

To: Denver City Council
From: Abigail Christman, Principal Planner, Community Planning & Development (CPD)
Date: May 11, 2023
RE: Landmark Designation for the Alan Golin Gass House at 602 S. Harrison Ln.

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, staff recommends approval of the application.

Request to Designate a Structure:

Application: #2023L-004
Address: 602 S. Harrison Ln.
Zoning: S-SU-F
Council: Council District # 10, Chris Hinds
Owner: Alan Golin Gass
Applicant(s): Alan Golin Gass with assistance from Historic Denver and Docomomo (Documentation and Conservation of the Modern Movement)

Case Summary:

Alan Golin Gass, owner of 602 S. Harrison Ln., submitted a Landmark Designation application for 602 S. Harrison Ln. to CPD. Staff reviewed the application and found it to be complete and to meet Denver Landmark designation criteria. As such, staff set the public hearing at the Landmark Preservation Commission for April 4, 2023, for the Commission to review the designation application.

At the public hearing, the Commission received a staff presentation, testimony from the owner and representatives of Historic Denver and Docomomo. Three members of the public also provided comment (two opposed and one in support). The comments in opposition were from neighbors who primarily expressed the following concerns:

1. That persons experiencing homelessness use the projecting decks at 602 S. Harrison Ln. for shelter
2. That following the death of the property owner, the property might be left vacant and become derelict
3. That the house is in need of repair and thus should not qualify for designation

The LPC then considered the application, staff report, submitted documentation, owner comments, and public testimony regarding the significance of the property. The first two items of concern are outside the purview of the Commission and thus were not discussed. The Commission did discuss the question of the integrity of the property and clarified that the Landmark ordinance requires that properties have historical integrity (evaluated considering location, setting, feeling, design, materials, workmanship, and association) and does not consider the structural condition of the property.

After deliberation, the Commission found that the building met the designation requirements as outlined in the Landmark Preservation Ordinance, Chapter 30-4(8) – including maintaining its historic

integrity, meeting three significance criteria (A, C, and D) and being related to a historic context. Therefore, based on their purview for deliberation and determination, the Commission voted (7-0-0) to recommend approval and forward to City Council the landmark designation of 602 S. Harrison Ln.

On April 11, 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 May 15.

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 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 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 Alan Golin Gass House at 602 S. Harrison Ln. is significant for its association with the post-World War II residential development of Denver. Constructed by Gass in 1961, the house is located adjacent to the Green Bowers Subdivision (established in 1955) on land that was formerly part of the Green Bowers Nursery and immediately adjacent to a city landfill (now City of Brest Park). It is associated with the rapid growth of Denver in the mid-twentieth century and the expansion of residential development into areas formerly less desirable for residential development. In the 1950s and 1960s, most of Denver's dairies, greenhouses, and nurseries were replaced by housing developments. The Cherry Creek area also began its transformation from a gravel pit and then town dump to a fashionable shopping area, with an open-air mall opening at Cherry Creek in 1955.

The Green Bowers subdivision offered its initial thirty building sites for sale in the summer of 1955 and custom ranch houses soon occupied much of the district. The new subdivision was advertised for its proximity to the new Cherry Creek Shopping Center. Additional sites on the east side of S. Harrison Ln. were offered later. The location of 602 S. Harrison Ln. was less desirable due to its location immediately next to the landfill and easements that reduced the buildable area. But this made it much more affordable for a young architect who was just establishing his own practice and was up for a challenge.

The Alan Golin Gass House is representative of a collection of architects experimenting with housing innovation and promoting new types of residential development in post-war Denver. Architects and designers had been experimenting with ideas for housing during the previous decades but were unable to realize their visions until after the Great Depression and World War II. These architects helped shape development in post-war Denver, including through the design of their own homes. The unusual form and siting of 602 S. Harrison Ln. received a lot of public attention as it was being constructed. The house

was the subject of a *Denver Post* article on July 5, 1961, titled “Denver Architect Builds Home with Many Unusual Features.” According to the article, the home was an “attention-catcher in southeast Denver” with few new homes generating “more comment and curiosity than the new structure being built by Denver architect Alan Golin Gass on S. Harrison Ln.” The *Denver Post* followed up with another article the following year (June 23, 1962) after the house was completed titled “Denver Home’s Dome Stops Traffic.” According to the article,

Passerby were so amazed at oriental-type dome on house at 602 S. Harrison Lane that they almost caused traffic jams, just looking. But dome’s more than conversation piece—it provides living area with sun, moon, star light . . . From the moment the 6’8” square skylight crowned. . . the home at 602 S Harrison Lane, traffic multiplied. People drove by at a snail’s pace, and when their curiosity became too avid, would stop to wander through the house.

The Alan Golin Gass House would remain a prominent example of contemporary housing during the 1960s, featured in home tours and included in a *Denver Post* article (October 14, 1968) titled “Excellent Architecture Begins at Home” which featured homes “loaded with ingenious features” built by local architects for themselves. Thus, the Alan Golin Gass House reflects mid-twentieth century residential development patterns in Denver, both through the expansion of housing into new areas of the city in response to the city’s rapid population growth as well as in the new trends in residential design reflected in the work of progressive architects such as Gass.

