



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

Report to the Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: April 13, 2023 REPORT NO. HRB-23-012

HEARING DATE: April 27, 2023

SUBJECT: **ITEM #2 – Fred Rohr/ Ralph L. Frank House**

RESOURCE INFO: [California Historical Resources Inventory Database \(CHRID\) link](#)

APPLICANT: Earnshaw Living Trust 08-30-17; represented by Landmark Historic Preservation

LOCATION: 555 San Fernando Street, Peninsula Community, Council District 2
APN 532-272-0900

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the Fred Rohr/ Ralph L. Frank House located at 555 San Fernando Street as a historical resource.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate the Fred Rohr/Ralph L. Frank House located at 555 San Fernando Street as a historical resource with a period of significance of 1940 and 1942-1965 under HRB Criteria B, C and D. The designation excludes the 2022 basement level enclosure. The designation includes the cobblestone wall and fence on San Fernando Street, the granite site walls at the driveway, and the S-shaped stone site wall in the front yard. This recommendation is based on the following findings:

1. The resource is identified with Fred Rohr, a historically significant person and retains integrity for that association. Specifically, the resource was Rohr's home during the most productive years of his career in San Diego's aeronautics industry from 1942-1965. Rohr was a leader in the aeronautics field and founded the Rohr Aircraft Corporation in 1940, only two years before he moved to the resource. The company achieved explosive growth and employed thousands of people manufacturing vital equipment for the U.S. and British military during World War II. Rohr Aircraft's Chula Vista factory was a major regional employer until it was sold in 1970 and contributed to the growth of the cities of San Diego and Chula Vista.
2. The resource embodies the distinctive characteristics through the retention of character defining features of the Colonial Revival style and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its 1940 period of significance. Specifically, the resource exhibits an asymmetrical façade, medium pitched gable roof, entry porch with slender square columns

and built in bench, shingle exterior with stone veneer accent, corniced eaves, multi-lite wood frame double hung windows, diamond pane leaded windows, wall dormers, and decorative shutters.

3. The resource is representative of a notable work of Master Architect Ralph L. Frank and retains integrity as it relates to the original design. Specifically, the resource is significant as an example of Frank's work in his signature style, Colonial Revival, and as part of a collection of Frank designed Colonial Revival homes in the La Playa neighborhood of Point Loma constructed in the 1930s and 1940s.

BACKGROUND

This item is being brought before the Historical Resources Board in conjunction with the owner's desire to have the site designated as a historical resource. The resource is a two-story with basement single family residence constructed in 1940. The house is situated on a sloping corner lot in the La Playa neighborhood of Point Loma and features views of the San Diego Bay.

The property has not been identified in any historic surveys, as the subject area has not been previously surveyed.

The historic name of the resource, the Fred Rohr/ Ralph L. Frank House, has been identified consistent with the Board's adopted naming policy and reflects the name of Fred Rohr, who is a historically significant individual and the name of Ralph L. Frank, a Master Architect.

ANALYSIS

A Historical Resource Research Report was prepared by Landmark Historic Preservation, which concludes that the resource is significant under HRB Criterion B, C and D and staff concurs. This determination is consistent with the *Guidelines for the Application of Historical Resources Board Designation Criteria*, as follows.

CRITERION B - Is identified with persons or events significant in local, state or national history.

The resource is associated with Fred Rohr, a founder of the Rohr Aircraft Company, who resided at the property with his wife Shirley from 1942 to his death in 1965. Rohr was born in Hoboken, New Jersey in 1896 to European immigrants. At the age of two, his family moved to San Francisco where his father opened a sheet metal shop. Rohr would later work as an apprentice sheet metal worker in his father's shop. During World War I, Rohr served in the Navy aboard a tanker. After the war, he returned to work in the sheet metal shop and took classes in engineering and mathematics. Rohr and several friends would buy, repair, and fly surplus military airplanes.

In 1920 Rohr married Shirley Blade and the couple moved to San Diego in 1924 where he established the Standard Sheet Metal Works. Rohr quickly became acquainted with several of San Diego's aviation pioneers such as T. Claude Ryan who asked him to join the Ryan Aeronautical Company as the sheet metal foreman. Rohr was able to work on the construction of Charles Lindbergh's plane, the *Spirit of St. Louis*, which he famously flew from Long Island, New York to Paris in 1927. Rohr continued to work steadily in San Diego's aeronautics industry up until 1940.

