

**M E M O R A N D U M****COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT  
CITY OF SANTA MONICA  
PLANNING DIVISION**

**DATE:** October 12, 2020  
**TO:** The Honorable Landmarks Commission  
**FROM:** Planning Staff  
**SUBJECT:** **305 San Vicente Boulevard, 20ENT-0119**

Public Hearing to consider Landmark Designation application 20ENT-0119 for the property located at 305 San Vicente Boulevard to determine whether the multi-family residential building in whole or in part, should be designated as a City Landmark and, if so designated, whether an associated Landmark Parcel should be defined and described in order to preserve, maintain, protect, or safeguard the Landmark.

PROPERTY OWNER: Mid Century SV LP

APPLICANT: H. Joseph Soleiman

**INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND**

On April 27, 2020, H. Joseph Soleiman submitted Landmark Designation application 20ENT-0119 on behalf of the property owner. The item has been delayed until now due to meeting cancellations in response to the COVID-19 Safer at Home Order.

A Landmark assessment report was prepared for the subject building by Audrey von Ahrens, of GPA Consulting (GPA) (included with the application materials as Attachment B). The GPA report focuses on a single criterion finding that the “building is eligible for designation as a Santa Monica City Landmark under Criterion 5 as a significant and

representative example of the work of notable architect, Samuel Reisbord”, and is not a full assessment of the Landmark criterion. Jan Ostashay of Ostashay and Associates Consulting (OAC) at the request of the City, prepared a Peer Review Assessment of the GPA report, provided as Attachment C. Based on the OAC peer review, the property does not appear eligible for designation as a Santa Monica Landmark as proposed under Criterion 5. Staff has analyzed the applicant’s materials and the OAC peer review and recommends the Commission deny designation of the property at 305 San Vicente Boulevard as a Santa Monica Landmark.

### **Historic Resources Inventory Status**

The subject property has not been identified on the City’s Historic Resources Inventory (HRI). Further, the property is included in the San Vicente Courtyard Apartment Historic District as a non-contributor as it was built outside the period of significance.

### **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 consecutive calendar days prior to the hearing. A copy of the notice is included as Attachment A.

### **ANALYSIS**

#### **Architectural Description**

The GPA report identifies the building at 305 San Vicente Boulevard as designed in the Mid-Century Modern style. The Mid-Century Modern style was prevalent in the Los Angeles region from the 30’s through the 70s and has experienced a resurgence in popularity over the past 10-15 years. There are many fine examples of Mid-Century Modern architectural design in single-family residential structures. Multi-family structures tend to be primarily characterized by the simplicity of features and construction.

The building, constructed in 1961, is rectangular in plan and organized around a courtyard with a swimming pool in the front setback. While the building contains some interesting

details in the courtyard, the building at 305 San Vicente Boulevard is of simple design and construction primarily clad in stucco with simple stucco and metal railings, and aluminum windows.

### **Assessment of Integrity**

Historic integrity is the ability of a property to convey its significance and is defined as the “authenticity of a property’s historic identity, evidenced by the survival of physical characteristics that existed during the property’s historic period.” The National Park Service defines seven aspects of integrity: location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association.

The building at 305 San Vicente Boulevard appears relatively intact and while there has been maintenance performed over the years, it does not appear that there have been any major alterations to the building’s exterior. However, there was substantive repair after the 1994 Northridge earthquake that may have resulted in changes to the exterior, such as the balcony details which are different at the courtyard than at the front of the building.

### **Historic Context**

#### San Vicente Courtyard Apartment Historic District

As with much of Southern California and Los Angeles County, Santa Monica’s population skyrocketed during and after World War II. The Douglas Aircraft manufacturing plant in Santa Monica employed thousands of local residents from the 1940s into the postwar years. Following the war, the RAND Corporation provided employment for hundreds of Santa Monica residents in the fields of mathematics, aerodynamics, engineering, physics, chemistry, economics, and psychology. As housing demands quickly exceeded supply, courtyard apartment complexes replaced smaller multi-family dwellings and the remaining single-family residences along San Vicente Boulevard.

