



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

Report to the Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: July 12, 2024 REPORT NO. HRB-24-024

HEARING DATE: July 25, 2024

SUBJECT: **ITEM #4 – Heart of Bankers Hill Historic District National Register Nomination**

RESOURCE INFO: California Office of Historic Preservation Pending Nominations link:
[Heart of Bankers Hill Historic District Nomination Draft \(ca.gov\)](#)

APPLICANT: Heart of Bankers Hill, Inc. represented by Architectural Resources Group

LOCATION: Various addresses within the proposed Heart of Bankers Hill Historic District, Uptown Community, Council District 3

DESCRIPTION: Review of the Heart of Bankers Hill Historic District National Register of Historic Places nomination

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Recommend to the California State Office of Historic Preservation the listing of the Heart of Bankers Hill Historic District with a period of significance of 1905-1961 at a local level of significance under National Register Criterion C and that the nomination be amended to provide additional justification for extending the period of significance beyond 1940 and potentially change the classification status of the 8 properties shown in Tables 1 and 2 of the staff report with a caveat that the proposed classifications of all contributing and non-contributing resources may not be adequately confirmed by staff due to the limited property-specific information and documentation requirements for National Register nominations.

BACKGROUND

This item is being brought before the Historical Resources Board (HRB) pursuant to the California State Office of Historic Preservation's (OHP) requirement that the local jurisdiction be provided 60 days to review and comment on a nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. A National Register of Historic Places Registration Form was prepared and submitted to the OHP by Architectural Resources Group to nominate the Heart of Bankers Hill Historic District to the National Register of Historic Places. Proposed nominations are reviewed by the OHP and the State Historical

Resources Commission for submittal to the National Park Service for final review and listing by the Keeper of the National Register of Historic Places.

A recommendation by the HRB to the State is not a designation action and the proposed historic district will not be listed in the City of San Diego Register of Historic Resources as a result of the Board's recommendation or as a result of listing on the National Register by the State and the National Park Service. However, if listed or determined eligible for listing on the National Register, the district would meet the definition of a designated historical resource under the City's Municipal Code and would be subject to compliance with the City's Historical Resources Regulations.

The proposed Heart of Bankers Hill Historic District comprises approximately 35 acres and is located within the Bankers Hill neighborhood of the Uptown community planning area. The district boundary is defined by the contour of a canyon that parallels Albatross, Brant, and Curlew Streets on the west; the northern terminus of Front Street and a section of W. Walnut Avenue on the north; Redwood Canyon on the south; and Front Street on the east (Attachment 1). The district boundary is primarily dictated by the neighborhood's topography. A portion of the north boundary also follows the centerline of W. Walnut Avenue, which historically marked the north end of the Horton's Addition map.

The proposed historic district is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C as a significant historical resource at the local level of significance. The period of significance is 1905-1961, reflecting the period during which most properties within the district developed.

Under Criterion C (Design/Construction) the historic district is proposed as eligible in the area of Architecture as an excellent, intact concentration of early-to-mid twentieth century residential architectural styles. Many of the houses within the district were designed by San Diego's most prominent architects of the first half of the twentieth century, and these houses are evocative of how this group of locally influential practitioners collectively guided the architectural and aesthetic development of San Diego's residential neighborhoods at that time. Collectively, buildings within the district exude a strong sense of time and place.

The 103 parcels within the district's proposed boundary comprise mainly private property except for 6 City-owned open space parcels. The nomination surveyed 91 properties and one structure within the public right-of-way as potential resources. A total of 67 buildings and the 1 structure (75 percent) were evaluated and initially determined as district contributing elements, and 21 buildings and 1 site as non-contributors (Attachment 2). The 1 structure is the Spruce Street Suspension Bridge which is part of the City's mobility infrastructure and is designated as a local historical resource. District contributors also include 24 individual properties locally listed on the San Diego register as individually significant and 2 resources previously listed on the National Register.

The Uptown Community has a long-standing development history and has been part of various community and citywide historic contexts and survey efforts. The most recent, consisted of a historic context statement and reconnaissance survey prepared for the 2016 Uptown Community Plan update. This survey is substantially more detailed than a typical reconnaissance-level survey because it incorporated previous surveys and conducted more extensive field work. However, it did not include the degree of documentation required for an intensive-level survey. The [Uptown](#)

[Community Plan Area 2016 Historic Resources Survey Report](#) (Uptown Survey) identified eighteen potential historic districts, four additional districts that appear locally eligible but were not as thoroughly surveyed, three Multiple Property Listings, and 2,134 properties that may be eligible for individual listing under one or more of the City's local designation criteria. As standard practice with historic surveys scoped at the community plan level, the historic districts identified in the Uptown Survey are subject to further research and intensive-level survey work to verify their eligibility.