Rohr and four partners, two engineers from Ryan and two attorneys, created the Rohr Aircraft Corporation in 1940. During that time, Rohr and his wife were living at 3603 Amaryllis Drive in Point Loma. By late 1940, Rohr had 64 employees and the company had received its first major contract. In January of 1941, Rohr Aircraft moved into a 37,500 square foot factory in Chula Vista and within three years the factory was expanded to 600,000 square feet. The company continued to receive contracts and quickly expanded from 70 to over 400 employees. By the end of 1941, Rohr Aircraft employed 865 people and reported sales of just under \$1.5 million.

After the close of World War II, Rohr Aircraft experienced a sharp decline and the company merged with the International Detrola Company to stay afloat. Rohr continued to head the company that he founded until his death in 1965. The Rohr Chula Vista factory continued to expand and by the end of 1966 the corporate headquarters employed over 9,000 people. The company entered marine technology in 1970 and began to build boats for use by the U.S. Navy and Army during the Vietnam War. In 1997 Rohr Aircraft was sold in its entirety to the B.F. Goodrich Company and demolition of the Rohr complex of buildings in Chula Vista began in 2005. Since its initial construction in 1941, Rohr Aircraft factory had a massive impact on the City of Chula Vista, stimulating the population growth of the city. Additionally, the Rohr factory had a massive economic impact on the San Diego region due to the high numbers of employees it attracted to the area.

Rohr resided at the 555 San Fernando Street property with his wife, Shirley, from 1942 to 1965, during the years of the Rohr Aircraft Company's most explosive growth. The Rohr factory in Chula Vista is likely the property best associated with Fred Rohr and his most significant achievements; however, the factory has been greatly modified with demolition of the complex beginning in 2005. The company was founded in 1940 while the Rohrs lived at 3603 Amaryllis Drive; however, the couples association with the Amaryllis property is brief and it cannot be determined to be the property best associated with Fred Rohr's achievements. Therefore, staff finds 555 San Fernando Street to be the property best associated with Rohr.

As discussed below, several modifications to the subject property have occurred since its construction. However, the 1951 remodel and 1960 porch enclosure occurred while the Rohr's lived at the property and contribute to its historic significance under Criterion B for their association with Rohr. These and other modifications discussed in the Criterion C analysis do not impair integrity of feeling, association and setting as it relates to HRB Criterion B.

Significance Statement: The resource is identified with Fred Rohr, a historically significant person and retains integrity for that association. Specifically, the resource was Rohr's home during the most productive years of his career in San Diego's aeronautics industry from 1942-1965. Rohr was a leader in the aeronautics field and founded the Rohr Aircraft Corporation in 1940, only two years before he moved to the resource. The company achieved explosive growth and employed thousands of people manufacturing vital equipment for the U.S. and British military during World War II. Rohr Aircraft's Chula Vista factory was a major regional employer until it was sold in 1970 and contributed to the growth of the cities of San Diego and Chula Vista. Therefore, staff recommends designation under HRB Criterion B.

CRITERION C - Embodies distinctive characteristics of a style, type, period, or method of construction or is a valuable example of the use of natural materials or craftsmanship.

The resource is a two-story with basement single family residence constructed in the Colonial Revival style in 1940. The house features a medium pitched, side gabled roof with corniced eaves and one gabled dormer extending above the roof line. Shingle siding covers the exterior of the historic portion of the house. The front façade is asymmetrical and features a one-story wing that projects from the north portion of the elevation. An entry porch with a shed roof, slender square columns and built in bench is located in the center of the primary façade. The exterior of the entry is accented by a stone veneer. An attached garage on the basement level is accessible from the south façade. The majority of fenestration includes wood, multi-lite, double hung windows; however, the primary elevation features a set of diamond pane leaded windows. Additionally, two large bow windows project from the rear façade. Other Colonial Revival detailing includes, wood shutters, decorative dove-cote style attic vents and an internal red brick chimney.

