

Recommendation

Staff requests the Historic Landmarks Committee provide a recommendation to the Planning Commission on the proposed improvements of *The Old Post Office building* and adjacent structure, located at 735 and 725 8th street.

Introduction

The applicant proposes rehabilitation and renovation work to two adjacent buildings located at 725 and 735 8th Street on the Arcata Plaza. The buildings share a single parcel and were constructed with matching Classical Revival facades in 1917. Although the buildings are both housed on one parcel and therefore the historic landmark ordinance technically applies to both buildings, the historic report associated with the landmark process clearly indicates one structure (735 8th) has retained integrity and is a historic resource, and the other building (725 8th) has lost historic integrity and was not considered a historic resource at the time of landmark adoption. Alterations are currently proposed to both structures, and staff would like guidance from the committee on how to treat the proposed work.

Discussion

The applicants are requesting review and approval for both interior and exterior modifications to the two buildings currently housed under APN 021-108-004, protected by Landmark Ordinance 1168. The owners of the buildings are interested in merging the two structures internally to accommodate the needs of their business, *All Under Heaven*, and perform necessary structural repairs to ensure ongoing health of both structures.

The following discussion breaks the proposed work and policy implications into two sections, one for each building currently proposed for improvements. Both buildings will receive roof repairs, electrical upgrades, interior improvements, and exterior repainting and signage (subject to separate Design Review).

735 8th Street (Local Historic Landmark) Proposed Scope of Work

The City Council designated *The Old Post Office building* at 735 8th street as a Local Historic Landmark under Ordinance 1168 (Attachment B). The building was constructed in 1917 to house the Arcata Post Office, which operated at this location until 1926. The building is identified in Katie Stanton's 1989 Historical Research and Architectural Analysis (attached to project materials) for LHP Designation as a fine example of Classical Revival Style architecture featuring symmetrical composition, pilasters, balustrade, ornamental cornice, transom windows. Stanton documented the buildings' significance and identified character-defining features to be preserved, on the front façade as; four pilasters, transom lights, recessed entrance, pedimented frontispiece, inset cornice with frieze and dentils, parapet wall with six small pilasters. At the rear façade Stanton identified the two double-hung windows with embedded wire mesh glass and

steel bars over the windows. The adopted landmark ordinance mirrors these items as features to be preserved (Attachment B).

Proposed work includes:

- Conversion of recessed entry door to display window
- interior renovations
- restoration of rear windows
- removal of non-historic stairs at rear
- preservation of all other Plaza-facing historic facade features

The applicant proposed the removal/modification of two features identifies in the Landmark Ordinance from this structure: 1) the bars on the rear windows associated with the Post Office use, which are proposed to be removed and not replaced, and 2) covering the recessed entrance and instead direction foot traffic through the 725 8th Street entrance. The 1989 Historic Research and Architectural Analysis specifically identified two double-hung windows with embedded wire mesh glass and steel bars over the windows as features to be preserved. While the applicant proposes to restore the two large double-hung windows by replacing the plywood and modern windows that currently infill the original openings, the proposal also includes removal of the steel security bars and notes the embedded wire mesh mentioned in the report has already deteriorated. Both of these elements were identified as character-defining features to be preserved under the landmark designation ordinance. The recessed entry is not proposed to be removed entirely but covered in a manner that can be returned to its original form in future if needed.

The architect has provided justification for these modifications to listed features to be preserved in the Historic Report (Attachment A), as follows:

- 1) For the rear window bars and mesh, the owners prefer to remove the bars as they will be visible from the interior when the space opens up and the new windows are in place, stating aesthetic concerns. Regarding the wire mesh, the architect argues that installing replica mesh in new windows would create a false sense of history since the windows would not be original, and that the feature is not aesthetically desirable for the space. The architect further notes that since the building served as the Post Office for only 10 years, this change seems reasonable and would not be detrimental to public health, safety, welfare, and environment.
- 2) For the recessed entryway, the owners would like to remove the entry door and install a display window at 735 8th St. (Old Post Office). This would be installed set back from the stucco so the entry "niche" still reads architecturally. The work is not original except at the concrete flat work and stucco, which would remain. The owners worry that garbage will be thrown there or it will be a hang out spot. The new work (the display window) is

removable in the future and is intended to make no change to anything that is historic, except the use of the location as an entry.