The boundaries for the twenty-two potential historic districts identified by the Uptown Survey were determined using the National Register standards for determining district boundaries. The original historic subdivision maps were used as the origination of proposed boundaries which were then reviewed with respect to underlying zoning and surveyed for their visual development characteristics. Factors evaluated include an assessment of visual barriers, visual changes in character, boundaries at a specific time in history, and clearly differentiated patterns of historic development.

The Uptown Survey identified a Heart of Bankers Hill Historic District as potentially eligible for designation under City of San Diego Historical Resources Board (HRB) Criteria A, C and D with a period of significance of 1870 to 1940. The boundary proposed in the survey was generally north of redwood street, south of Pennsylvania avenue, west of first avenue, and east of dove street (Attachment 3). This proposed boundary is slightly larger than the boundary proposed by the National Register nomination and included a total of 125 buildings. The nomination includes a discussion on both the historical residential development trends and the master architects associated with the district, but does not propose designation under National Register Criteria A or D.

ANALYSIS

The National Register nomination by Architectural Resources Group concludes that the historic district is significant under National Register Criterion C at the local level of significance. The OHP received the nomination in December 2023 and has reviewed and docketed the nomination for the August 2, 2024 State Historical Resources Commission quarterly meeting.

City staff has reviewed the applicant's Registration Form, conducted a field survey of the resources, and reviewed Sanborn maps, Google maps street view, and all available recent permits. Staff concurs that the proposed historic district has the attributes of a historic district at the local level of significance. The proposed district has a coherent concentration of buildings representative of several development periods and architectural styles within the City's historical development.

However, staff was unable to confirm the contributing/non-contributing classifications of each potential resource due to the limited property-specific information and documentation requirements for National Register nominations and due to the time constraint posed by the State's 60-day notice requirement. Staff was able to meet with the members of the applicant's team to discuss the results of our review, including obtaining their input on the classification of resources and additional justification of the proposed period of significance (see discussion below). The applicant agreed to the following text changes to the Registration Form that would address most issues raised by staff's review in the discussion below:

- In Section 8, Statement of Significance: revise all references to “early 20th century architectural styles” to “early to mid-20th century architectural styles,” so that the narrative more directly aligns with the 1905-1961 period of significance.
- In Section 8, Statement of Significance: revise all references to houses being “excellent examples” of their respective architectural style to “good to excellent examples,” to better capture the range of architecture and design within the district.
- Corrections:
 - o The incorrect address “305 W Walnut” will be corrected to “315 W Walnut” (Sect. 7 p. 7, Sect. 7 p. 8, Sect. 8 p. 41)
 - o The incorrect resource number for 315 W Walnut will be corrected from #91 to #90 (Sect. 7, p. 7)
 - o The incorrect resource number for 321 W Walnut be corrected from #92 to #91 (Sect. 7, p. 7)
 - o Change the World War II reference to World War I (Sect. 7, p. 7)

NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERION C

The district is proposed as significant under National Register Criterion C: *Embodies distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.*

The nomination states that the Heart of Bankers Hill Historic District is significant as an excellent, intact concentration of early-to-mid twentieth century residential architectural styles. Built for middle- and upper-income San Diegans, contributing buildings – many custom-designed single-family homes – exhibit a high level of articulation, and are thus excellent examples of their respective architectural styles. Many of the buildings within the district were designed by San Diego’s most prominent architects of the first half of the twentieth century and are evocative of how this group of locally influential practitioners guided the architectural and aesthetic development of San Diego’s residential neighborhoods at that time. Collectively, buildings within the district exude a strong sense of time and place and evince the distinctive look and feel of an early twentieth century suburban neighborhood.

The nomination identifies the following architectural styles present: Craftsman, Prairie, American Foursquare, Spanish Colonial Revival, Colonial Revival, Mediterranean Revival, Italian Renaissance, Tudor Revival, Classical Revival, and Pueblo Revival, along with the unique Early Modern style of Irving Gill. Also present, though less common are examples of the earlier Queen Anne and the later Mid-Century Modern and Ranch styles of architecture.

