



To: Land Use, Transportation, and Infrastructure Committee
From: Kara Hahn, Principal Planner, Community Planning & Development (CPD)
Date: August 1, 2019
RE: Landmark designation application for 601 East Colfax Avenue

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-008
Address: 601 East Colfax Avenue
Zoning: C-MS-8
Council: District #10, Chris Hinds
Blueprint Denver: Urban Center Neighborhood Context; Community Corridor Future Place Type
Owner: Tom Messina
Applicant(s): Five residents of Denver

Case Summary:

On May 3, 2019, a Certificate of Non-Historic Status (CNHS) application was submitted to CPD by Alberta Development and property owner Tom Messina. Landmark staff reviewed the property and found it had the potential to be an Individual Denver Landmark. CPD staff publicly posted notice signs of the CNHS application on the property and sent notification emails. Five Denver residents submitted a Denver Landmark designation application, along with the \$875 fee, for 601 East Colfax to CPD on June 14, 2019. Staff performed an investigation and 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 meeting on July 23, 2019.

At the Landmark Preservation Commission public hearing, during the public comment period, Historic Denver recommended reducing the Landmark boundary from the entire parcel to the southern half of the parcel. During deliberation, the LPC considered the reduced boundary, which would remove the parking lot to the north of the building from the designation.

The LPC voted (5-0-0) to recommend approval of the designation application and forwarded it to city council, with a recommendation of reducing the boundary. This determination was based on History Criterion 1c, Architecture Criteria 2a and 2b, and Geography Criteria 3a and 3b citing as findings of fact for this recommendation the application form, public testimony, and the staff report. Landmark staff also supports a reduction of the boundary. Should this item be forwarded by LUTI, the designation bill will contain the legal description from the application, and it would be a decision of council on whether to amend that legal description in order to decrease the designation boundary as recommended by LPC.

Per the Landmark Preservation Ordinance, Chapter 30-6(1)(c), a designation application submitted as part of the CNHS review, must be reviewed by LPC and forwarded to city council, voted on by city council, and signed by the mayor within 120 days of receipt of the CNHS application, in order for the property to become an Individual Denver Landmark. If the designation application process is not completed within 120 days or the designation application is terminated, a CNHS for the property would be issued. The 120-day deadline for this application is August 31, 2019.

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

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

1. Meet one designation criterion in two or more of the following categories:

- History
- Architecture
- Geography

2. Maintain its historic or physical integrity

3. Relate to a context or theme (reviewed by the LPC)

Criteria Evaluation:

Landmark staff found that the application meets History Criterion 1c, Architecture Criteria 2a and 2b, and Geography Criteria 3a and 3b.

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;

The building at 601 East Colfax is significant for its direct and substantial association with William F. Clements who had long-term and extensive involvement in Denver's restaurant industry. As the restaurant industry was evolving nationwide in the post-war era, Clements influenced how those changes manifested in Denver. He established 29 restaurants, including the White Spot chain, in the Denver area. Clements helped introduce new trends to Denver, such as family dining, franchising, convenience, take-out, and 24-hour dining. And, with the proliferation of the automobile culture, his restaurants were intentionally sited along busy corridors such as Broadway, Speer, and Colfax and designed in eye-catching fashion to attract the attention of consumers. Clements was heavily involved in the restaurant industry, traveling annually to California to see the newest trends in restaurants, serving on the board of the National Restaurant Association for ten years, and serving as the President of the Colorado-Wyoming Restaurant Association. The restaurant at 601 East Colfax Avenue is one of the few remaining buildings associated with Clements' White Spot chain, which reached a peak of 25 different locations, and retains the best integrity of the extant buildings. It reflects the post-war trends that Clements aspired to in its location along a busy road corridor, attention-grabbing Google architecture, convenient family-friendly food, and 24-hour service.



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;

The commercial building embodies the distinguishing characteristics of the Googie architectural style. Googie style architecture, designed to be futuristic and playful, frequently included dynamic roof forms, geometric forms, and a combination of building materials. The building at 601 East Colfax Avenue embodies those character-defining features in its boomerang shaped trusses, overhanging eaves, hexagonal footprint, and combination of materials including large plate glass windows, stone, and brick.

b) Be a significant example of the work of a recognized architect or master builder;

The building is a significant example of the work of recognized architects. Located in California, the architectural firm of Armet and Davis were leaders in developing and promoting the Googie style. They are recognized nationwide as one of the most prominent firms associated with the style. During his travels to California, Clements became familiar with their work and commissioned them to design several White Spot restaurants in Denver. Of those commissions, nearly all have been demolished or altered. This is a significant, intact example of the nation's preeminent Googie architects in Denver.