The subject parcel contains multiple hardscape elements in both the front and rear yards. A wood fence on top of a cobblestone wall is located at the front of the parcel on San Fernando Street. The front entry is approached from San Fernando Street by accessing a wooden gate and a curvilinear flagstone walkway. The cobblestone wall, fence and walkway all appear to be from the date of construction and appear on the original plot plan. An S-shaped site wall constructed of a similar stone as the exterior veneer is located in the front yard and appears to be original to the date of construction of the house. Additionally, granite retaining walls at the driveway appear to be from the home's construction and are visible on the original plot plan. The backyard contains several site walls and a circular walled patio which are estimated to be added to the property between 1945 and 1980.

Several alterations have been made to the property since its 1940 date of construction. A remodel in 1951 included a three-story addition to the rear of the house at the northeast corner and extension of the projecting wing. The two original bow windows were relocated during this project. In 1960 the main level rear porch was enclosed and converted to living space. At an unknown date, windows on the rear of the second floor were converted to doors to access the porch on that level. In 2022 the current owners completed a rehabilitation project that included enclosing the rear porch at the basement level and adding new porches on the basement and ground floor levels. The 2022 project was reviewed by historical resources staff and determined to be consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards. These modifications do not impair integrity of design, materials, workmanship or feeling as it relates to Criterion C.

Following the Centennial Exposition of 1876 America experienced a rebirth of interest in its colonial past. Primarily popular from 1880 to 1955, Colonial Revival buildings reference the early English and Dutch homes of the Atlantic seaboard, particularly the Georgian and Adam styles. As with their prototypes, Colonial Revival structures generally have a symmetrical front façade with the principal areas of elaboration being entrances, windows, and cornices. About ten percent of Colonial Revival houses have asymmetrical facades, a feature rarely seen on their colonial prototypes. Roofs can be hipped, gable or gambrel and some variations feature a center gable projecting slightly from the primary façade. Windows are typically double-hung sash with multi-pane glazing in one or both sashes and are commonly found in pairs, triples, or bay windows.

Significance Statement: The house continues to convey the historic significance of the Colonial Revival style by embodying the historic characteristics associated with the style; including an

asymmetrical façade, medium pitched gable roof, entry porch with slender square columns and built in bench, shingle exterior with stone veneer accent, corniced eaves, multi-lite wood frame double hung windows, diamond pane leaded windows, wall dormers, and decorative shutters. Therefore, staff recommends designation under HRB Criterion C.

CRITERION D - Is representative of a notable work of a master builder, designer, architect, engineer, landscape architect, interior designer, artist, or craftsman.

Ralph Loren Frank was born in Kansas in 1898. He moved to San Diego in 1920 and began working as a salesman for the Grable-Francisco-Bleifuss Company, a real estate company. By 1926, he was working as a drafter for Ralph E. Hurlburt, while also designing houses on his own. By the mid-1930s, he was a partner with the firm Hurlburt, Frank & Slaughter. Frank was the firm's primary architectural designer, while Slaughter built the houses and Hurlburt sold them.

The firm designed and built several houses throughout San Diego for high-end clients including Rueben H. Fleet, Percy J. Benbough (mayor of San Diego from 1935 to 1942), and C. Arnholt Smith. While with Hurlburt, Frank & Slaughter, Frank was responsible for the design of the five houses in the small subdivision of Brookes Terrace in Marston Hills. He was equally as creative with interior design, planning the interiors for several houses by Hurlburt, Frank & Slaughter. He also designed 20 Southern California branches of the U.S. National Bank in partnership with Grant King.

Ralph Frank worked in many neighborhoods including Uptown, Mission Hills, Point Loma, La Playa and La Jolla, and in various architectural styles. Towards the beginning of his career Frank was known for his high-end Spanish style homes but he turned his focus to more cost-effective Colonial Revival and Monterey designs during the Great Depression. At the height of his career in the late 1930s thru the 1940s, Frank had developed a distinctive Colonial Revival style incorporating elements of the Monterey and Ranch styles. He worked as an architect into his later years, shifting to styles more common during the midcentury. A partial list of Frank's notable works is below.

