



City of Santa Ana
20 Civic Center Plaza, Santa Ana, CA 92701
Historic Resources Commission Staff Report
September 5, 2024

Topic: HRC No. 2024-07 – Levengood-Bist House (1205 South Birch Street)

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Adopt a resolution approving and Historic Register Categorization No. 2024-07

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City of Santa Ana is requesting approval for re-categorization and renaming of an existing Spanish Colonial Revival-style, single-family residence at 1205 South Birch Street, which was placed on the Santa Ana Register of Historic Resources (“Register”) and categorized as “Contributive” in 2003. Subsequent analysis confirmed the property is significant not only for its previously recognized architectural merit, but also due to the historical contributions of Lisa and Brian Bist to the Santa Ana community. Based on this analysis, it is recommended that the property be re-categorized as “Key,” because it is associated with significant people in Santa Ana’s history. To reflect the re-evaluation of the property’s significance, it is also recommended its name be appended as the Levengood-Bist House.

DISCUSSION

Background

On December 4, 2003, the Historic Resources Commission (HRC) held a duly noticed public hearing to consider Historic Register Categorization (HRC-2003-60) and Historic Register Categorization Application (HRCA-2003-58) for the property at 1205 S. Birch Street. The HRC unanimously voted to list the property on the Register under Criterion 1, and within the “Contributive” category, because it contributes to the overall character and history of Wilshire Square. Moreover, as a building with “distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or period,” it is an intact example of a Spanish Colonial Revival-style home in Santa Ana. At that time it was named the Levengood House.

On May 8, 2024, the HRC unanimously approved a motion to recommend that the City Council authorize the City Manager and City Clerk to execute a Historic Property Preservation Agreement (Mills Act) with the current property owner. This recommendation

was subject to the property being re-evaluated, re-categorized as “Key,” and re-named to the Levengood-Bist House, due to the property’s historical associations with its former owners and residents, Lisa and Brian Bist. Several commissioners provided anecdotal information substantiating the historical associations with Lisa and Brian Bist.

Following the May HRC meeting, staff provided subsequent analysis and confirmed the property is significant not only for its previously recognized architectural merit, but also due to the historical contributions of Lisa and Brian Bist in the areas of neighborhood activism and local politics in Santa Ana. Staff provides additional analysis in the *Analysis of the Issues* section of this report.

Project Location and Site Description

The Levengood-Bist House (formally Levengood House) consists of an existing one-story Spanish Colonial Revival style residence that is approximately 1,590 square feet in size on a 7,253-square-foot residential lot (Exhibit 2).

Substantially intact and enhanced by its landscaping, Levengood-Bist House is an example of a modestly sized Spanish Colonial Revival home. The tiled roof is cross-gabled and moderately pitched over the front of the building, while the rear of the house is flat-roofed and circled by a tile-edged parapet. Smooth stucco covers the exterior of the building. Clay pipe vents pierce the gable ends. A porch is recessed beneath the side gable on the north half the façade. Wooden posts with carved brackets support the roof overhang and a waist high stucco wall encloses the porch space. A tripartite window and the entry open onto the porch. In an unusual departure from a standard Spanish roof configuration, a small, front gabled dormer is located above the porch. The southern half of the façade contains a large, picture window, to which an aluminum canopy has been added, offset to the south and a tall, slender window to the north. A three-sided bay projects from the south elevation. Although reroofed, the house retains its design integrity. Character-defining exterior features of the Levengood-Bist House that should be preserved include, but may not be limited to: materials and finishes (stucco, wood, tile); roof configuration and treatment; massing and composition; original doors and windows; porch; and architectural detailing (porch posts, brackets, and beam).

Analysis of the Issues

Pursuant to Section 30-2.2 (Categorization) of the Santa Ana Municipal Code (SAMC), the HRC may, after a duly noticed public hearing revise, or modify any such categorization upon reconsideration of the historical or architectural importance of a particular building, structure, object, or site. As previously mentioned, in 2003 the HRC approved listing the property on the Register and within the “Contributive” category. Following the information received during the May 8, 2024 HRC meeting to approve a Mills Act for the subject

property, staff moved forward with a public hearing for consideration of a re-categorization of the property from “Contributive” to “Key,” due to its historical association with its former owners and occupants Lisa and Brian Bist, and that it be renamed to reflect the Bists’ associations with the property. Therefore, staff provides analysis below substantiating the request for re-categorization for the HRC’s consideration.

In June and July 2024, staff prepared an evaluation of the property’s historical significance due to its associations with the Bists. Research for the 2024 reevaluation relied principally on the oral testimony of Commissioner Christy, HRC Chair Tim Rush, and Guy Ball, an associate of the Bists. Staff briefly interviewed each of these figures in June and July 2024, in addition to reviewing testimony provided by Commissioner Christy recorded during the HRC’s May 8, 2024, hearing. The testimony was supplemented with Internet research.