The nomination also evaluated the significance of the district for its high concentration of properties attributed to notable local architects and builders, many of whom have been established as Masters by the Historical Resources Board. Architects include Henry Lord Gay, Irving J. Gill, Louis J. Gill, William Sterling Hebbard, Ralph Hurlburt, William Templeton Johnson, Frank Mead and Richard Requa, the Quayle Brothers, Hazel Wood Waterman, Emmor Brooke Weaver, and Carleton Winslow,

Sr. Builders and other professionals include Alexander Schreiber, Kate O. Sessions, Walter Trepte, and Edwin M. Capps (engineer of the Spruce Street Suspension Bridge).

Analysis of Criterion C

Staff concurs that the nomination establishes significance of the proposed district under National Register Criterion C at a local level of significance. The nomination's research and narrative discussion presented in the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form establish the architectural significance of the proposed district. The architectural evaluations of individual properties describe how the contributing resources embody the characteristics of the various architectural styles popular during the district's period of significance and also note the high concentration of properties designed and built by architects and builders who have been established as Masters by the Historical Resources Board.

Staff's field work and review of district resources confirmed that the contributors represent a coherent collection of good to excellent examples of the architectural styles found in San Diego during the district's period of significance of 1905-1961, including the mid-century modern and ranch styles constructed after the 1940 period of significance identified in the Uptown Survey and verified by the San Diego Modernism Historic Context Statement. However, staff recommends that the Registration Form be amended to reflect that there are "good" as well as excellent examples of contributing resources within their respective styles. This change would better reflect that the mid-20th century Ranch style homes (as well as a few Craftsman style homes) are not as highly styled as the other resources.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The nomination proposes a boundary that is smaller than that of the potential historic district identified in the Uptown Survey. While the southern and western boundaries of the proposed district and the Uptown Survey's potential district are the same, the Uptown Survey identified an additional 30 parcels within a larger boundary. These parcels are generally in two areas east and north of the proposed boundary: the east side of Front Street and First Avenue between Upas and Walnut Streets, and an irregular boundary that runs along the Robinson Mews alley to West Brookes Avenue and north of Front Street.

The proposed district does not include properties along Robinson Mews and W. Brookes Avenue. The proposed district's north boundary instead follows the centerline of W. Walnut Avenue, which historically marked the north end of Horton's Addition, and extends to include the 3500 block of Albatross Street, which terminates at a canyon and where buildings share historic context. The boundary identified by the Uptown Survey follows the west side of Robinson Mews and jogs east along W. Brookes Avenue to include 10 properties to the north along Front Street. Within the neighborhood's lot and block pattern, Robinson Mews is situated as an alleyway behind Front and Albatross Streets and functions and feels like an alley with a narrow pavement width framed by abutting rear yard fences and garages similar to any alleyway in San Diego. The extension of the district boundary along the Robinson Mews alley and the jog along W. Brookes Avenue does not feel like a natural extension of the district within the neighborhood's street grid.

A boundary that included both sides of Front Street would appear more coherent but may lack the historic feeling and association of the proposed district. The blocks bounded by Front Street contain

a mix of contemporary infill development and historic development of single-family residential buildings, apartment buildings and commercial buildings. These blocks do not have the same contextual relationship as the blocks included within the proposed district which contain a much larger proportion of single-family residential buildings, 83 out of 90 buildings compared to 4 out of the 12 buildings in the expanded boundary. These blocks reflect additional themes in the neighborhood's historic development and lack the same feeling as those within the proposed district.

The Uptown Survey identified the district as potentially significant under multiple Criteria (local A, C and D) and proposed a boundary that captures a wider variety of building types and architectural styles possibly reflecting broader socio-economic levels. Historic districts designated under local Criterion A such as South Park are significant for their breadth of historical development and can reflect a variety of related uses, building types and architectural styles expressed at various socio-economic levels as these relate to one or more historical development themes.

The boundary proposed by the National Register nomination reflects significance under NR Criterion C related to architecture with less of a focus on historical development. The proposed boundary is generally formed by whole streets and blocks except where these are interrupted by canyon topography and can be considered geographically coherent. Staff therefore does not recommend an expanded boundary that captures a wider variety of potential resources. Such a boundary would more likely be associated with events related to the historical development of Bankers Hill and may alter the feeling and association of the district as a whole when considered under NR Criterion C.

PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE

The nomination proposes a period of significance of 1905 to 1961 and staff concurs although the Uptown Survey identified a period of significance for a potential district of 1880 to 1940. However, these dates are more reflective of the special elements of the Uptown Community's development history under local designation Criterion A. The 1880 date is reflective of the Uptown Survey's "Early History: 1769-1885" theme and establishment of the Horton's Addition subdivision. There are no buildings from this era identified in the potential district. The 1940 end date is reflective of the "Great Depression and World War II: 1929-1948" theme when a large majority of the buildings in the district were constructed, including the last building of this period in 1940.