- HRB #718- Strawn House (3120 Owen Street), 1933
- HRB #722- Philip and Helen Gildred/Ralph Frank House (1025 Cypress Avenue), 1935
- HRB #869- T. Claude Ryan House (548 San Fernando Street), 1962
- HRB #881- Ralph Loren and Alice Mae Frank House (6003 Waverly Avenue), 1928
- HRB #896- C. Arnholt Smith/Ralph L. Frank House (2293 San Juan Road), 1936
- HRB #955- Willis and Jane Fletcher/Ralph L. Frank and Milton Sessions House (575 San Gorgonio Street), 1941
- HRB #987- Walter J. and Grace Ogden/Ralph L. Frank House (1007 Cypress Avenue), 1931
- HRB #1011- Guilford H. and Grace Whitney House (4146 Miller Street), 1927 (with Hurlburt, Tifal and Milton P. Sessions)
- HRB #1059- Dr. Franklin and Leone Lindemulder/Ralph Frank House (2251 San Juan Road), 1935
- HRB #1160- Alfred and Helen Cantoni/Ralph L. Frank and William B. Melhorn House (2412 Pine Street), 1964
- HRB #1206- Justin and Anastasia Evenson/Ralph L. Frank House (1041 Cypress Avenue), 1934
- HRB #1288- Howard and Helen Taylor House (605 San Fernando Street), 1956
- HRB #1457- Timothy and Thelma Perkins/ Ralph L. Frank House (4165 Miller Street). 1946

- Frank Residence (2288 San Juan Road)

At least 13 of Frank's works have been designated as historical resources by the City of San Diego Historical Resources Board. They include the Philip and Helen Gildred/Ralph Frank House (HRB #722), which established him as a Master Architect by the HRB in 2005, the Ralph Loren and Alice Mae Frank House (HRB #881), and the C. Arnholt Smith/Ralph L. Frank House (HRB #896).

Ralph Frank designed the 555 San Fernando Street property for David and Loula Fleet in 1938 and the building was completed in 1940 at the height of his career. During the 1930s and 1940s, Frank designed multiple custom Colonial Revival homes in the La Playa neighborhood including 667 San Elijo Street (1937), 567 San Gorgonio Street (1937), 575 San Gorgonio Street (HRB #955,1941), 515 San Elijo Street (1947), 635 San Elijo Street (1949), 561 San Fernando Street (1949), and 555 San Gorgonio Street (1949). Each of these residences is unique and illustrates Frank's ability to adapt the Colonial Revival style not only to meet the needs of his clients but also the challenging sloping lots of the La Playa neighborhood. The structures are closely linked geographically as well as visually. The 555 San Fernando residence is a notable example of Frank's work because it exhibits his quality of design in the Colonial Revival style and is also a part of a collection of Colonial Revival homes designed by Frank in the 1930s and 1940s in the La Playa neighborhood.

As discussed above under Criterion C, the subject resource has been modified since its 1940 date of construction. None of these modifications can be attributed to Frank; however, these modifications do not impair the resource's integrity of design, materials, workmanship and feeling as it relates to HRB Criterion D.

Significance Statement: The subject resource retains excellent integrity and continues to reflect Master Architect Ralph L. Frank's original design, intent and aesthetic. The house is significant as an example of Frank's work in his signature style, Colonial Revival, and as part of a collection of Frank designed Colonial Revival homes in the La Playa neighborhood of Point Loma constructed in the 1930s and 1940s. Therefore, staff recommends designation under HRB Criterion D.

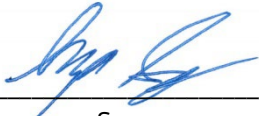
OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Designation brings with it the responsibility of maintaining the building in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards. The benefits of designation include the availability of the Mills Act Program for reduced property tax; the use of the more flexible Historical Building Code; flexibility in the application of other regulatory requirements; the use of the Historical Conditional Use Permit which allows flexibility of use; and other programs which vary depending on the specific site conditions and owner objectives. If the property is designated by the HRB, conditions related to restoration or rehabilitation of the resource may be identified by staff during the Mills Act application process, and included in any future Mills Act contract.

CONCLUSION

Based on the information submitted and staff's field check, it is recommended that the Fred Rohr/ Ralph L. Frank House located at 555 San Fernando Street be designated with a period of significance of 1940 and 1942-1965 under HRB Criteria B, C and D. The designation excludes the 2022 basement

level enclosure. The designation includes the cobblestone wall and fence on San Fernando Street, the granite site walls at the driveway, and the S-shaped stone site wall in the front yard.



