



CITY OF POMONA COUNCIL REPORT

October 18, 2021

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: James Makshanoff, City Manager

Submitted By: Anita Gutierrez, AICP, Development Services Director

**SUBJECT: DESIGNATION OF THE POMONA CIVIC CENTER AS A LOCAL
HISTORIC DISTRICT**

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the City Council adopt the following resolution (Attachment 1):

**RESOLUTION NO. 2021-139 – A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL
OF THE CITY OF POMONA, CALIFORNIA, APPROVING THE
DESIGNATION OF THE POMONA CIVIC CENTER AS A LOCAL
HISTORIC DISTRICT**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The Historic Preservation Commission recommends that the City Council designate the Pomona Civic Center as a Local Historic District. The application requesting designation was evaluated under local designation criteria and staff determined that the properties within the proposed District boundaries met three of the criteria for historic designation, which include, 1) architecture, 2) design of the Civic Center and; 3) its connection to well-known mid-century architect Welton Becket.

FISCAL IMPACT:

No Fiscal Impact at this time.

PUBLIC NOTICING REQUIREMENTS:

Pursuant to Section .5809-13.E.10.b of the Zoning Ordinance, public noticing and a public hearing are not required for City Council consideration of a Historic District designation request. However, at the Historic Preservation Commission level, a public hearing was held on August 4, 2021 and every property owner within the proposed District was notified 30 days in advance of

the hearing and again 10 days before the hearing. We have received no objections to the proposed designation.

DISCUSSION:

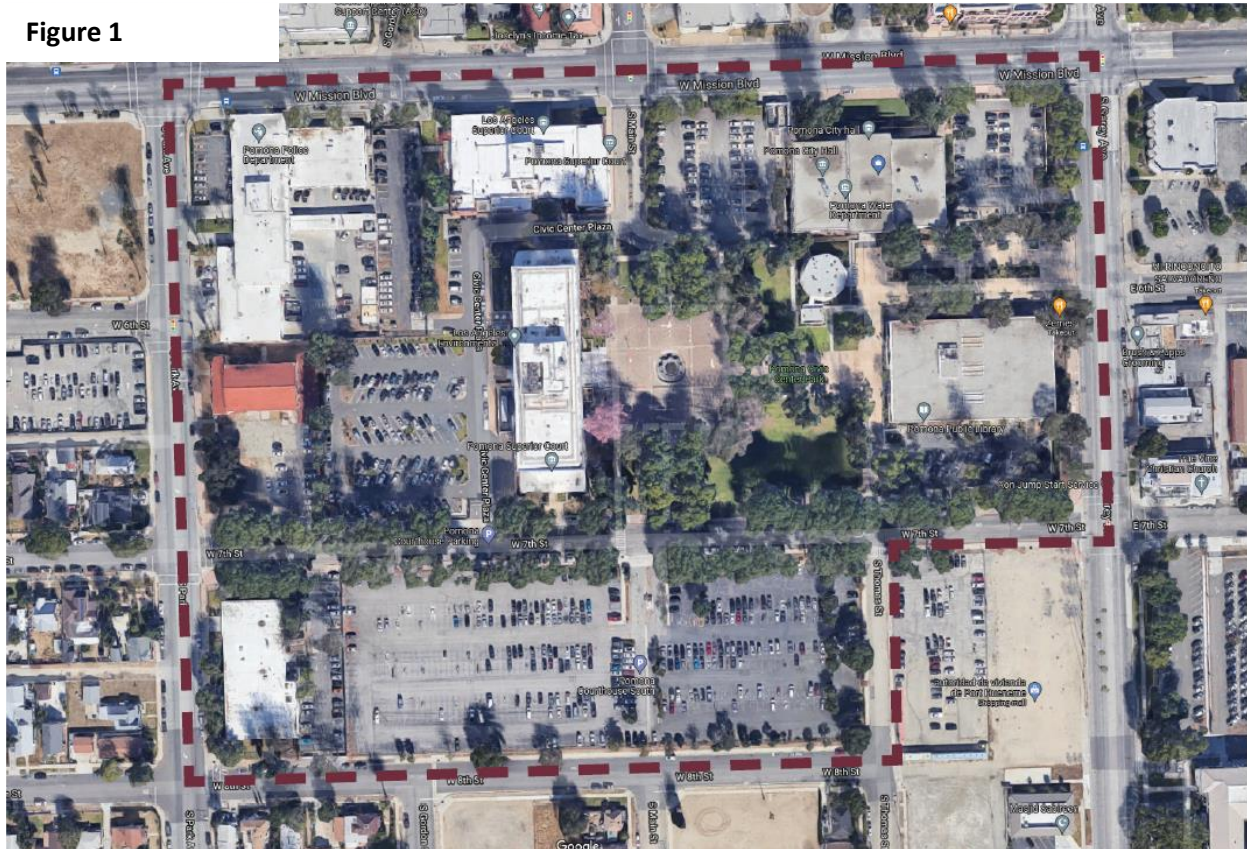
An application for the designation of the Pomona Civic Center as a Local Historic Landmark was submitted in 2017 by Mickey Gallivan. On February 3, 2020, the City Council voted 7-0 to approve Resolution No. 2020-15 authorizing the application to move forward for review. Based on a review of the application and the designation area, staff has determined that because the nomination involves multiple resources on multiple properties the best course of action was to propose the nomination as a Local Historic District (“District”) rather than a Local Historic Landmark. A key distinction between the two approaches is that a District allows consideration of alterations that may make some resources non-contributing, but would still allow a non-contributing resource to be identified within the District, not effecting the District designation. With a Local Historic Landmark, alterations that may make some resources non-contributing could impact the overall integrity of a landmark potentially making the designation no longer eligible for landmark status. If adopted, the designated area would be referred to as the Civic Center Historic District.