Expanding the period of significance encompasses infill development of the post-war era while also adding to the architectural significance of the district by including later modern styles of Ranch and Mid-Century Modern in addition to the early modern styles of Prairie, Craftsman and the unique "cubist" style of Irving Gill. However, staff recommends that the Registration Form be amended to provide greater justification for the expanded period of significance by referencing the mid-20th century period in the narrative. City staff met with the applicant and discussed the expanded period of significance. These comments were discussed with the applicant, and they provided draft changes to the text that address this issue (see above).

CONTRIBUTING AND NON-CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES

The City defines and regulates designated historical resources as those listed on, or formally determined eligible for listing on, the State or National registers. As a result, staff reviews State and

National register nominations in detail to ensure an adequate analysis and information exists to regulate these resources effectively and preserve the features and characteristics that are critical to conveying their significance. Consistency in evaluating district resources and determining their status as contributors or non-contributors is important for multiple reasons. First, in order for a district to be eligible for listing on any Register, a district must have a clear majority of contributing resources. Second, a contributing vs non-contributing status confers significant differences in the application of the City's Historical Resources Regulations and Guidelines on a property. Lastly, in the event that a National Register District is listed on the City's Register through a future action, contributing resources are eligible to apply for a Mills Act agreement.

A list of contributing and non-contributing resources can be found in Section 7, pages 32-34 of the National Register nomination. Descriptions of all resources including address, assessor's parcel number, contributing status, year built, and builder (as known) is in Section 7 pages 11-32 of the nomination. City staff has reviewed the nomination and conducted a high-level review of the entire historic district via field survey, permit review, Sanborn maps, and Google maps street view feature and concurs with the survey methodology as stated in the nomination and concurs with the classification of all but 8 of the 92 properties.

City staff met with the applicant team to discuss our review. As a result, the applicant has agreed to revise the Registration Form to reflect the contributing status of the 5 resources shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1 – Status Changes (Agreement)

Address/APN	New Status	City Staff Comments
3514 Albatross 452-391-0500	Non-Contributor	The large, 2-story side addition from 1985 is visually prominent and non-differentiated from the original design, and the carport/terrace is too visually prominent in terms of massing and size.
3255 Front St. 452-538-3600	Contributor	Although an addition was added to the rear in 1982 and the building has undergone window replacement in original openings, staff believes that the building retains sufficient integrity to be a district contributor.
3328 Front St. 452-537-2200	Non-Contributor	According to City permits, a major remodel was done to the property in 1998-1999 which included a large addition, new decking, full perimeter wall, and loss of nearly all material integrity. Therefore, staff does not believe the house maintains enough integrity for Criterion C.

Address/APN	New Status	City Staff Comments
3355 Front St. 452-538-1400	Contributor	A permitted porch restoration was done in 2024 which restored design integrity to the point of contributing status under Criterion C. Further, the second story addition was approved by City staff in 2022 as consistent with the Historic Preservation Standards and Guidelines.
148 W. Spruce St. 452-538-3900	Contributor	Although an addition was added to the rear, the addition is set back in an appropriate manner and does not overwhelm the original building. All other changes are compatible with materials and design and staff supports a contributing status under Criterion C.

The applicant team also reviewed the following three properties and maintains that they retain enough integrity to convey their significance and association with the district. Application of the Secretary of Interior’s Standards pertaining to integrity is subject to interpretation. However, staff recommends the following three properties be reclassified to non-contributor status to maintain consistency in how City staff has been interpreting the Standards when preparing and reviewing past local historic district nominations.

Table 2 – Status Changes (Disagreement)

Address/APN	City Proposed Status	City Staff Comments
3245 Brant St. 452-537-3100	Non-Contributor	The resource has had a front and rear porch enclosure, window opening modifications, window replacements, and a large rear addition which prevent the resource from maintaining enough integrity to convey any design significance. The covered walkway and site wall provide a false sense of history and feeling.
3545 Albatross 452-392-0800	Non-Contributor	Historically inappropriate shingle siding replaced stucco in 2008. Building record indicates original siding as wood shingle. Due to the incompatible wall cladding, staff does not think that this resource retains enough integrity for Criterion C.

