

To: Land Use, Transportation, and Infrastructure Committee
From: Kara Hahn, Principal Planner, Community Planning & Development (CPD)
Date: April 4, 2019
RE: Landmark Designation for Cableland, 4150 East Shangri La Drive

Staff Recommendation:

Based on ordinance designation criteria and on the findings of the Landmark Preservation Commission (LPC) that the application meets the criteria for designation of a structure, staff recommends approval of the application.

Request to Designate a Structure:

Application: #2019L-001
Address: 4150 East Shangri La Drive
Zoning: E-SU-D
Council: District #5, Mary Beth Susman
Blueprint Denver: Area of stability
Owner: City and County of Denver
Applicant(s): Mayor Hancock

Case Summary:

Based on information and a draft application submitted by the Cableland Foundation, two Landmark staff members researched and wrote the Landmark Designation application for the property at 4150 East Shangri La Drive. Staff found the application to be complete and to meet Denver landmark designation criteria. As such, staff set the public hearing at the Landmark Preservation Commission for February 12, 2019.

At the Landmark Preservation Commission public hearing, the LPC voted (6-1-1) to recommend approval and forward to City Council, based History Criteria 1c and Architecture Criteria 2a, citing as findings of fact for this recommendation the application form, public testimony, and the staff report.

Designation Criteria and Evaluation, Chapter 30, Denver Revised Municipal Code:

To meet landmark designation criteria, in accordance with Chapter 30-4, Denver Revised Municipal Code, a structure must meet the following criteria:

1. Meet one designation criteria in two or more of the following categories:
 - History
 - Architecture
 - Geography
2. Maintain its historic or physical integrity
3. LPC consider how relates to a context or theme



Bill Daniels in front of wall tv sets (historic photo)

Criteria Evaluation:

Landmark staff found that the structure application meets History Criteria 1c and Architecture Criteria 2a.

1. Historical Significance

To have historical significance, the structure or district shall be thirty (30) or more years old or have extraordinary importance to the historical development of Denver, and shall:

c) Have direct and substantial association with a person or group of persons who had influence on society;

Cableland is significant for its association with Bill Daniels, an early pioneer in cable television. Daniels started one of the earliest cable operations in 1952 using new technological advancements. He also established a financial network to back his fledgling business that led to his career as a financial broker, making deals within the cable television industry. He also played an important role in cable content development, starting or supporting early sports networks and 24-hour news channels. Daniels, who primarily lived in the West, established the headquarters for his company in Denver. As the culmination of a successful and long-running career, he constructed the house at 4150 Shangri La Drive, known as Cableland, as a residence and social gathering space for Denver.

Daniels played a significant role in Denver society, as one of Denver’s most prominent philanthropists. Bill Daniels’ home, which was specifically designed to host charity events, was an important part of his charitable giving. Daniels hired architect Lawrence Pepper and interior designer Andrew Gerhard, both associated with high-end residential architecture in California, to design the home. Few houses of this scale had been built in Denver since the early twentieth century. Daniels built Cableland as a modern alternative to Denver’s Phipps Mansion, and as a reinterpretation of Denver’s grand mansions of the past. Cableland quickly became a status symbol for Denver, hosting glamorous events and garnering national press. With Daniels’ cable empire based in Denver, Cableland also became associated with Denver’s emergence as a technology center. According to the New York Times: “Cableland stands as a symbol of Denver’s emergence as a high-tech center and a world capital of the cable television industry.” Featuring the most-up-to-date amenities and design trends, Cableland itself was a showcase of modern technology.



Façade, looking north (historic photo)

2. Architectural Significance

To have architectural importance, the structure or district shall have design quality and integrity, and shall:

a) *Embody distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or type;*

Cableland is significant for Architecture as an exceptional example of residential Postmodern architecture in Denver. The concept of Postmodern architecture arose in the 1960s as a reaction against the austerity of Modern architecture. Postmodernists criticized Modernism as sterile, anonymous, too universal, overly simplistic, and meaningless. Postmodernists argued that when Modern architecture rejected ornament and forms with past associations, it lost the ability to communicate a building's reason for existence, creating buildings that looked similar regardless of purpose and place. Postmodernists promoted architecture that was unique and surprising, blending traditional, contemporary, and newly invented elements. Postmodernism reinterpreted traditional design elements, combining inspiration from various styles and periods. Familiar shapes and details were used in unexpected ways, creating striking contrasts.

Postmodernism gained popularity in the 1970s and 1980s, becoming hugely influential on design and culture. However, there are few examples of Postmodern residential architecture in Denver, and certainly none on the scale of Cableland. The style was more widely used for public and commercial buildings, with Michael Graves's Central Branch of the Denver Public Library and Philip Johnson's "Cash Register" building Denver's best-known examples of Postmodernism. Commonly referred to as the "mauve mansion," Cableland reflects 1980s design trends of excess, theatricality, luxury, and exuberance. Key Postmodern design elements seen in Cableland include: oversized, stylized versions of traditional building elements (arches, window surrounds, columns, corbelling); strong geometric composition with repeated motifs; use of textured surfaces; and highly varied wall planes with projections and recesses creating a play of light and shadow. Significant interior features included textured surfaces, recessed lighting, warm colors, brass details, irregularly shaped rooms, multiple levels, and geometric shapes.