On August 4, 2021, the Historic Preservation Commission held a public hearing to consider the designation request. The majority of the discussion centered on whether or not the plaza fountain between the Superior Courts Building and the Library should be a contributing resource to the district. It was the consensus of the Commission, that because the Plaza Fountain was original to the District and had never been altered, that it should be considered a contributing resource to the District. The recommendation to designate the Civic Center as a Local Historic District was approved unanimously (7-0).

Proposed District Boundaries

The proposed Pomona Civic Center Historic District (Figure 1, below) covers most of the original Civic Center Master Plan created by Welton Becket (Attachment 3). The proposed District is generally bounded by Mission Boulevard to the North, Garey Avenue to the East to 7th Street and then heading west along 7th Street to Thomas Street and south to 8th Street, ending with the Park Avenue as the Western boundary (Attachment 2). Since the Historic Preservation Commission hearing, planning staff was informed that the City is currently in negotiations regarding the development of the current City parking lot property at the corner of 7th Street and Garey Avenue. Due to those negotiations, staff is recommending that property be excluded from the proposed District. As a non-contributing resource to the District, removal of the property from the District will not affect the district as a whole.

Figure 1



Architectural Description

There are two main styles of architecture present within the proposed District boundaries: Mid-Century Modern and New Formalism. Mid-Century Modern is a result of the development of the International style. The International style is based primarily on the principles of LeCorbusier's (1923) book, *Towards a New Architecture*, and emphasized technology. Those principles included:

1. Pilotis, which were reinforced concrete columns that bear the weight of the structure;
2. Freeing the ground plan, where the supporting walls are removed to free up the use (this typically would make the ground floor walls recessed which would highlight the pilotis even more);
3. Freeing the facade, where, because the pilotis take the structure, the facade is not limited by the structure;
4. Horizontal ribbon window, which provides light equally to all rooms; and
5. Roof Gardens, which provided food while protecting the concrete roof.

As the International style developed the first three principles became features in every International style building and the ribbon window would merge into the facade and develop into the glass curtain wall. As the style developed and inspiration changed to the space age, the style also changed and evolved in a new period of modernism, known as Mid-Century Modern style.