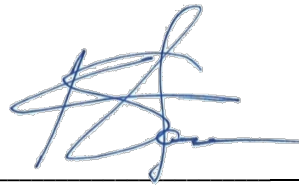
3162 Front Street 452-511-1700	Non-Contributor	A carport/patio was added to the south façade. An infilled porch on the street facing façade does not retain enough legibility and impacts integrity of design, materials, and feeling for Criterion C. Comparison of a historic newspaper rendering and Sanborn map shows that the primary (side) façade was likely modified to create the covered porch for the main entry.
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CONCLUSION

Based on the information submitted and the research and field work of City staff, staff recommends that the HRB support the nomination of the Heart of Bankers Hill National Register Historic District for listing on the National Register of Historic Places at the local level of significance under Criterion C and further recommends amending the nomination to justify expanding the period of significance and to change the contributing status of the several properties as discussed above.



Bernie Turgeon
Senior Planner
City Planning Department



Kelley Stanco
Deputy Director
City Planning Department

BT/KS/bt

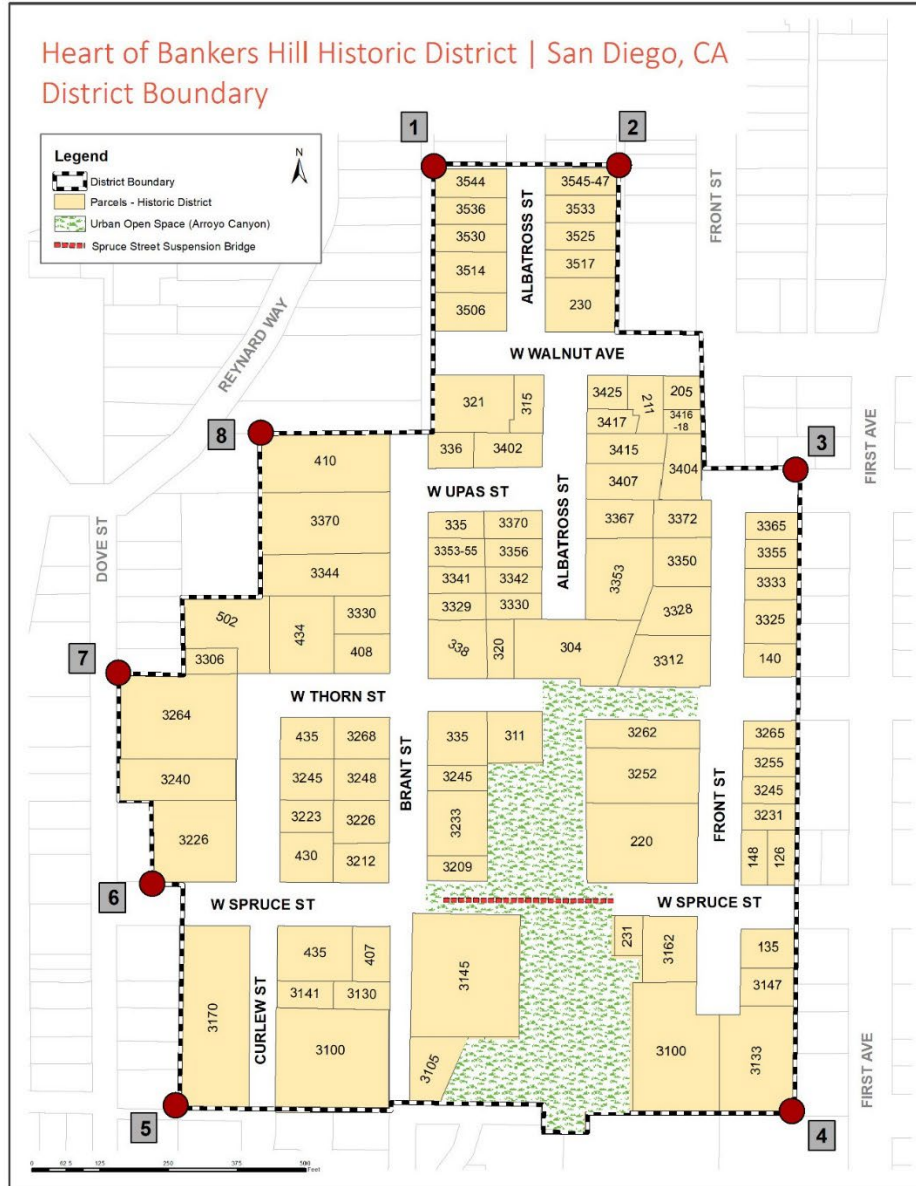
Attachments:

