



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

Topic: HPPA No. 2022-20– The Elwood (214-218 West 4th Street)

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Recommend that the City Council authorize the City Manager and City Clerk to execute a Historic Property Preservation Agreement (Mills Act) with Liennette Chung, with Wild Orchid Investments, LLC, for the property located at 214-218 West Fourth Street, subject to non-substantive changes approved by the City Manager and City Attorney (Exhibit 1).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Liennette Chung is requesting approval to execute a Mills Act Agreement with the City of Santa Ana at an existing commercial building located at 214-218 W. Fourth Street that is currently listed on the National Register of Historic Places, California Register of Historical Resources, and Santa Ana Register of Historical Properties.

DISCUSSION

Project Location and Site Description

The subject property, known as the Elwood, consists of an existing two-story Art Deco-style commercial building that is approximately 9,100 square feet in size on a 5,200-square-foot commercial lot on the south side West Fourth Street (Exhibit 2). The Elwood was listed on the National Register of Historic Places as a contributing property to the Downtown Historic District and was later automatically added to the California Register of Historical Resources, pursuant to State regulations. The Elwood was added to the Santa Ana Register of Historical Properties (“Register”) in 2001, categorized as “Contributive.”

Analysis of the Issues

Ordinance No. NS-2382 authorized the Historic Resources Commission to execute Historic Property Preservation Agreements (HPPA), commonly known as Mills Act agreements, for eligible properties. The property is listed on the Register and categorized as Contributive, making it eligible for a Mills Act Agreement. The agreement provides monetary incentives to the property owner in the form of a property tax reduction in

exchange for the owner's voluntary commitment to maintain the property in a good state of repair as necessary to maintain its character and appearance. Once recorded, the agreement generates a different valuation method in determining the property's assessed value, resulting in tax savings for the owner. Aside from the tax savings, the benefits include:

- Long term preservation of the property and visual improvement to the neighborhood
- Allows for a mechanism to provide for property rehabilitation
- Provides additional incentive for potential buyers to purchase historic structures
- Discourages inappropriate alterations to the property

The Elwood was listed on the National Register of Historic Places as a contributing property of the Downtown Historic District and was later automatically added to the California Register of Historical Resources, pursuant to State regulations. In 2001, the Historic Resources Commission placed the Elwood on the Santa Ana Register of Historic Properties and within the "Contributive" category as an example of the rebuilding of Fourth Street in the wake of the Long Beach Earthquake of 1933. Character-defining exterior features of the Elwood that should be preserved include, but may not be limited to: exterior finishes dating from the building's original construction in 1886 through the post-earthquake alterations completed in 1933; bay divisions, including pilasters; original and 1933 fenestration; and parapet.

In the time since the property was listed on the Register in 2001, the property has been subject to several alterations, though most of the changes were limited to the installation of mechanical and electrical improvements and reorganization of the interiors of the commercial units. Exterior changes have generally maintained the historic character of the building and included the periodic replacement and eventual removal of all wall-mounted commercial signs, replacement in-kind of the brick veneer cladding along the lower portion of the primary (north) façade, and replacement and reconfiguration of storefront doors, replacement of window panes on the ground level of the primary façade, and removal of brick ground surfacing leading to recessed doorways. More recently, the property has undergone façade improvements, which include removal of up-lighting fixtures, repair to the display windows, stucco and storefront window repair; painting of the building façade, storefront window, and storefront bulkhead; and general up keeping and maintenance of the entrance paving. These improvements can be referenced as part of the site photos provided in Exhibit 3.

As part of the future improvements (Work Plan), staff is proposing the following: continued repair and repainting of the building, replacement of any non-compatible hardware and/or fixtures, general maintenance and upkeep of rooftop mechanical equipment, replacement of storefront glazing (as needed), and upkeep of the rear façade, adjacent to the alley . Staff will ensure that the proposed work will be done sensitively and will maintain the property's character-defining features as part of the Mills Act Agreement for this property.

As part of the Mills Act approval process, staff will work with the applicant to ensure that a bronze plaque is installed honoring and recognizing the structure. The plaque will include the historic name, address, year built, and local historic register designation. Lastly, the site will be subject to general maintenance and upkeep requirements including, but not limited to, replacement or restoration of damaged character-defining features, painting, etc. These improvements will be subject to review and approval by staff. Upon consideration of the application, it is recommended that the City enter into a Historic Property Preservation Agreement.

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. 2024-71, will be filed for this project.

FISCAL IMPACT

The Historic Property Preservation Agreement will reduce the Property Tax revenue account 01102002-50011 to the City by an estimated \$3,121.97 annually, for a period of not less than ten years.

EXHIBIT(S)

1. Mills Act Agreement
2. Vicinity Map - 214-218 W. Fourth Street
3. Site Photos – 214-218 W. Fourth Street
4. Action Minutes HRC (214-218 W. Fourth Street)

Submitted By:
James Williams, Contract Planner

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