

CITY OF BERKELEY
CITY CLERK DEPT

2016 JAN 15 AM 10:44

January 11, 2016

Glenn Yasuda
Berkeley Bowl
2020 Oregon Street
Berkeley, CA 94704

City Clerk
City of Berkeley
2180 Milvia Street
Berkeley, CA 94704

RE: 2777 Shattuck; Appeal of Landmark Preservation Commission's action

Dear City Clerk:

Herewith please find my formal appeal of the LPC's action designating our building as a Structure Of Merritt in their meeting of December 3, 2015. Below, and enclosed please find our comments on why this "landmarking" action is unwarranted and was chiefly intended to stop the Berkeley Honda project from moving into the building.

It cannot be overstated – this Landmark/Structure of Merit application is intentionally hostile to the proposed user and use of the former Berkeley Bowl building at 2777 Shattuck . The application's authors admitted this following the hearing at which the application was initiated and, directly following the LPC hearing of the application, the applicants again stated that they oppose this user and use and intend to stop this project. These direct statements lay waste to the applicants' statements made in the public hearing, which were that they are not hostile to a proposed project.

The applicants are hostile to a proposed building user and use and are using the Landmarks process as a means to halt a project. They've in fact already in part succeeded, as the project itself has been waylaid by the Landmark/SOM application for six months already.

If the term "hostile" is too frank, then perhaps better to label this landmark application effort as a version of the writing of history referred to as "politically motivated myth-making."

The LPC's deliberations underscored the weakness of the application, unequivocally agreeing that the substantially altered state of the building precludes landmark status. In the process, the LPC substantially negated the applicants' voluminous arguments, instead concluding only that the building is a "good" example of the Streamline Moderne by Architect Albert Farr – whereas the applicant argued with such exaggerated terms as "impressive", "irreplaceable", "rare", and

“outstanding” -- and that was once a neighborhood bowling facility. This outcome could not have resulted in a weaker designation, the findings just the thinnest of facts rather than the establishment of meaningful criteria. Moreover, three commissioners disagreed with those thin arguments by voting against, and another abstained.

In addition to the over-riding ulterior motives, this Landmark/Structure of Merit application effort and action assuredly lowers the landmarking threshold, altogether leaving one to seriously wonder about the purposes and values of historic preservation.

Please proceed promptly in informing the City Council of this appeal so as the Council can take the necessary actions regarding this designation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Glenn Yasuda", with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Glenn Yasuda
Owner

Enclosure

Cc: Mayor Tom Bates and members of the City Council
Sally Zarnowitz, LPC Secretary

PRESERVATION ARCHITECTURE

December 2, 2015

City of Berkeley
Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC)
2120 Milvia Street
Berkeley, CA 94704

Re: Pending landmark application for 2777 Shattuck Avenue (Berkeley Bowl)

Commissioners:

I have twenty-five years of professional preservation experience in Berkeley and before the LPC, over the course of which I have witnessed that the era of hostile landmark applications has been transcended by the recent generation of commissioners. I trust that this Commission will uphold the era of principled landmarking efforts and project evaluations.

The present application has been authored on the basis of hostility to a building use and user. This is not a statement of opinion, it stems from a direct conversation between the applicant and myself. Per the author's admission, the reasons behind this application are:

- That he/they oppose automotive use of this building and this vicinity;
- That he/they believe that the reasoning behind the proposed use is a consequence of a real estate and development conspiracy.

When I queried about whether there were any actual preservation related reasons behind this initiation, the applicant added:

- That he/they didn't like the car door proposed to be added at the front of the building;
- That he/they do not believe that the current LPC is sufficiently preservation-focused.

Thus, with the exception of the door alteration – which is the only actual preservation subject related to the currently proposed project and is a minor issue – the applicant(s) clearly believes himself/themselves to be citizen planners, and which is exactly how they introduce the application itself. Moreover, it is also apparent that he/they believe that their efforts stand above and outside that of the regular public planning process, including respect for established historic resource standards and criteria.

To pursue their ends, the applicant(s) unwaveringly and unobjectively pursue a finding of significance and, sure enough, find a handful of possibilities. Yet, remarkably, even bizarrely, no finding is made on the necessarily primary basis of the building's individual architectural merits. Evidently, the applicant(s) understood that this building's altered character precludes such a finding. Yet, that it has been substantially altered goes entirely unmentioned in the findings.

Its extent of alteration cannot be ignored. Thus, I have attached a diagram that I standardly employ to measurably assess the extent of change on a given resource. In this case, the result is surprising and unequivocal. Moreover, despite the applicants suggestion to the contrary, these alterations were largely structural – i.e., they removed and altered building structure – so are not reversible.

