court).
- Alterations to the existing courtyard will include the removal of the lawn area immediately north of the commercial building (as mentioned above) and the replacement of the poured concrete patio surrounded by a contemporary brick stem wall with new hardscape consisting of star and cross matte terra cotta. A water feature/fountain in the center of the new patio is proposed. Walkway paving would consist of integral colored concrete paving.
- New replacement concrete stairs (natural color) east and west of the commercial building will be relocated closer to both residential buildings, respectively, to provide access into the courtyard from the street. New brushed aluminum handrails are proposed. Two outdoor dining areas (68 SF each) are designed adjacent to the sidewalk that would provide potential seating for future commercial tenants that would help activate the sidewalk in front of the property.
- New landscaping along the south elevations of the residential buildings will consist of drought-tolerant low-growth plants and trees (Kentia Palms). The courtyard plantings will include Pink Trumpet Trees and low-lying plants in rectangular concrete planters.
- New lighting will include in-ground uplights on either side of the commercial building and wall-mounted fixtures adjacent to each unit entry and at the new rear (north) entry of the addition. Path lights will also be included along the east and west concrete paths through the courtyard and step lights will illuminate the stairs to the second floor units. Tree uplights along the south elevation and within the courtyard will also be installed.
- Exterior walls of the two residential buildings are clad in textured stucco. The stucco appears to be in generally good condition, with some areas of cracking and

in need of repair. The proposed work includes patching and sealing of the damaged areas.

- The two residential buildings both have brick water tables along the front (south) and courtyard elevations. The scope of work includes removal of the brick “water tables”.
- Exterior walls of the commercial building are clad in textured stucco, which appears to be in good condition, with the addition of decorative tile wainscot on the west, south, and east elevations. The proposed work includes replacing broken, cracked, and missing tiles and tile caps in-kind, and patching and sealing grout. The west, north, and east elevations would be altered in order to accommodate the addition, as described above.
- Windows on both residential buildings include wood two-over-two hung speedline sash windows, wood casements windows, and replacement one-over-one hung wood windows, which are all in generally good condition. The proposed project includes repairing and rehangng existing windows as necessary to improve operability. Loose and flaking paint would be removed from frames and sashes, and original hardware is to be repaired or replaced in-kind.
- Both residential buildings have low-slope flat roofs with multi-layer roofing material and parapets clad in terra cotta Mission tiles. Roofs are generally in good condition and no work is proposed. At the parapet, damaged or missing tiles would be replaced in-kind as necessary.
- Existing exterior walls and new proposed walls painted off white (Benjamin Moore Simply White OC-117) and window trim painted light green (Benjamin Moore Light Pistachio 2034-60).

Consistency with the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards

The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards defines rehabilitation as “[t]he act or process of making possible a compatible use for a property through repair, alterations, and additions while preserving those portions or features which convey its historical, cultural, or architectural values”. Staff has analyzed the proposed project for consistency with the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation and believes that execution of the proposed project scope, as conditioned, will be performed in a sensitive manner that is consistent with the Standards.

Consistent with Rehabilitation Standard 2 which states “the historic character of a property will be retained and preserved” in that the demolition of the storage room and portions of the two existing residential units would not alter the building’s character-defining features as the alteration is limited to the rear portion of the building. The building wall replacement at the east elevation would be finished consistent with the existing historic stucco. Additionally, the removal of the non-original brick “water tables” at the residential buildings, breeze block screen walls at the stair entries, and front palm tree

would not alter the historic features of the property. The proposed building (off-white) and trim (light green) colors would be appropriate for the architectural style of the building.

Additionally, in conformance with Standard 2, the proposed alterations to the courtyard would retain the historic character of the subject property. While smaller in size, the reconfigured courtyard would maintain its sense of place as a gathering space for the residents. The landscape and hardscape alterations would enhance the use of the courtyard and would replace non-original features with a more compatible design. The replacement stairs providing access into the courtyard are necessary to improve accessibility compliant with Building Code requirements. The proposed landscaping material at the front of the property consists of low-growth shrubs and ground cover that would not directly obscure the building's character and would further enhance the color and texture of the perimeter landscaping as viewed from the street. Furthermore, two outdoor dining areas (68 SF each) are designed adjacent to the sidewalk that would provide potential seating for future commercial tenants that would help activate the sidewalk and improve the viability of the commercial component of the property.

The scope of work is consistent with Rehabilitation Standards 5 and 6 which states "distinctive materials, features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize the property will be preserved" and "deteriorated historic features will be repaired rather than replaced," respectively. The materials and finishes on all of the three buildings would be preserved. Repairs to the textured stucco would be performed in-kind pursuant to *Preservation Brief 22: The Preservation and Repair of Historic Stucco* and would match the historic material. The historic decorative tilework along the "water table" on the commercial building, the existing wood windows, and existing roof tile would be repaired or replaced with in-kind material as needed.