Suzanne Segur
Senior Planner/ HRB Liaison
Development Services Department

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Attachment(s):

1. Draft Resolution
2. Applicant's Historical Report under separate cover

RESOLUTION NUMBER N/A
ADOPTED ON 4/27/2023

WHEREAS, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego held a noticed public hearing on 4/27/2023, to consider the historical designation of the Fred Rohr/ Ralph L. Frank House (owned by Earnshaw Living Trused 08-30-17, 6793 Crystal Springs Ct, San Jose, CA 95120) located at **555 San Fernando Street, San Diego, CA 92106**, APN: **532-272-09-00**, further described as BLK 158 LOT 1 S 100 FT in the City of San Diego, County of San Diego, State of California; and

WHEREAS, in arriving at their decision, the Historical Resources Board considered the historical resources report prepared by the applicant, the staff report and recommendation, all other materials submitted prior to and at the public hearing, inspected the subject property and heard public testimony presented at the hearing; and

WHEREAS, the property would be added to the Register of Designated Historical Resources as **Site No. 0**, and

WHEREAS, designated historical resources located within the City of San Diego are regulated by the Municipal Code (Chapter 14, Article 3, Division 2) as such any exterior modifications (or interior if any interior is designated) shall be approved by the City, this includes but is not limited to modifications to any windows or doors, removal or replacement of any exterior surfaces (i.e. paint, stucco, wood siding, brick), any alterations to the roof or roofing material, alterations to any exterior ornamentation and any additions or significant changes to the landscape/ site.

NOW, THEREFORE,

BE IT RESOLVED, the Historical Resources Board based its designation of the Fred Rohr/ Ralph L. Frank House on the following findings:

(1) The property is historically significant under CRITERION B as a resource identified with Fred Rohr, a historically significant person and retains integrity for that association. Specifically, the resource was Rohr's home during the most productive years of his career in San Diego's aeronautics industry from 1942-1965. Rohr was a leader in the aeronautics field and founded the Rohr Aircraft Corporation in 1940, only two years before he moved to the resource. The company achieved explosive growth and employed thousands of people manufacturing vital equipment for the U.S. and British military during World War II. Rohr Aircraft's Chula Vista factory was a major regional employer until it was sold in 1970 and contributed to the growth of the cities of San Diego and Chula Vista. This finding is further supported by the staff report, the historical research report, and written and oral evidence presented at the designation hearing.

(2) The property is historically significant under CRITERION C for its distinctive characteristics through the retention of character defining features of the Colonial Revival style and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its 1940 period of significance. Specifically, the resource exhibits an asymmetrical façade, medium pitched gable roof, entry porch with slender square columns and built in bench, shingle exterior with stone veneer accent, corniced eaves, multi-lite wood frame double hung windows, diamond pane leaded windows, wall dormers, and decorative shutters. This finding is further supported by the staff report, the historical research report, and written and oral evidence presented at the designation hearing.

(3) The property is historically significant under CRITERION D as a notable work of Master Architect Ralph L. Frank and retains integrity as it relates to the original design. Specifically, the resource is significant as an example of Frank's work in his signature style, Colonial Revival, and as part of a collection of Frank designed Colonial Revival homes in the La Playa neighborhood of Point Loma constructed in the 1930s and 1940s. This finding is further supported by the staff report, the historical research report, and written and oral evidence presented at the designation hearing.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, in light of the foregoing, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego hereby approves the historical designation of the above named property. The designation includes the parcel and exterior of the building as Designated Historical Resource **Site No. 0**.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the designation shall include cobblestone wall and fence on San Fernando Street, the granite site walls at the driveway, and the S-shaped stone site wall in the front yard.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the designation shall excludes the 2022 basement level enclosure.