Additionally, New Formalism developed in the 1950s and brought classical elements back in a new, “modern” way. The style used columns, entablatures, and similar classical elements to create monumentality in buildings (including setting buildings up on a pedestal). Pools, fountains and sculpture was used to provide a formal landscape to complement the building. These two styles furthered the modernist idea of “architecture as art.”

There are four (4) New Formalism style buildings and three (3) Mid-Century Modern style buildings in the Civic Center complex. In addition, the Armory, which predates the Civic Center Complex is built in the Mediterranean Revival style, a typical style used in California in the 1930s.

History

The original City Hall was designed to support a city of 10,000 people. By the late 1950s Pomona had far exceeded that figure and the City began exploring options to replace city hall. An independent Corporation was established to construct a new Civic Center Complex. The City chose the section south of downtown, and demolished the homes on the site as an urban renewal project. The Corporation chose Welton Becket to design the complex. He not only designed all the major buildings, but he also designed the plazas and connecting spaces between the buildings, and he created the overall master plan for the Civic Center. The complex was constructed during the mid to late 1960s and the complex as it exists today was completed in 1969. There were several buildings and improvements that were never completed.

Welton Becket

Welton Becket was one of Southern California’s most prominent Modernist architects. While other architects like Neutra, Eames, and Lautner are better known “Mid-Century Modern” architects, they are all known for their residential designs. Becket’s work was predominantly commercial and civic. He designed some of Southern California’s most recognizable landmarks and ended up with the largest architecture firm in America. His work has been a template for many others to follow.

Born in 1902, Becket grew up in Washington and graduated from the University of Washington. He moved to Los Angeles in 1933. With his schoolmate Walter Wurdeman, they formed a partnership with Charles Plummer. In 1935, he designed the Pan Pacific Auditorium, streamline moderne masterpiece. In 1947, he designed Bullock’s Pasadena (now Macy’s Pasadena), which became the first suburban department store and when combined with the work of A.C. Martin, became the modern shopping mall (he also designed Fashion Island in Newport Beach among other malls). He designed the Beverly Hills Hilton hotel, the original Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center, Parker Center (Old LAPD Headquarters), Pauley Pavilion, the Cinerama Dome, the Los Angeles Memorial Sports Arena, and the Capitol Records Building.

His best work was probably his civic work, which included: Orange City Hall and the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium. His best known work is probably the Los Angeles County Music Center where he designed the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, the Mark Taper Forum, the Ahmanson Theatre, and the central plaza. All of these places were, like much of the Pomona Civic Center, designed in the New Formalism style. Becket believed in a total design concept, where his firm designed everything, from buildings, to fixtures and furniture, and even signage.

Significance

The Pomona Civic Center is significant because of its relationship to architect Welton Becket and because it is the largest collection of Becket's work in the United States. It meets local designation criteria 3, 5, and 10 and is eligible for designation as a Local Historic District. The three criteria are:

3. It embodies distinctive characteristics of a style, type, period, or method of construction, or is a valuable example of the use of indigenous materials or craftsmanship;
5. It is the work of a notable builder, designer, landscape designer or architect;
10. It is one of the few remaining examples in the city of Pomona, region, state, or nation possessing distinguishing characteristics of an architectural or historical type or specimen.

It is also staff's opinion that the Pomona Civic Center is also eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C: Design/Construction in the area of Architecture and possibly Community Planning and Development for its association with Welton Becket.

The architectural significance of the Pomona Civic Center is rooted in the understanding of the ideals of modernism represented by the civic center. Modernism began in the 1920s as a movement in Europe to change society. Modernists saw that the traditions and structure of society created by the "elites" of society (the aristocracy) is what caused World War I, destroying much of Europe and several nations. They envisioned a society built for the masses. Modernists saw architecture much in the same way.

Modernists believed that the architecture of the past represented a society that caused all of the world's problems, and therefore, should be thrown away. They looked to the future and embraced technology. They saw anyone using traditional forms as not practicing real architecture. As Modernism developed and came to America, one other change developed. Architecture became art. Instead of experiencing architecture, it became something that you looked at and appreciated. This is an idea that still persists today. This idea of the "Architect as Artist" or "Architecture as Art" is still part of the work of the World's most famous architects. Frank Gehry, Richard Meier, and Zaha Hadid all view their work as a form of art.

