

ACTION NO. -----2024

RECORD OF THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PALO ALTO'S LAND USE ACTION TO UPGRADE 261 HAMILTON AVENUE FROM HISTORIC RESOURCES INVENTORY CATEGORY 3 TO CATEGORY 1

On April 22, 2024, the Council [REDACTED] the property owner's request to reclassify the commercial building at 261 Hamilton Avenue, currently a local Category 3 historic resource and a contributor to the Ramona Street Architectural District; the Council [REDACTED] Historic Resources Board (HRB) recommendation to an upgraded level, Category 1 historic resource on the City's Historic Resources Inventory, making the following findings, determination, and declarations:

SECTION 1. Background. The *City Council of the City of Palo Alto ("City Council")* finds, determines, and declares as follows:

- A. In December 2023, the property owner contacted staff to discuss the process for reclassifying the building. With the owner's request and funding, staff obtained a historic resource evaluation from the City's consultant, Page and Turnbull, including an integrity evaluation to understand the effect of the 2015 rehabilitation project on the building's eligibility. The evaluation supports a classification upgrade to a Category 2 historic resource; the consultant describes the building's eligibility in a report dated February 8, 2024, noting its eligibility under local criteria 1, 2, 5, and 6. The building does not appear to meet local criterion 3 regarding the style type (Spanish Colonial Revival) considered common at the time of construction and not considered rare in the current day, nor local criterion 4 regarding the building's use as a medical use and post office, considered common at the time of construction but not rare in the current day.
- B. On March 28, 2024, the HRB received a staff report (ID #2402-2685), conducted a public hearing, and concurred with the consultant's evaluation regarding the building's eligibility for category upgrade from the current local historic inventory Category 3; however, the HRB recommended a higher classification level (Category 1) than the consultant recommended (Category 2).

SECTION 2. Environmental Review. This project is exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), as it is not a project under CEQA Guidelines per Section 21065.

SECTION 3. Designation Findings.

- A. The following criteria, as specified in Municipal Code Section 16.49.040 (b), shall be used as criteria for designating historic structures/sites to the historic inventory:
 - 1. The structure or site is identified with the lives of historic people or with important events in the city, state or nation;

2. The structure or site is particularly representative of an architectural style or way of life important to the city, state or nation;
3. The structure or site is an example of a type of building which was once common, but is now rare;
4. The structure or site is connected with a business or use which was once common, but is now rare;
5. The architect or building was important;
6. The structure or site contains elements demonstrating outstanding attention to architectural design, detail, materials or craftsmanship.

The building at 261 Hamilton Avenue, a contributor to the locally designated Ramona Street Architectural District, met many of the above criteria when it was first listed on Palo Alto's Historic Resources Inventory, in 1985. With the rehabilitation work performed in 2015, and the 2024 assessment, the building's status as a historic resource has improved.

- B. The definition of Category 2 in Municipal Code Section 16.49.020 (b) must be met to allow the upgrade to the structure's category designation:

Category 2 Definition: "Major building" means any building or group of buildings of major regional importance, meritorious works of the best architects or an outstanding example of an architectural style or the stylistic development of architecture in the state or region. A major building may have some exterior modifications, but the original character is retained. The applicant requested and the consultant found the Category 2 appropriate for this building and the City's consultant supported this request.

The City's consultant found the building at 261 Hamilton Avenue meets the Palo Alto Inventory Category 2 definition; the integrity evaluation found that the building at 261 Hamilton Avenue retains all seven aspects of integrity (location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association).

However, the HRB's recommendation is for Category 1, which is defined thus:

Category 1: "Exceptional building" means any building or group of buildings of preeminent national or state importance, meritorious work of the best architects or an outstanding example of the stylistic development of architecture in the United States. An exceptional building has had either no exterior modifications or such minor ones that the overall appearance of the building is in its original character.

The minor exterior modifications cited in the consultant's report have not caused the building to lose its original character.

- C. National Register of Historic Places and California Register of Historical Resources listing: The structure is listed as a contributor to the Ramona Street Architectural District, as of 1986 (National Register) and 1998 (California Register, which was created in 1998).

SECTION 5. Category Upgrade Approved. The City Council approves the property owner's request for re-designation of 261 Hamilton Avenue to a Category X historic resource on the City's Historic Resources Inventory.

PASSED:

AYES:

NOES:

ABSENT:

ABSTENTIONS:

ATTEST:

APPROVED:

City Clerk

Director of Planning and
Development Services

APPROVED AS TO FORM:

Senior Asst. City Attorney