While the above and attached address the central points of argument, it may also be worth noting that the findings – which the staff report unfortunately copies – are based on a range of potential associations and on the use of superlatives. For example:

- "...less than half a dozen major non-residential buildings constructed in Berkeley in the Streamline Modern style...";

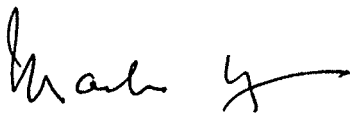
- "...impressive and irreplaceable...";
- "...a rare example of a [architect Albert] Farr commercial building..." who was then "...transitioning into the Moderne style...";
- "...one of Berkeley's outstanding examples of adaptive reuse...";
- "...an acknowledged role in the creation of Berkeley's internationally known fine cuisine culture...";
- "...the culmination of a major period of public and private recreation facility development...";
- "...a nexus of recreational enjoyment...";
- "...an important cultural theater...";
- "...a nationally significant cultural event...";
- "...a visual landmark...";
- "...a highly visible icon...".

These quotes summarize the supposed findings. Again – strangely, bizarrely – none actually address potential historic architectural significance, instead relying on largely subjective associations and considerations.

In turn, several requisite responses:

- That it was originally a bowling alley goes largely unmentioned;
- That its 1977 adaptive reuse is asserted as being a historically significant event (!);
- That the original Berkeley Bowl was not unique but was one of dozens of local bowling alleys, each of which was undoubtedly a local recreational "nexus";
- That despite its being a "visual landmark" and "highly visual icon", the building is not included in published Bay Area architectural surveys, including those of noted author and historian Susan Dinkelspiel Cerny, who is a champion of Berkeley architecture;
- That at the time of its construction it was International Modernism that was the emerging and important architectural style in California, not Streamline Moderne, the era of which was ending, its best examples in the past;
- That the Streamline Moderne is simply an identified architectural style and is not in and of itself important nor are all examples thereof noteworthy. Based on the provided examples, the Streamline Moderne is poorly representative of Berkeley architecture;
- That in 1940 its presumed architect, Albert Farr, was not "transitioning" but was poised to conclude his career – as the only author to thus far summarize his work (Bradley Wiedmaier) has written that Farr retired before WWII, when he was about 70, and died in 1945 (not, as stated in the application, in 1947);
- That his firm's commercial work is rare does not make it important – in fact, Farr's noteworthy work was not commercial but residential and none of which was Modern;
- Finally, Farr has not been previously identified as a "master architect," nor does this application suffice for such a determination.

Respectfully,



Mark Hulbert
Preservation Architect

attached: Historic building evaluation diagram

GRAPHIC ANALYSIS OF THE BUILDING'S EXISTING FAÇADE UNEQUIVOCALLY ILLUSTRATES THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE ORIGINAL BUILDING EXTERIOR WAS ALTERED IN 1993:

- THE ORIGINAL NORTH AND SOUTH WINGS HAVE BEEN ALTERED TO THE EXTENT THAT APPROXIMATELY 90% OF THE ORIGINAL EXTERIOR WALLS HAVE BEEN LOST.
- THE 1993 EXTERIOR ALTERATIONS INCLUDED THE STRUCTURAL REMOVAL AND ALTERATION OF THE ORIGINAL EXTERIOR WALLS WITH THE EXCEPTION OF SHALLOW UPPER SPANDRELS, AND WHICH ARE RECESSED BEHIND THE NEW FAÇADES. IN ALL LIKELIHOOD, THE PLASTER FINISH ON THOSE SPANDRELS ALSO DATES TO 1993.
- THE BUILDING ENTRY HAS LIKEWISE BEEN REPLACED WITH A 1993 ADDITION.
- THE BUILDING'S SOUTH-FACING EXTERIOR AT THE END OF THE SOUTH WING HAS BEEN ALTERED TO THE SAME EXTENT AS THE FRONT.
- THE NORTH AND SOUTH BUILDING SIDES HAVE NO HISTORIC ARCHITECTURAL CHARACTER OR CHARACTER-DEFINING FEATURES AND HAVE ALSO BEEN ALTERED IN SUBSTANTIVE WAYS.

CONSEQUENTLY, FOR THE PURPOSES OF THE IDENTIFICATION OF POTENTIAL HISTORIC ARCHITECTURAL RESOURCES, THE BUILDING WINGS AND ENTRY ARE CONTEMPORARY AND NON-HISTORIC CONSTRUCTION.

WHAT SUBSTANTIVELY REMAINS OF THE EXTERIOR ARCHITECTURE OF THE ORIGINAL 1940 BUILDING IS LIMITED TO THE UPPER CENTRAL TOWER AND THE BOWED CENTRAL ROOF BEYOND.

