



To: Denver City Council
From: Jenny Buddenborg, Senior City Planner, Community Planning & Development (CPD)
Date: February 3, 2022
RE: Landmark Designation of 555 East 8th Avenue, #2021L-007

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: #2021L-007
Address: 555 E 8th Ave
Zoning: PUD 34
Council: District 10 – Chris Hinds
Owner: M. Karen Christiansen
Applicant(s): Owner

Case Summary:

The property owner submitted a landmark designation application to CPD for 555 E 8th Ave on September 22, 2021. Staff performed an investigation and found the application to be complete and to meet Denver Landmark Preservation Ordinance designation criteria. As such, staff set the public hearing at the Landmark Preservation Commission (LPC) for December 7, 2021.

At the public hearing, LPC recommended approval of the landmark designation application for 555 E 8th Ave based on criteria B, C, and F, citing as findings of fact for this recommendation the application form, public testimony and the November 30, 2021, staff report. Vote 7-0-0.

On December 21, 2021, the Land Use, Transportation, and Infrastructure Committee forwarded the case to the full City Council. At first reading, Denver City Council ordered the bill published and the public hearing set for February 7, 2022.

This designation application is running concurrently with a map amendment application to rezone the property from PUD 34 to G-MU-3, UO-3.

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 the structure must:

1. Maintain its integrity;
2. Be more than 30 years old, or of exceptional importance;
3. Meet at least three of ten significance criteria;
4. Be considered by the LPC for its historic context.

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Criteria Evaluation:

The structure meets the following significance criteria.

B. It has direct and substantial association with a recognized person or group of persons who had influence on society.

The property has direct and substantial association with three generations of the Charles Nelson and Elizabeth Arms Hart Family, as well as Emma Fellows and Peter McCourt, recognized persons who had influence on Denver and Colorado society. These early residents lived in the house at 555 E 8th Ave from 1898 until 1915. The Hart family built the home and resided there from 1898 to 1909. Emma McCourt purchased the property from the Harts in 1909 and lived there with her husband Peter McCourt until her death in 1912. Peter continued living there until 1915 when the property was sold again.

Charles Hart, originally from Connecticut, became an accomplished medical doctor in the field of gynecology in part while residing at 555 E 8th Ave. During his medical tenure, he served as the president of the State Board of Medical Examiners. He married Elizabeth Arms in the 1870s and together they had two children: Richard and Francis. Their son, Richard Huson Hart, would go on to practice law in Denver and Colorado after studying at Harvard University and the University of Denver. Richard filled office of attorney for the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company in 1903 – the same year John D. Rockefeller purchased the company – until 1909. The Colorado Fuel and Iron Company played a pivotal role in the history of American labor relations and the industrialization of the West.

Richard Hart was the recorded owner of 555 E 8th Ave from 1898 to 1909. In 1903, he married Elizabeth Jerome, daughter of eminent Colorado financier John Lathrop Jerome, and the two settled at 555 E 8th Ave with Richard's parents. They had two children while living there: John and Stephen. Stephen would go on to co-found one of Colorado's largest and most influential law firms: Holland & Hart. He was Colorado's first State Historic Preservation Officer, among other accolades. Upon selling 555 E 8th Ave in late 1909, Richard Hart and his family relocated to 729 E 8th Ave (since demolished) and his parents moved to 914 Ogden St. The 555 E 8th Ave property was sold to Emma Fellows McCourt. Shortly after the sale, Richard Hart was elected secretary of Colorado Fuel and Iron; at age 34, this was a notable accomplishment. Elizabeth Jerome would later become a key figure in the creation of the Denver Symphony Orchestra.

From 1909 until she died in 1912, 555 E 8th Ave was owned by Emma McCourt who was known as an excellent businesswoman and a well-respected socialite who aided many impoverished individuals and families. Her second husband, Peter McCourt, was brother to the infamous Baby Doe Tabor, the second wife of the "Silver King" Horace Tabor. Emma and Peter resided together at 555 E 8th Ave. Prior to moving to Denver, Emma helped her father manage his successful Springfield Wagon Company in Missouri, at one point as director of the company. In the 1912 *Denver Post* article following her death, she was acknowledged for her leadership and entrepreneurial spirit that drove her interest and significant involvement in the management of Denver's Broadway and Tabor Grand Opera House theaters.

Peter McCourt was best known as the prominent theater manager of the world-famous Tabor Grand Opera House and Broadway Theater in Denver. Peter and Horace Tabor's relationship led to McCourt managing the Tabor Grand Opera House and building his legacy by becoming one of the most successful theater managers in the country and growing the performing arts in Denver at the turn of the 20th Century. He devised the Silver Circuit that booked the same acts on consecutive nights in cities across the West and West Coast. During the time the McCourts owned and resided at 555 E 8th Ave, Peter was expanding his circuit. Started in 1886, the Silver Circuit eventually lost traction and was retired around 1915, after nearly 30 years of success.