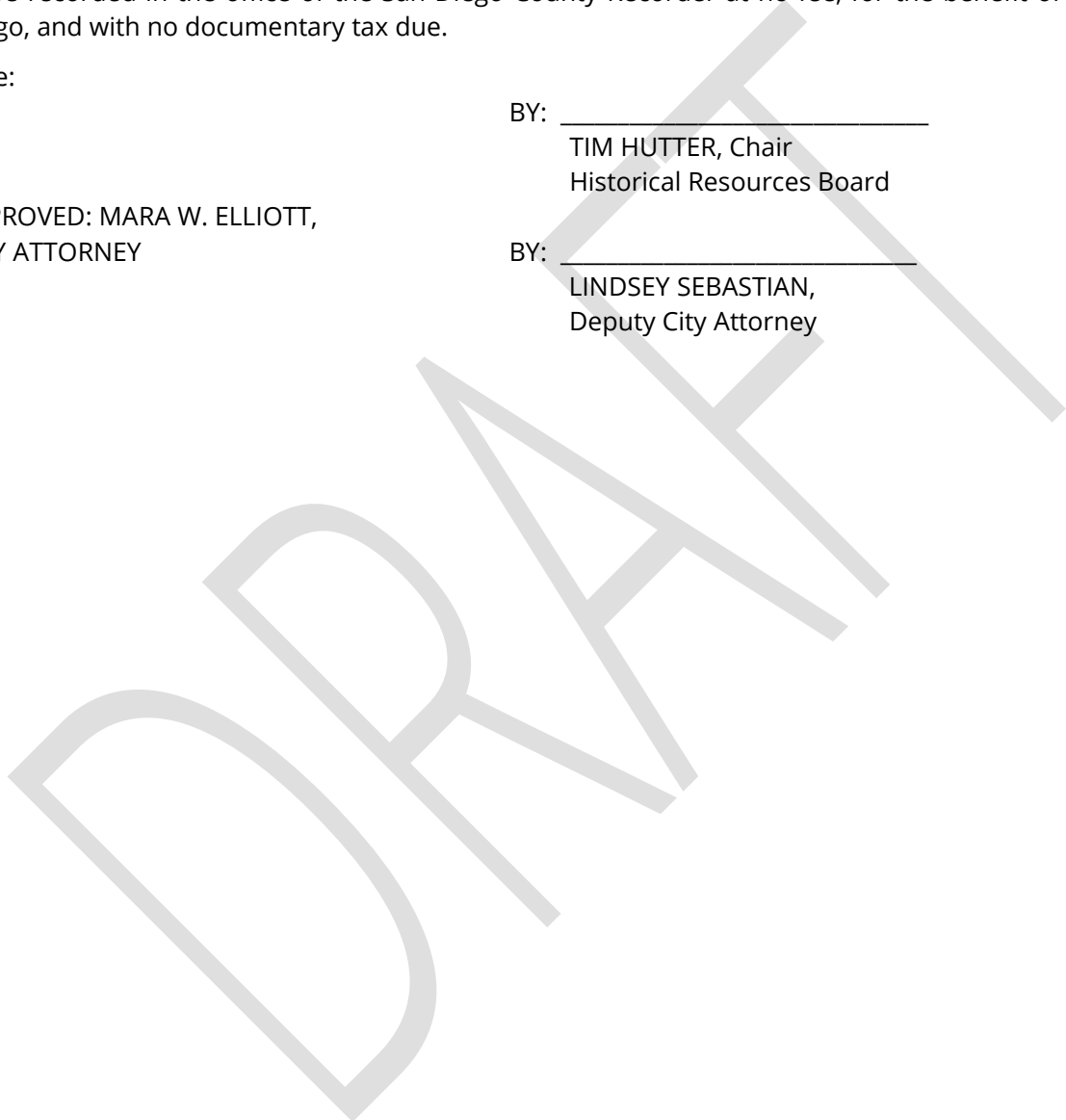
BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the Secretary to the Historical Resources Board shall cause this resolution to be recorded in the office of the San Diego County Recorder at no fee, for the benefit of the City of San Diego, and with no documentary tax due.

Vote:

BY: _____
TIM HUTTER, Chair
Historical Resources Board

APPROVED: MARA W. ELLIOTT,
CITY ATTORNEY

BY: _____
LINDSEY SEBASTIAN,
Deputy City Attorney



RECORDING REQUESTED BY
CITY OF SAN DIEGO
DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DEPARTMENT

WHEN RECORDED MAIL TO

HISTORICAL RESOURCES BOARD
ATTN: HRB SECRETARY
1222 FIRST AVENUE, MS 501
SAN DIEGO, CA 92101

SPACE ABOVE THIS LINE FOR RECORDER'S USE

RESOLUTION NUMBER **N/A**

HISTORICAL DESIGNATION OF PROPERTY ON

555 San Fernando Street, San Diego, CA 92106

ASSESSOR PARCEL NUMBER **532-272-09-00**

HISTORICAL RESOURCES BOARD NUMBER **0**