3. Geographic Significance

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

a) Have a prominent location or be an established, familiar, and orienting visual feature of the contemporary city;

The restaurant at 601 East Colfax has a prominent location and is an established, familiar, and orienting visual feature of the contemporary city. Displaying the hallmark characteristics of both roadside architecture and the Googie style, including the location along a high-traffic road and eye-catching design, this building is an orienting visual feature on Colfax. The building is also an established and familiar feature of the Colfax corridor. Due to its proximity to downtown, the capitol, and bars and theaters along Colfax, the restaurant became a community gathering space both for visitors and residents in the surrounding neighborhoods.

b) Promote understanding and appreciation of the urban environment by means of distinctive physical characteristics or rarity;

The building promotes the understanding of the urban environment through physical characteristics and rarity. The building is a rare and high-quality example of Googie architecture, which is rapidly disappearing in Denver. The majority of the other Googie style White Spot restaurants were heavily altered or demolished. While there are a few other buildings of this distinctive architectural style in the city, 601 East Colfax is an outstanding example of the rare Googie style in Denver.

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.

The existing property retains a high degree of integrity, with minimal alterations. The glass and aluminum of the windows were replaced, but maintained the same fenestration pattern. The building retains its original location and automobile-centric setting, feeling, and association. It also maintains its design, materials, and workmanship in its sloping geometric roofline, wide over-hanging eaves, stone veneer siding, and large window pattern.

Relate to a Historic Context/Theme:

The building is strongly related to roadside architecture and the culture of Colfax. Roadside architecture refers to buildings that are defined by their relationship to the road and the car culture of the post-war era. These buildings were designed for high visibility and quick recognition to serve those traveling by automobile. While Colfax Avenue was initially a residential street, it was converted to a commercial corridor and then evolved as it became a segment of U.S. 40 and adapted to the automobile culture of the 1950 and 60s. The building at 601 East Colfax Avenue reflects both the automobile culture and the transformation of Colfax as it has become a part of the diversity of Denver’s historic main street.

Relationship to the Comprehensive Plan 2040, Blueprint Denver, Uptown Neighborhood Plan (1986), and East Colfax Plan (2004):

The proposed district is consistent with Comprehensive Plan 2040, Blueprint Denver, and supplemental plans including the Uptown Neighborhood Plan and East Colfax Plan.

It is consistent with several Comprehensive Plan 2040 vision elements, most directly with the Strong and Authentic Neighborhoods vision element, which includes the goal to “preserve the authenticity of Denver’s neighborhoods and celebrate our history, architecture and culture.” Throughout Blueprint Denver, the plan recognizes the importance of historic preservation and encourages the reuse of structures. 601 East Colfax’s neighborhood context is urban center and its future place is a community corridor. Blueprint Denver recommends the continued use or adaptive use of historic structures within corridors.

Additionally, there is support in the small area plans for both designation of structures and finding creative ways to preserve historic structures. The 1986 Uptown Neighborhood Plan calls for the preservation of historic structures as they “help create a distinctive character for Uptown, [and] their preservation is essential to the ability of the neighborhood to redevelop a mixed use with an urban character.” The plan also recommends exploring ways to preserve buildings, such as the transfer of development rights. Within the East Colfax Plan, historic preservation is an integral component. Throughout the plan, there are recommendations for identifying, preserving, and reusing historic resources. It states that “valuable historic resources that define the place-making characteristics of East Colfax are located on and adjacent to the corridor.... Creative development solutions should be employed to achieve both preservation and development.”

The designation of 601 East Colfax Avenue aligns with the vision and goals of both the Comprehensive Plan and Blueprint Denver, as it helps retain Denver’s authenticity by preserving a historically, architecturally, and geographically significant building. The designation of the structure is also consistent with adopted neighborhood plans that recommend a balance of preserving historic structures, while allowing redevelopment.

Boundary:

The designation application proposes designating the legal description below:
CLEMENTS ADD B336 L15 TO 19 & JW SMITHS ADD TO DENVER B399 L19 & 20

The Landmark Preservation Commission recommends designating the legal description below:
CLEMENTS ADD B336 southern ½ of L18 TO 19 & J W SMITHS ADD TO DENVER B399 L19 & 20

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, Planning Board, and Building Inspection email notifications
- Registered Neighborhood Organization and courtesy email notifications
 - Inter-Neighborhood Cooperation (INC)
 - The Points Historical Redevelopment Corp
 - Uptown on the Hill
 - Unsinkables, Inc.
 - East Side RNO
 - Center City Denver Residents Organization
 - Capitol Hill United Neighborhoods, Inc.
 - Colfax Ave. Business Improvement District
 - Denver Neighborhood Association, 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 five written public comments regarding the application and four community members spoke at the LPC public hearing.

- RNO comment
 - The Neighbors for Greater Capitol Hill submitted a letter of support
- Public Comments from individuals
 - 3 individuals in support
 - 1 individual in opposition
- At the LPC public hearing 4 members of the public commented
 - 4 in favor and 0 opposed

Attachments Provided by CPD:

- Designation Application
- Maps of proposed boundaries
- Public Comments