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

The Alan Golin Gass House is significant as a representation of the evolution of Modern architecture in Denver after World War II. Character-defining features of the house include: the dramatic roof form with a domed skylight and deep overhanging eaves; large decks with broad expanses of glass to provide indoor/outdoor connections; an open-plan and flexible interior with a bi-level floor plan; combination of concrete, brick, and wood; symmetrical and geometric design elements; and angled lot orientation. These elements are all representative of the evolution of Modern architecture in the mid-twentieth century away from the starkness of the International Style into more varied interpretations of Modernism. The use of brick is particularly reflective of Modern architecture in Denver. Brick is a highly characteristic building material of the city and remained prominently in use throughout the 20th century. While Modern architects in other cities often replaced brick with concrete or stucco, in Denver brick remained common.

Before World War II, Modern architecture was largely a style of the elite, seen predominantly on the East and West Coasts. But after the war, the U.S. embraced Modernism as a break from the past and part of a bright and optimistic post-war future. Modernism evolved to become less stark and more accessible, though it continued to emphasize functionalism and innovation. In the post-war period, many Modern architects began to move away the severity, austerity, and uniformity of the International Style, leading to the development of new styles within the Modern Movement. The Midcentury Modern or Contemporary residential style (as seen in Denver’s Krisana Park and Harvey Park) that emerged in the 1950s incorporated elements of the International Style, softening them into a more widespread, popular style. Key features included: roofs with deep, overhanging eaves; contrasting wall materials and textures; unusual window shapes and placements; integration with the landscape including large glass doors onto side patios, courtyards, and/or rear yards; and inclusion of a car port or garage. In the 1960s,

Formalist architecture broke from the pure functionalism of the International Style and combined aspects of building forms of the past with new forms enabled by advances in building technology. Formalist designs referenced and abstracted Classical forms and reintroduced applied ornamentation.

The Alan Golin Gass House is square in plan with a roof topped with a dome skylight, inspired by the Roman Pantheon, at its peak. Acrylic dome skylights were a new architectural product at the time. The exterior walls are built of brick and sit on a visible concrete foundation. Void of ornamentation, the placement of windows and glazing add dimension and depth to the building facades. The house opens up to outdoor decks with full length glazing and sliding glass doors on the identical southeastern and northwestern facades. The symmetrical central plan layout of the upper level was inspired by Palladio's Villa Capra, a nod to Classical architecture informing the Modern design of the residence.

While the Alan Golin Gass house is unique and does not clearly fit into a single category of Modernism, it clearly reflects the evolution of Modern design in the mid-twentieth century as well as more specifically, the evolution of housing. At mid-century, Modern architects were utilizing new technologies, materials, and mass production methods to meet the demand for affordable and fast construction. Key mid-century design elements evident in 602 S. Harrison Ln. include a floorplan laid out to maximize space and flexibility; a layout designed to create connections between indoor and outdoor spaces; facades featuring large windows; decorative elements replaced with contrasting wall materials and textures; and integration into the landscape.



A view of the construction of 602 S Harrison lane in 1961.

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

The Alan Golin Glass House is significant example of the work of Alan Golin Gass, who made substantial contributions to the fields of architecture and urban planning in Colorado. During his long career he was a prominent member of Denver's architectural community working both independently and collaboratively with other architects and contributing his expertise to a variety of planning, arts, and civic organizations. Born in Denver on May 6, 1931, Gass graduated from East High School in 1949. Gass left Colorado to attend Harvard University. He completed his undergraduate studies in 1953 and then entered the Harvard Graduate School of Design, graduating with a M.A. in Architecture in 1956. Gass worked for several prominent architects in his early career including assisting I.M. Pei with the Denver U.S. Bank Center and the Courthouse Square redevelopment into Zeckendorf Plaza and assisting Fisher & Davis & James Sudler Associates with the Byron G. Rogers Federal Building. In 1961, he decided to start his own firm in partnership with Robert Brewster Gay. After this partnership ended in 1967, Gass went on to work with other firms in Denver, New York City, and Aspen.

Gass also made significant contributions to the development of Denver through his volunteer work with various commissions and organizations dedicated to arts, culture, and planning. These include founding the AIA/Denver Urban Design Committee in 1962; serving as Vice Chairman of the Citizens Advisory Committee to the Denver Regional Council of Governments; serving as President of the Babi Yar Park Foundation to create (and then advocate for) a city park to memorialize Soviet Jews massacred in 1941; and serving on the Board of the Denver Architecture Foundation.

In 1998, Gass was recognized as part of the AIA College of Fellows. The fellowship program was developed to elevate architects who have achieved a standard of excellence in the profession and made a significant contribution to architecture and society on a national level. Fellows are selected for their work in areas such as advancing the standards of practice, improving building standards, serving society, and improving architectural education and training.