Santa Monica’s population boom in the postwar era prompted the restructuring of the City’s zoning ordinance to allow for higher density, multi-family residential development. Changes to Santa Monica’s zoning ordinance were further provoked by the rejection of

an application for the construction of a 120-unit apartment building on San Vicente Boulevard in 1952. Through the 1950s, a contentious battle ensued between homeowners who opposed multi-family residential development in their neighborhoods, and developers who looked to profit from higher density construction. In 1959, the City proposed a new zoning ordinance that permitted the construction of “skyscraper apartments on large parcels of land,” and “garden-type apartments” on smaller parcels in the Palisades Tract. Though many of the courtyard apartments along San Vicente Boulevard had been built by this time (since it had been zoned for higher density development since the 1920s), their construction presumably provided impetus for the proposed “garden apartment zone” in the rest of the Palisades Tract. Rezoning of the Palisades Tract south of San Vicente Boulevard was never realized. With the exception of Montana Avenue, the tract’s southern boundary, the rest of the tract remains zoned for single-family residential construction.

By 1960, Santa Monica’s zoning had come to use some of the same language used in the modern zoning code, and the land use changed in the District area accordingly. The block of San Vicente Boulevard between 7th Street and 4th Street was zoned R3, Multiple Residential, limiting buildings to 45 feet (roughly four stories); the block between 4th Street and Ocean Avenue was zoned R4, limiting building height to 12 stories. In 1975, due to concern for the “quality of life” for residents living in areas zoned R3 and R4, new height restrictions enforced a 40-foot (roughly three story) height limit in R3 zones and a 6-story height limit in R4 zones.<sup>14</sup> Both R3 and R4 zoning required minimum setbacks and a certain amount of private open space per unit. By the 1970s, condominiums had surpassed lower density courtyard apartments as the most prevalent form of multi-family housing along San Vicente Boulevard. Today, the District comprises courtyard apartments, apartment houses, and condominiums, dating from the late 1930s to the mid-1990s. The area is currently zoned R2, Low Density Multiple Residential, and building heights are limited to two stories.

Census records from the 1920s, ‘30s, and ‘40s indicate the courtyard apartments in the District were owned or rented by middle-income residents reflecting a wide range of

occupations, including engineers, teachers, dentists, salesmen, gardeners and realtors. Residents of the area were also exclusively white, as restrictive housing practices kept non-white residents from living nearly anywhere in Santa Monica other than the Pico neighborhood until well into the post-World War II era. Even with the Supreme Court decision in 1948 that deemed restrictive covenants based on race and ethnicity unconstitutional, realtors and landlords employed other tactics to keep non-white residents from renting and owning in many Southland neighborhoods. By the time of the passage of Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which prohibits racial discrimination in programs (including the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development) that receive federal financial assistance, housing restrictions were largely unenforceable and many previously homogenous neighborhoods began to diversify.

### **Architect Samuel Reisbord**

The GPA report states that the “building is eligible for designation as a Santa Monica City Landmark under Criterion 5 as a significant and representative example of the work of notable architect, Samuel Reisbord”. However, as the OAC report finds that while Mr. Reisbord was a prolific architect whose collaborative work spanned three decades, he does not appear to be a “notable architect” in Santa Monica or the larger Los Angeles region.

Typically, to be identified as a notable or “master” figure in a field (architect, builder, designer, engineer, landscape architect, craftsman artist, etc.), the person is generally recognized because of his or her consummate skill whose work is distinguishable from others by its characteristic style and quality. Depending on the sphere of geographic influence a notable person may be recognized locally for their quality of design and skill or on a broader scale at the state or national levels (think Frank Lloyd Wright). It does not appear how Reisbord, whose office was located in Los Angeles, was accomplished in his field and made contributions to architecture or the architectural heritage of the local community or elsewhere. As stated in the OAC report, there are seven (7) known buildings designed by Reisbord in Santa Monica, and it does not appear that they should be considered significant or representative works by the architect.