Figure 1 Facade of Hart-McCourt House and Carriage House

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

The Hart-McCourt House embodies the distinctive visible characteristics of the Classical Revival (or Neo-Classical) architectural style, popular in the United States from 1895-1950. The primary structure was built in 1898 and designed by Denver architects Varian and Sterner. The Classical Revival style is distinguished from other contemporary revival styles by its use of symmetrical facades with central entries, full-height porches supported by classical columns and the use of classical details such as broken pediments, dentilled cornices and balustrades.

The Hart-McCourt House exemplifies the Classical Revival style with its dramatic front porch which dominates the front façade of the primary structure. The porch is supported by paired Ionic columns and features a decorative balustrade on the second level. The overhanging eaves feature a dentil course and frieze band underneath the cornice. A side addition carries across many of these character-defining features, including the balustrade, cornice, and dentil course. The 1911 carriage house was designed by the Denver firm Sterner and Williamson, Sterner's subsequent architectural firm, and also exemplifies the Classical Revival Style.

F. It represents an established and familiar feature of the neighborhood, community, or contemporary city, due to its prominent location or physical characteristics.

The Hart-McCourt House is an established and familiar feature of the Capitol Hill Neighborhood due to its prominent location and physical characteristics. Constructed in 1898, during Capitol Hill's initial heyday, the property represents over 120 years of Capitol Hill history and evolution. Additionally, its prominent location facing onto and elevated above East 8th Avenue, coupled with its sizeable massing, scale and architectural features, make it a familiar and orienting feature of the neighborhood.

Its high-style architecture and construction materials reflect the wealth on Capitol Hill in the late 1800s. It was constructed during the early development of the Emery's Capitol Hill Addition, one of two houses standing on Pearl Street between 8th and 9th Avenues from 1903 and 1904. The other single-unit residence no longer stands, leaving 555 E 8th Ave as the oldest surviving structure on the block between 8th and 9th Avenues and Pearl and Pennsylvania Streets. Over time, most single-unit structures and properties were replaced by tall, multi-unit structures, which now primarily surround 555 E 8th Ave. The exception is the property directly to the north and on the south side of 8th Avenue, across from the Hart-McCourt House, where the 1923 John Porter House, 1921 Malo House, and 1908 Cheesman-Boettcher (Governor's) Mansion, are preserved as Denver Landmarks.

Integrity:

Chapter 30 requires that a landmark designated property maintain its integrity, 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 property at 555 E 8th Ave retains a high degree of integrity. It remains in its original location and exterior alterations have been sensitive to the original design, materials, and workmanship, as well as feeling and association of the property. The west and north (rear) additions, and porch enclosure, to the primary structure made prior to 1929 are compatible with the building's character and do not negatively impact the building's integrity. The addition of the retaining wall and parking lot impact the integrity of setting and feeling, but do not detract from the essential features of the primary structure and carriage house. Similarly, the metal fire escape added at the rear of the primary structure goes unnoticed as it is not clearly visible from the public right-of-way. As such, the property retains a high degree of integrity.

Relates to a Historic Context and Period of Significance:

The period of significance is 1898-1915. This encompasses the original construction of the house, addition of the carriage house, and years that the Hart and McCourt families resided at the address.

The Hart-McCourt House relates to the context of Denver's recovery and expansion following the Panic of 1893 due to the Silver Crash. Denver experienced an immediate economic downturn that lasted several years and negatively impacted the overall population. However, at the same time,



Denver was annexing adjacent cities and experiencing population growth due to expanded municipal boundaries.

While many of Capitol Hill’s wealthy families were left penniless after the Silver Panic, this was not the case for the Hart family, whose financial and social status survived due to their careers in medicine and law. Emma and Peter McCourt owned 555 E 8th Ave after the city recovered from the economic downturn. Their six years of ownership fell at a time of continued growth for Denver through economic diversification that was deemed a necessity following the Panic of 1893. The McCourts contributed to this diversification through performing arts and related tourism.

Boundary:

The designation application proposes to designate the following legal description:

LOTS 18 TO 21, INCLUSIVE, BLOCK 13, EMERYS CAPITOL HILL ADDITION AND LOT 18, BLOCK 13, ARLINGTON HEIGHTS ADDITION TO THE 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 letter regarding the LPC public hearing
- Denver City Council and Community Planning and Development email notifications
- Registered Neighborhood Organization (RNO) and courtesy email notifications
 - Capitol Hill United Neighborhoods, Inc.
 - Center City Denver Residents Organization
 - Denver For ALL
 - District 10 Neighborhood Coalition, Inc.
 - Neighbors for Greater Capitol Hill
 - 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
- Owner notification letter regarding City Council meetings

Public Comment:

As of 5:00 p.m. on February 2, 2022, CPD received two emails from Individuals commenting on the designation application:

- 2 in support
- 0 neutral
- 0 in opposition



Attachments:

- Designation Application
- Map of Structure
- Public Comment