When completed in 1987, Cableland featured four bedrooms, thirteen bathrooms, three fireplaces, four kitchens, a sunken bar, a swimming pool, a combined cabana and guest house, and staff quarters. The house showcased technology throughout. The media room featured a wall of 64 televisions, one for each station on Daniels' Mile High Cablevision. There were also an additional 24 televisions elsewhere in the house, including a closed-circuit system. Other amenities included 10 telephone lines, 97 telephones, surround sound and tactile sounds systems, a 12-foot fireman's pole, a tanning bed, a driveway with a snow-melting system, laser security system, a LiteTouch customized lighting system, and a resistance exercise pool decorated with a seascape mural.



Reception area (historic photo)



Courtyard view from the roof deck of the cabana/guest house, looking southeast

Integrity:

Chapter 30, DRMC requires that a landmark designated property maintain its historic or physical integrity, defined as “the ability of a structure or district to convey its historic and architectural significance...recognized as belonging to its particular time and place in Denver’s history.” The seven qualities that define integrity are location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling and association.

Cableland retains a high degree of integrity. The house passed directly from Daniels to the City and County of Denver, under the management of the Cableland Foundation. When Daniels donated the property to the city in 1998, he stipulated that neither the exterior or interior be substantially changed or renovated without the approval of a foundation established to manage the property. As a result, no significant alterations changing the character of the property have occurred.

The city has completed two renovation projects at Cableland. In conjunction with the dedication of Cableland as the official mayor’s residence in 2002, Wilma Webb, wife of then-mayor Wellington Webb, oversaw the first renovation project. It included a few small internal changes such as, adding a photograph of Daniels at the entrance and installing a carpet with the city seal. It also created a new entrance for accessibility, constructed a canopy at the new entrance, and added landscaping. No alterations were made to Daniels’ private quarters. In 2012, a second project updated the entertaining space. The original mauve colored walls were repainted a more neutral taupe color (the original texturing was retained), internal furnishings were altered, and displays on Denver history and its mayors were also added.

Given the massive scale of Cableland, these changes have been minor. The original character of Cableland remains intact. The property is in its original location, and the surrounding residential neighborhood remains largely as it was when the house was constructed. The continued use of Cableland for philanthropic events and other social gatherings enhance integrity of feeling and association. With few physical alterations, the property retains integrity of design, material, and workmanship.

Relate to a Historic Context/Theme and Period of Significance:

The structure is related to Bill Daniels development of the cable television industry and the establishment of the Daniels and Associates headquarters in Denver.

Relationship to the Comprehensive Plan (2000), Blueprint Denver (2002), and Comprehensive Plan (2019), Blueprint Denver (2019)

The Comprehensive plan envisioned Denver in 2020 as vibrant, with well-preserved and appropriately used structures representing every era of the city’s history. It included strategies (1-C) that “Preserve Denver’s architectural and design legacies while allowing new to evolve.” This property is located in an Area of Stability in Blueprint Denver. Within Blueprint Denver, landmark preservation is identified as a tool to reinforce areas of stability. Blueprint Denver noted that for areas of stability, it is important to respect valued development patterns and attributes of the area, including existing buildings, particularly those adding distinctive character and identity.

One of the vision elements of the draft Comprehensive plan is strong and authentic neighborhoods, and the plan includes goals for preserving Denver’s authenticity and celebrating the city’s history, architecture, and culture. Within the draft Blueprint Denver future places, the structure is in the low intensity residential area. Recommendations for Design Quality and Preservation include using “historic designation to preserve the character of an individual structure or district where there is historic, architecture, cultural, and/or geographic significance.” The designation of Cableland aligns with the vision and goals of both the existing and draft plans, as it helps retain Denver’s authenticity by preserving a historically and architecturally significant building.

Boundary:

The designation application proposes to designate the legal description below:

SHANGRI-LA HEIGHTS 06073 B2 L1 TO 7 EXC E 14.5FT OF L7 & UND 1/2 INT IN TRACT A

Public Review Process:

Notifications:

- Owner notification letters regarding the LPC public hearing
- City Council, Planning Board, and Building Inspection email notifications
- Registered Neighborhood Organization and courtesy email notifications
 - Hilltop Heritage Association
 - Cranmer Park- Hilltop Civic Association
 - Inter-Neighborhood Cooperation (INC)
 - Historic Denver, Inc
 - Colorado Preservation, Inc
 - National Trust for Historic Preservation
 - State of Colorado Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation
- Posted signage for Landmark Preservation Commission public hearing

Public Comments:

As of the date of this staff report, CPD has received two letters of support for the designation application. One letter is from the Cranmer Park/Hilltop Civic Association and the other from Historic Denver.

Attachments Provided by CPD:

- Designation Application
- Map of structure proposed for preservation
- LPC public hearing record
- Public comment