This idea is also present in the Pomona Civic Center. In several instances, Welton Becket provides a carefully planned out view of his art work. As you stand on Garey Avenue looking at the City Council Chamber, he framed your view, with City hall on one side, the Library on the other and you looking down past the reflecting pools which lead directly to the council chambers (Below Left). On 7th street looking towards city hall, Becket does it again, with the library on the right and an art gallery (never completed) on the left, this view hides the Council Chambers and reveals the entrance to City Hall (Below Right). A third example (Bottom Left and Right below) of this framing would have existed had the master plan ever been completed. In front of the courthouse there is a plaza that connects to a walkway south to what is now the County Court parking lot. Had the plan been completed, the parking lot would be the site of a civic auditorium and that walkway would connect the plaza with the auditorium.



In addition, from the street Becket tricks the passerby, forcing you to view his art, rather than experience it. From the street (Garey Ave. and Mission Blvd.), both the Library and City Hall look accessible, yet as you get closer, they are not (see Photos Below). They are separated from the ground and nature by being built on a pedestal. The entrances are not on the street side, but the opposite, plaza facing side.



Integrity

The proposed District has a high degree of architectural integrity as all of the buildings have had only minor alterations. The reflecting pools, parking lots, and other landscape features may have some integrity issues and those items are discussed under the contributing and non-contributing resource sections below.

Contributing Resources

The proposed Civic Center Historic District has 10 contributing resources in it. They are listed below and described in Attachment 4:

1. Pomona City Hall
2. City Council Chambers Building
3. Pomona Public Library Building
4. Pomona District Health Center (Los Angeles County Public Health Building)
5. East District Superior Court Building
6. Municipal Courts Building
7. State Armory
8. Civic Center Plazas
9. Planters/Seating Areas
10. Plaza Fountain

Non-Contributing Resources

There are several non-contributing resources in the proposed District. They are listed below and described in Attachment 4:

1. Parking Lots South of 7th Street
2. Lawn area between the Library and the Courthouse Building along 7th Street
3. Council Chambers Annex Building
4. Reflecting Pools

Designation Criteria

The proposed District meets three (3) different criterion for designation. The criteria and how the proposed district meets those criteria are contained in the attached resolution (Attachment 1).

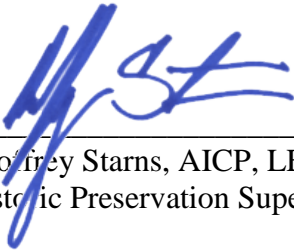
Effects of Designation

Designation of the Civic Center as a Local Historic District does not mean that changes can never be made to the Civic Center. In fact, staff would expect the Civic Center to grow and change over time. Designation means that there is a process for ensuring that the new development fits in to the architectural and landscaping style of the Civic Center. Normal installation of mechanical equipment would not be affected by designation unless it would require alterations to the appearance of the building (such as filling in windows.). It would have to be screened from public view, which is required of all properties in Pomona. Any telecommunication equipment needed by the Police and Fire Departments or City for public service purposes would not be subject to local preservation laws since all telecommunications are governed by the FCC. Any new installation would not require review under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, regardless of designation. Designation also provides some protection for the City if Los Angeles County, or the State of California, ever decide to sell off their property as surplus land. Any major project would be reviewed by the Historic Preservation Commission and could be appealed to the City Council.

ALTERNATIVES: The City Council has the following alternatives:

1. The City Council can deny the request for designation of the area as a Local Historic District; or
2. The City Council can approve the proposed District and modify the Historic Preservation Commission's recommendation by changing the boundaries or changing the determination as to what features are considered contributing or non-contributing.

Prepared by:



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ATTACHMENTS:

- Attachment No. 1 – Resolution No. 2021-139
Attachment No. 2 – Proposed Pomona Civic Center District Map
Attachment No. 3 – Map of Original Civic Center Master Plan
Attachment No. 4 – Description of Contributing and Noncontributing Resources
Attachment No. 5 - Presentation