725 8th Street (Not Local Historic Landmark) Proposed Scope of Work

The adjacent site at 725 H Street is not an historic landmark and was in fact found to have lost its historic integrity per Staton's report. The building housed a shoe shop from 1884 that was relocated to the current site after the construction of the Post Office building. In 1917, its front facade was altered to match its neighbor, creating the distinctive "twin" appearance. The 1989 Historic Research and Architectural Analysis by Katie Stanton documented the buildings' significance and identified character-defining features to be preserved as Balustrade, corner pilasters, cornice, and basic form. While the structure is not individually designated as a historic landmark, it contributes to the historic character of the Plaza district.

Proposed work on the 725 building includes:

- Restoration of concealed historic transom windows
- Replacement of previous facade alteration with new centered ADA-accessible entry and storefront
- Interior connection to 735 8th Street
- Foundation improvements
- Restoration of deteriorated rear windows

Staff would like the Committee's input on a zoning interpretation related to Policy HP-3b. The Historic Preservation Element policy HP-3b states:

*"HP-3b. The Plaza Area Historic District shall, by ordinance pursuant to the Land Use Code, be designated within the Landmark District Combining Zone. **Structures within the Historic District shall review the same protections as are provided to individually designated Historic Landmarks.**"*[emphasis added]

Staff interprets that this policy in the context of the HP-3, Arcata Plaza Area Historic District, Objective and Figure HP-a, Arcata Plaza Historic District map. The objective states the policies are intended to ensure that the "unique historical, architectural, aesthetic, and economic values" are to be preserved by the Plaza Historic District. The map of the District (Figure HP-a) identifies the District boundaries, designated Historic Landmarks, and other non-designated buildings in the district. Lastly, Policy HP-3c requires review of exterior modifications for all buildings in the District. This policy guides operationalizing the body of policy by directing specific action to ensure the objective and policies are effectuated.

In order to achieve this goal, Policy HP-3b seems to indicate that any modifications to existing conditions should have an additional layer of review and consideration. In the case of exterior alterations within the Plaza Area, this policy provides the guidance that has resulted in a heightened level of architectural design review for all structures on the plaza, regardless of

whether or not they are historically significant per Table 7-2 of the Land Use Code. All Plaza alterations require a greater level of scrutiny before the Planning Commission than any other area of the city, in order to ensure aesthetic compatibility.

In this broader context, Staff interprets the HP-3b to require design review to ensure compatibility with the District ensuring historical, architectural, aesthetic, and economic values the Plaza represents are protected. We do not interpret this statement to mean that non-historic structures should be regulated as though they are historic.

Staff would like the Committee to provide guidance on the following in addition to any other thoughts from the committee:

-Does the removal of the two character-defining features, with the removal of the steel bars and wire mesh at the rear facade and covering of the recessed entry and the Plaza façade, at 735 8th Street negatively affect the historical significance of the structure?

or

-Would the modifications be consistent with the building's historic designation and the Secretary of Interior Standards?

and

-Will the proposed facade modifications at 725 8th Street be compatible with the historic character of the buildings and the Plaza consistent with HP-3 objectives and policies?

ENVIRONMENTAL

The project may qualify for a Class 31-Historical Resources Rehabilitation exemption per the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The application materials argue the project involves rehabilitation and preservation of a historical resource in a manner consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, as described in the submitted Historic Resource Report (Attachment A).

Attachment A. Historic Report/Architectural Treatment Memo

Attachment B. Ordinance 1168

Attachment C. Submitted Plan Set

Attachment D. Historic Preservation Element excerpt