The testimony indicated Brian and Lisa Bist’s earliest historically significant activities were in the area of neighborhood improvement activism, which the Bists began earnestly in the late 1980s and 1990s. In this area, the Bists were important contributors to the founding and early operation of the Wilshire Square Neighborhood Association (WSNA), which was established in 1989 to promote the improvement and maintenance of the City’s Wilshire Square neighborhood. Brian was particularly involved in organizing of the WSNA, serving as a founding co-chair and contributing to the drafting of its by-laws. The Bists’ work with the WSNA was a springboard to involvement in the Communication Linkage Forum (known informally as Com-Link), described in one source as “an umbrella organization of neighborhood associations” in Santa Ana (Adams 2007). Brian, along with Ball, helped to found Com-Link in 1989. The organization’s purpose was then, and remains, to provide local residents and neighborhood associations a neutral forum in which they could discuss issues facing their neighborhoods among themselves and with City staff and elected officials (City of Santa Ana 2024). In addition to Brian’s work to establish Com-Link, Lisa served on the body’s Neighborhood Improvement and Code Enforcement (NICE) committee, which furthered Com-Link’s objectives by targeting apparent blight in the city (Adams 2007). According to Commissioner Christy, Lisa’s main contributions while serving on the NICE committee included initiatives to establish a landscaping ordinance and a commercial code enforcement program in the City. Lisa was also involved in efforts to assist business owners on Main Street in rehabilitating their building façades by lobbying to secure redevelopment funds for the financing of improvements. Com-Link continues to operate to this day and counts 60 neighborhood associations as participants (City of Santa Ana 2024).

In 1998, Lisa was elected to the first of two consecutive terms on the Santa Ana City Council, serving until 2006. As a councilmember, she continued to champion neighborhood improvement efforts and built relationships with important businesses and institutions operating in the city. According to Commissioner Christy, as a member of the

City's Environmental and Transportation Advisory Commission ("ETAC"), Lisa championed an urban forestry campaign, in addition to a program of street modifications intended to alter problematic entrances into many neighborhoods. Christy observed that Lisa was also a key player in the City Council's outreach to important public and private institutions. During Lisa's tenure on the City Council, she contributed to the Council's successful efforts to support the Bowers Museum's acquisition of a new collection from the British Museum, to facilitate the establishment of the Mexican Consulate in the City, to convince First American Financial Corporation to retain its headquarters in Santa Ana, and to facilitate the development of the master-planned Santa Ana Auto Mall, among other accomplishments. Overall, Commissioner Christy claimed the Bists' significance is due to their instrumental roles in effecting concrete changes in Santa Ana that improved the City's public image and quality of life.

As mentioned above, the historic property was listed on the Register in 2003. Based on the 2003 evaluation, the property is eligible under Criterion 1 and in category "Contributive" as a good example of the Spanish Colonial Revival style. As determined through subsequent research and reevaluation in 2024, the property is also significant for its associations with the contributions of Lisa and Brian Bist in the area of local neighborhood activism and politics. Therefore, the property also qualifies under Criterion 4(b), which recognizes a property's associations "with famous people, original settlers, renowned organizations and businesses" (Santa Ana Municipal Code, Section 30-2). Additionally, due to the Bists' historical significance, the property is eligible in the category "Key," which provides for the listing on the Register a "building, structure, object or site [that] is associated with a significant person or event in the City" (Santa Ana Municipal Code, Section 30.2.2). It is further recommended the resource be renamed the "Levensgood-Bist House" to reflect the Bists' historical contributions. The Levensgood-Bist House's character-defining features remain those that characterize its Spanish Colonial Revival style, as identified as part of the 2003 evaluation, as listed above. The updated Executive Summary and Historic Description (Primary Record/DPR form) for the property have been included as Exhibits 5 and 6, for the commission's consideration.

Public Notification

The subject site is located within the Wilshire Square Neighborhood Association. The president of this Neighborhood Association was notified by mail 10 days prior to this public hearing. In addition, the project site was posted with a notice advertising this public hearing, a notice was published in the Orange County Reporter and mailed notices were sent to all property owners within 500 feet of the project site. At the time of this printing, no correspondence, either written or electronic, has been received from any members of the public.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

Pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the CEQA Guidelines, the project is exempt from further review pursuant to Section 15331 of the CEQA Guidelines (Class 31 – Historical Resource Restoration/Rehabilitation) as these actions are designed to preserve historic resources. Based on this analysis, a Notice of Exemption, Environmental Review No. 2024-17 will be filed for this project.

FISCAL IMPACT

The Historic Register Categorization will not result in a fiscal impact to the City.

EXHIBIT(S)

1. Resolution
2. 500-Foot Radius Map
3. 2003 Historic Description
4. Action Minutes December 4, 2003
5. Updated Executive Summary
6. Updated Historic Description
7. May 8, 2024 Special Historic Resources Commission Meeting Minutes
8. Copy of Public Notice

Submitted By: James Williams, Contract Planner

Approved By: Minh Thai, Executive Director of Planning and Building Agency, Planning and Building Agency