Though constructed at the beginning of Gass' career, 602 S. Harrison Ln. remains a key representation of his career. The Alan Golin Gass House was Gass' first widely-recognized design, helping to establish his architectural career and represents his Modern design philosophy. It is a very personal expression of his architectural vision and showcases Gass' knowledge in passive solar and interpretation of Modern architecture. Gass recounted in an interview that this was the house design he showed to his wife, Sally, to convince her to marry him. Alan and Sally Gass raised their daughter, Dana, in the home and lived there together until Sally's passing in 2020. Alan Golin Gass continues to live in the house today.

Following the construction of 602 S. Harrison Ln., Gass went on to incorporate active and passive solar technology in his future designs and contributed heavily to the environmental design field. The bi-level design of 602 S. Harrison Ln. would be seen in other works of Gass and was a practical design element since sinking the bottom level into the ground reduced heating and cooling costs. The role of 602 S. Harrison Ln. as Gass' personal residence where he lived during most of his career achievements is also significant. As a prime example of Alan's work as an emerging architect, this house embodies a distinctive period in his career, and remains a prominent representation of his residential design.



A view of 602 S Harrison lane shortly after construction in 1961.

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 property retains a high degree of integrity, within minimal changes. The structure is still in the same location, and the neighborhood is still residential in nature, retaining both integrity of location and setting. The integrity of workmanship, design, and materials are excellent, with minimal changes. The alterations are limited to the replacement of the asphalt roof with standing seam metal and the addition of solar panels. The original design called for a metal roof; however, due to cost, an asphalt roof was installed. So while this is a change in materials, it is not a change in the architect’s design (though it is a change from the original construction) and is a very minor impact to workmanship. The continued use as a residence, within a residential neighborhood, helps retain a strong sense of feeling and association. Overall, the property has excellent integrity.



Northwest elevation from the west of 602 S Harrison Lane.



An aerial view of the standing seam roof and photovoltaic solar collectors on 602 S Harrison lane.

Relates to a 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 postwar Modern architecture including the dramatic roof form with a domed skylight and deep overhanging eaves; large decks with broad expanses of glass to provide indoor/outdoor connections; an open-plan and flexible interior with a bi-level floor plan; combination of concrete, brick, and wood; symmetrical and geometric design elements; and angled lot orientation.

The period of significance for the structure is 1961-1993, encompassing its construction and ownership by Alan Gass. Part of the home's significance is its association with Gass and his career. Alan Golin Gass continued to practice architecture until his retirement in 2010, while he lived in the home. The period of significance captures the largest part of that career possible, but ends at 1993 due to the criteria for designation established in the Landmark ordinance. Section 30-3.2 states: "The structure or district is more than thirty (30) years old, or is of exceptional importance." The designation author determined that the period of significance extended to 1993 due to its continued association with Alan Golin Gass, but did not find this association met the exceptional importance threshold needed to extend the period of significance to less than thirty years ago.

Boundary:

The designation application proposes to designate the legal description below:

Book 8640 PG. 422, Office of the Clerk and Recorder, City and County of Denver, State of Colorado
That part of the SE1/4 NE1/4 of Section 13, Township 4 South, Range 68 West of the 6th P.M., described as follows:

Beginning at the Southeast corner of said SE1/4NE1/4; thence North 30 feet to a point on the North property line of Exposition Ave.; thence West along the North property line of Exposition Ave. a distance of 505.87 feet to a point on the East property line of the South Harrison Lane; thence North along the

East property line of South Harrison Lane a distance of 397.16 feet of the true point of beginning; thence East on a line with a deflection angle to the right of $90^{\circ}06'29''$ a distance of 100 feet; thence North and parallel with the East property line of South Harrison Lane a distance of 104 feet; thence West on a line with a deflection angle to the left of $89^{\circ}53'31''$ a distance of 100 feet to a point on the East property line of South Harrison Lane; thence South along the East property line of South Harrison Lane a Distance of 104 feet to the true point of beginning.

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)
 - Stokes Place Green Bowers
 - Strong Denver
 - Denver Neighborhood Association, Inc.
 - Historic Denver, Inc
 - Colorado Preservation, Inc
 - History Colorado
- Posted signage for Landmark Preservation Commission public hearing

Public Comments

As of 11:00 a.m. on May 11, 2023, CPD has received 17 public comments (plus additional Facebook posts) regarding the application.

- Public comments, including emails and letters, submitted to CPD from individuals
 - 11 individuals in support
 - 2 individuals in opposition
- Public comment submitted to CPD from organizations
 - Letter of support from the Colorado chapter of Docomomo US
- Public comments at LPC
 - 1 individual spoke in support
 - 2 individuals spoke in opposition
- Facebook posts
 - The applicant, Alan Golin Gass, also requested that comments on his Facebook posts about the proposed designation be submitted

Attachments Provided by CPD:

- Designation Application
- Map of structure proposed for preservation
- Public comment received