



To: Land Use, Transportation, and Infrastructure Committee
From: Becca Dierschow, Senior Planner; Community Planning & Development (CPD)
Date: March 2, 2023
RE: Landmark Designation for 618 S Monroe Way, Muchow Residence

Staff Recommendation:

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

Request to Designate a Structure:

Application: #2023L-001
Address: 618 S Monroe Way
Zoning: U-SU-F
Council: Council District #10, Chris Hinds
Owner: Anne Wattenberg and Peter Buttrick
Applicant(s): Anne Wattenberg

Case Summary:

Anne Wattenberg, owner of 618 S Monroe Way, submitted a Landmark Designation Application for 618 S Monroe Way, The Muchow Residence to CPD. Staff performed a preliminary review and found the application to be complete and to meet Denver landmark designation criteria. As such, staff set a public hearing before the Landmark Preservation Commission on February 21, 2023 for the Commission to review the designation application. At the public hearing, the Commission voted (6-0-0) to recommend approval and forward the designation application to City Council.

Designation Criteria and Evaluation, Chapter 30, DRMC:

To meet landmark designation criteria, in accordance with Chapter 30, Denver Revised Municipal Code, the application must be complete, and the structure must meet the following criteria:

1. The structure maintains its integrity
2. The structure is more than 30 years old, or is of exceptional importance
3. The structure meets at least three of ten criteria
4. The LPC considers the structure's historic context

Criteria Evaluation:

Landmark staff found that the application for designation demonstrates that the structure meets the following criteria.

A. It has a direct association with a significant historic event or with the historical development of the city, state, or nation;

The Muchow Residence has a direct association with the postwar pattern of development seen in Denver and cities across the United States. The population of Denver almost tripled and to accommodate housing for the new residents, more than 11,000 square acres were platted for residential use and more than 50,000 houses were constructed. New neighborhoods were laid out with winding streets in contrast to the rigid grid of established prewar neighborhoods and the majority of

new home designs were low slung ranch style with informal open plans in contrast to the relatively rigid brick bungalows of late 19th and early 20th Century Denver. William Muchow's 1953 design for his family home at 618 South Monroe Way is reflective of these changes.

The majority of Denver's postwar residences were "starter home" as was 618 South Monroe Way. Producing homes that were within the buying power of the new residents, many of them returning veterans, required rethinking building elements with a view towards reducing material and labor costs. Major changes included building the entire home on one floor 'slab on grade' without a basement or second floor, open floor plans so that public rooms could serve several purposes such as elimination of dining rooms with kitchens that accommodated a table, smaller bedroom for children and greater connection to outside spaces.

In their description of 618 South Monroe Way, The Denver Post's Empire Magazine's 1956 Home of the Month article stated in part, "A large determining factor in the design of the house was money. Like most young couples, Bill Muchow and his wife Priscilla have a limited budget... 'Modern homes have been compressed by high costs,' Bill explains, 'but I feel they can still have an air of spaciousness... despite a tight budget.'"¹ As such, the Muchow Residence embodies the construction constraints of post-war housing but uses architectural design to provide a unique expression of these constraints and trends.

C. It embodies the distinctive visible characteristics of an architectural style or type;



The building embodies the distinctive visible characteristics of the Mid Century Modern architectural style, which focused on simplified, geometric design elements, connected indoor/outdoor space, an open floor plan and simplified building materials with little adornment. The structure's exaggerated roof line creates a geometric volume through which the other principles of Midcentury Modern designs are expertly expressed – wide overhanging eaves shelter large swaths of windows on the north and south elevations, blurring the lines between indoors and outdoors. The cedar shingle roof is a rustic contrast to the modern glass walls and simple tongue and groove siding found on the addition.

The design also features many of the attributes of post war housing, designed to hasten construction: being built primarily on one level, slab on grade construction, and having little extraneous adornment.

¹ *Denver Post Empire Magazine*, Lopez, Bettie, "Muchow's' modern Colonial", January 29, 1956

D. It is a significant example of the work of a recognized architect or master builder;

618 S Monroe Way was designed by notable Denver architect William Muchow, who lived in the home with his family until 1971. William Muchow was born in Denver, Colorado in 1922 and died in 1991. He earned a Bachelor of Architecture from the University of Illinois in 1946 and a Master of Architecture and Urban Planning from Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan in 1948. While at Cranbrook, Muchow studied under the internationally acclaimed architect Eliel Saarinen.