The proposed commercial addition is consistent with Rehabilitation Standard 9, which states "new additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction will not destroy historic materials, features, and special relationships that characterize the property". The one-story addition will be constructed on a secondary elevation and would be set back from the front elevation of the commercial building by approximately 6.5 feet. This setback provides a physical delineation where the addition is clearly subordinate as situated behind the existing building and would be further differentiated in design and materials. The addition would be slightly lower in building height than the existing building with its roof extending from below the existing parapet designed with a more simplified parapet excluding mission tiles. The addition also consists of exterior walls clad in stucco and its front (south) facing elevations would have an aluminum storefront with a singular piece of curved glass on both sides, reflecting the curved corners of the existing building consisting of glass block. The proposed addition is similar in rectilinear plan and compatible in its form and overall massing.

In an effort to address the applicant's need to improve the viability of the small commercial space by expanding its current square footage, staff has worked with the applicant on reducing the overall size, placement, and relationship of the addition within the internal courtyard according to the Standards. Although the proposed addition would result in a

reduction of the overall courtyard space, its placement is sensitive to the surrounding residential buildings in which the overall form and design of the courtyard will continued to be preserved. The overall integrity of the internal courtyard would not be severely impacted by the addition, and the prominence of the commercial building's siting on the parcel and its spatial relationship to the rear courtyard and residential buildings would be maintained. Furthermore, the proposed improvements to the courtyard patio including new landscape and hardscape materials, and a new water feature would enhance the existing condition of the courtyard. In balancing the goals of preservation and rehabilitation of the site, and to improve the viability of the commercial component of the property which is a historic feature of the property type, staff is supportive of the proposed addition within the existing courtyard.

Overall, staff finds that the proposed scope of work is consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards. The proposed improvements maintain the integrity and character of the subject property, and the proposed new addition is both differentiated yet compatible in design. The proposed rehabilitation work would help preserve the Landmark by enabling it to continue to convey its significance as an example of a commercial/residential courtyard property in the Wilshire Montana/North of Montana neighborhood. In efforts to ensure that the proposed work will be performed in a sensitive manner consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards, staff recommends that the proposed scope of work is performed as outlined in the applicant's historic preservation consultant's memorandum dated February 6, 2019 (Condition No. 2).

Staff is supportive of the proposed rehabilitation and improvements as the scope of work will not result in any impacts to the overall integrity of the Landmark building and Parcel. For these reasons and based on the recommended conditions below, staff recommends approval of the proposed scope of work.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Commission approve Certificate of Appropriateness 19ENT-0050 based on the finding as required pursuant to SMMC Section 9.56.140(a) and subject to the conditions outlined below.

CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS FINDING

1. The proposed work will not detrimentally change, destroy or adversely affect any exterior feature of the Landmark or Landmark Parcel upon which such work is to be done in that the proposed scope of work consists of a one-story addition to the existing commercial building, demolition of portions of the easterly residential building, and alterations to the existing courtyard and landscaping that will all be performed in a sensitive manner that is consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for rehabilitation. The proposed improvements will not impact any character-defining or notable features of the buildings or parcel. The addition will be both complimentary and differentiated in design from the existing structure and the demolition of the storage room and portions of two residential units will not impact any character-defining features or facades. The altered courtyard will

still retain its historic character and function. Other rehabilitation work to the existing stucco, windows, parapet, and tiles will be done in an effort to repair the existing conditions or will be replaced in-kind. All proposed work will be executed in a manner that is complementary to the existing property, and will not result in any impacts to the overall integrity of the Landmark building and associated parcel.

CONDITIONS

1. Prior to the issuance of a building permit, the applicant shall provide a detail of proposed courtyard fountain to ensure there is adequate circulation within the space, subject to staff review and approval.
2. In efforts to ensure that the proposed scope of work will be performed in a sensitive manner consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards, the proposed scope of work shall be performed as outlined in the applicant's historic preservation consultant's memorandum dated February 6, 2019.
3. This approval is for the plans dated April 8, 2019, which are on file in the City Planning Division, except as amended by any conditions contained herein. Significant changes to the project design that are within the Commission's purview shall require review and approval by the Landmarks Commission. Minor changes may be approved administratively pursuant to all applicable guidelines and shall be subject to staff's approval and consistent with the findings of fact contained herein.
4. This Certificate of Appropriateness shall be in full force and effect from and after the date of the rendering of the decision by the Commission. Pursuant to Landmarks Ordinance Section 9.56.170(h), this approval shall expire within 12 months if the authorized work is not commenced. Should the applicant be unable to comply with this restriction, an extension may be granted pursuant to Section 9.56.250 for an additional 180 days maximum. The applicant must request such an extension prior to expiration of this permit. After that time, the applicant will be required to return to the Commission for approval. In addition, this Certificate of Appropriateness shall expire if the authorized work is suspended for a 180-day period after being commenced.
5. This decision may be appealed by properly filing with the Director of Planning and Community Development a Notice of Appeal on a form furnished by the Planning and Community Development Department. Such notice shall be filed within a ten (10) day time period commencing from the date of the determination.
6. All required Planning and Building Permit approvals shall be obtained. Project plans shall be subject to complete Code Compliance review when the building plans are submitted for plan check and shall comply with all applicable provisions of Article IX of the Municipal Code and all other pertinent ordinances and General

Plan policies of the City of Santa Monica prior to building permit issuance.

ATTACHMENTS:

- A. Public Notice
- B. Applicant's Materials
- C. Landmark Designation 17ENT-0032 STOA
- D. Mills Act Rehabilitation/Maintenance Plan