## **Evaluation for Landmark Designation**

The Landmarks Ordinance requires the Commission to review the building's eligibility as a landmark based on the six criteria discussed below. In order to be designated as a City Landmark, the Commission is required to find that the property meets one or more of these criteria.

While the GPA report finds the building at 305 San Vicente Boulevard eligible under Criterion 5, there does not appear to be evidence to support Samuel Reisbord as a notable architect, that the building is a representative example of his work, or that it is a particularly notable example of the Mid-Century Modern style as represented in the multi-family building type. Due to the lack of substantive evidence in meeting one or more of the Landmarks criteria, denial of the proposed designation would be consistent with the Commission's past practice of evaluation of properties.

***(1) It exemplifies, symbolizes, or manifests elements of the cultural, social, economic, political or architectural history of the City.***

The subject property is a multi-family building in the Mid-Century Modern style of relatively simple design and construction. While there are interesting aspects and details of this particular structure, the buildings of this style, type and construction are ubiquitous in multifamily neighborhoods in Santa Monica and throughout the Southern California region. Further, the property is a non-contributor to the San Vicente Courtyard Apartment Historic District as it is outside its period of significance and therefore does not exemplify the architectural history of the City as does the contributing properties or the District as a whole. Therefore, the property does not appear to exemplify the cultural, social, economic, political or early architectural development history of this particular area of the North of Montana neighborhood.

***(2) It has aesthetic or artistic interest or value, or other noteworthy interest or value.***

The subject building at 305 San Vicente Boulevard is a modest example of the Mid-Century Modern style as expressed in a multi-family residential structure that is simple in its overall design and includes common features style and era. The building does not

possess particular noteworthy concepts of design, or of aesthetic or artistic interest or value. Therefore, the subject property does not appear to satisfy this criterion.

***(3) It is identified with historic personages or with important events in local, state or national history.***

No evidence was provided to suggest that any of the prior owners or occupants of the property were persons of significance or made significant contributions to important events in local, state, or national history. Accordingly, the subject property does not appear to satisfy this criterion.

***(4) It embodies distinguishing architectural characteristics valuable to a study of a period, style, method of construction, or the use of indigenous materials or craftsmanship, or is a unique or rare example of an architectural design, detail or historical type valuable to such a study.***

The subject building is a typical example of a Mid-Century Modern design expressed in a multi-family structure. Additionally, the building is not a unique or rare example of an architectural design, detail, or historical type, and it does not embody distinguishing characteristics valuable to study. Therefore, the subject residence does not appear to satisfy this criterion.

***(5) It is a significant or a representative example of the work or product of a notable builder, designer or architect.***

While Mr. Reisbord was a prolific architect whose collaborative work spanned three decades, he does not appear to be a “notable architect” in Santa Monica or the larger Los Angeles region. There are seven (7) extant examples of multi-family buildings in Santa Monica and this does not appear to be a particularly representative example of his work. Therefore, the subject property is not considered a significant or representative example of the work of a notable architect and therefore does not appear to satisfy this criterion.

***(6) It has a unique location, a singular physical characteristic, or is an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community or the City.***

The subject building is a non-contributor to the San Vicente Courtyard Apartment Historic District, sitting in the middle of the block at 305 San Vicente Boulevard. It does not have a unique location or singular physical characteristic and is not an established or familiar visual feature of the neighborhood. Therefore, the subject property does not appear to satisfy this criterion.

**RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends that the Commission determine that the property located at 305 San Vicente Boulevard does not meet the criteria for Landmark based on the draft findings contained herein.

Pursuant to SMMC 9.36.180, the Landmarks Commission's determination regarding this application may be appealed to the City Council if the appeal is filed with the City Planning Division within ten (10) consecutive days commencing from the date that the decision is made by the Landmarks Commission.

Attachments:

- A. Public Notice
- B. Applicant's Materials
- C. Peer Review Assessment, OAC, October 2020