Returning to Denver in 1949, Muchow worked for several firms including Fisher and Fisher before founding Muchow Associates Architects in 1950. Muchow's firm worked on a broad range of architectural projects that include schools, churches, single and multi-family residences, office buildings, financial institutions, municipal and recreational facilities. From 1950-1991, his firm designed eight hundred and thirty-three projects and was awarded thirty-five A.I.A. awards. In 1968 Muchow was elected as a Fellow to the American Institute of Architects. Some of his most prominent commercial and civic designs include: the 1968 Federal Reserve Branch Bank, 1975 BlueCross/Blue Shield Office Building, and the Galleria of the Denver Center for the Performing Arts (1978).

The property at 618 S Monroe Way is a significant example of Muchow's residential work. Although Muchow designed hundreds of buildings during his career, he primarily focused on larger scale building – his single-family residential work has gone largely undocumented. This property is a unique example of his design philosophy expressed in a residential context, and it was also a notable, award-winning design in its own time. In May of 1957 it was one of 25 homes nationally published in Architectural Record's Record Homes issue. The jury stated "A-three-dimensional approach, developing the structure along with the plan, give unusual spaciousness and livability for an inexpensive house on a small plot."

Integrity:

Chapter 30 requires that a landmark designated property maintain its integrity. Integrity is defined as "the ability of a structure or district to convey its historic, geographic, architectural, or cultural significance...recognized as belonging to its particular time and place in Denver's history." The seven qualities that, in various combinations, define integrity are: location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling and association.



The house retains a remarkably high degree of integrity. The original feature and architectural elements, including the large areas of windows, exaggerated A frame roof with cedar shingles, and site features are intact, retaining the integrity of design, workmanship, and materials. The alterations to the property, including the garage addition and reorientation of the entrance were designed by the architect and do not detract from the midcentury Modern character of the structure. A small, non-historic addition on the east elevation of the building, approximately where the original entrance is located, is non-contributing to the structure, but does not detract from the building's integrity. The property is still in its original location, situated in a residential

neighborhood fronting Monroe Way in the Belcaro neighborhood, and as such, the property also maintains integrity of location, setting, feeling, and association.

Relates to Historic Context and Period of Significance:

As is appropriate for a property proposed for designation, the historic context is strongly interrelated to both the areas of significance and period of significance. The property is directly related to the postwar development patterns of Denver and is a unique architectural expression of the design principles of the midcentury Modern style – including the use of rustic materials and simple geometric volumes.

The period of significance for the structure is 1954-1975, encompassing its construction and ownership by the Muchow family, through the design and construction of the garage addition and reordination of the entrance on the west elevation in 1975. These changes were designed by Muchow, although he sold the property in 1971.

Boundary:

The designation application proposes to designate the legal description below:

The west 18 feet of Lot 32 and the east 57 feet of Lot 31, Block 3, Stokes Place Addition, City and County of Denver, State of Colorado.

Public Review Process:

Community Planning & Development has met all posting and notification requirements delineated in Chapter 12 (Article III, Section 12-96) and Chapter 30 of the DRMC.

Notifications:

- Owner notification letters regarding the LPC public hearing
- City Council and Community Planning and Development email notifications
- Registered Neighborhood Organization and courtesy email notifications
 - Inter-Neighborhood Cooperation (INC)
 - Green Cherry Creel
 - Stokes Place Green Bowers
 - Strong Denver
 - Historic Denver, Inc
 - Colorado Preservation, Inc
 - National Trust for Historic Preservation
 - State of Colorado Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (History Colorado)
- Posted signage for Landmark Preservation Commission public hearing

Public Comments:

As of March 2, 2023 CPD has received two public comments on the proposed designation, in support of the designation.

Attachments Provided by CPD:

- Designation Application
- Map of structure proposed for preservation
- Public comments received by 5:00pm on March 2, 2023