1. Proposed National Register District Boundary Map
2. District Contributors Map from Registration Form
3. Uptown Survey Report Map - Heart of Bankers Hill Potential District
4. Applicant's National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (see Resource Info weblink on page 1; also distributed under separate cover)

Heart of Bankers Hill Historic District
Name of Property

San Diego, CA
County and State

Location Map



United States Department of the Interior
 National Park Service / National Register of Historic Places Registration Form
 NPS Form 10-900 OMB Control No. 1024-0018

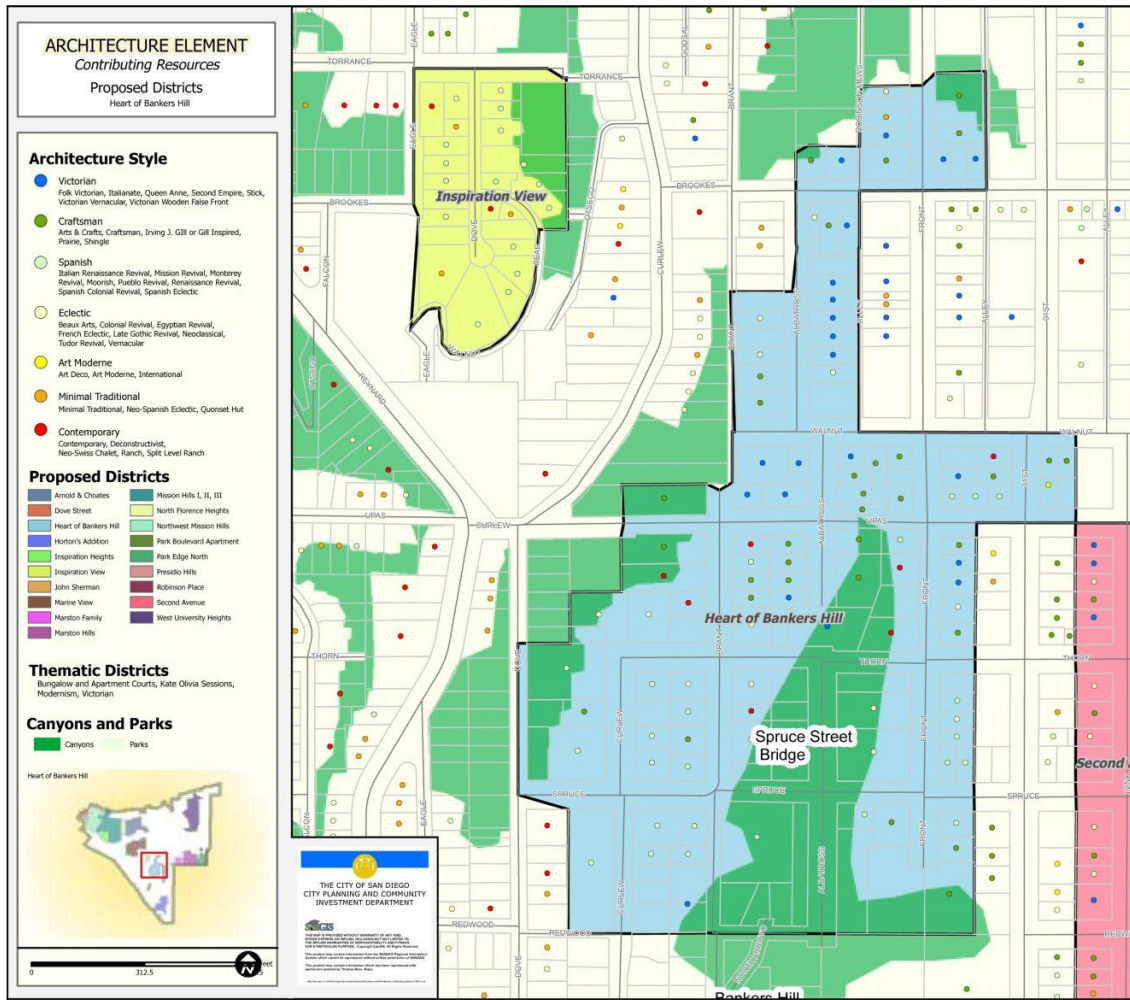
Heart of Bankers Hill Historic District
 Name of Property

San Diego, CA
 County and State

Sketch Map and Contributor Key



Figure 7. Heart of Banker's Hill Potential Historic District*
 *Graphic Dates to the 2004-2006 Survey Effort



Uptown Community Plan Area
 2016 Historic Resources Survey Report