

February 22, 2024

City of Palo Alto
Department of Planning & Community Environment
250 Hamilton Avenue, 5th floor
Palo Alto, CA 94303

Re: 261 Hamilton Avenue Project Description

To Planning Staff and HRB Members:

Attached is Hayes Group Architect's submittal package for 261 Hamilton Avenue for a request to elevate the local historic listing classification. The project applicant is Hayes Group Architects on behalf of our client, Hamilton Ramona Partners

This package includes an electronically submitted Historic Inventory Evaluation Memorandum prepared by the city's consultant, Page & Turnbull.

1. EXISTING CONDITIONS

The existing building is on the corner of Hamilton Avenue and Ramona Street, in downtown Palo Alto, in the CD-C(P)(GF) zoning district, adjacent to other commercial properties of similar scale. Constructed in 1928, and designed by Birge Clark, the subject property was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1986 as a contributing building to the Ramona Street Historic District. By default, because of the national listing, the building was subsequently listed in the California Register of Historic resources also as a contributor to the Ramona Street Architectural District. In 1985, the building was added to the Palo Alto Historic Inventory as an individual Category 3 resource.

In 2015, a rehabilitation and seismic upgrade project was undertaken and completed by Cody Anderson Wasney Architects and SEI, structural engineers. The rehabilitation work, reviewed by Architectural Resources Group, was found to be consistent with the Secretary of the Interiors Standards for Historic Rehabilitation.

2. PROPOSED PROJECT

We are proposing to elevate the historic status on the local inventory from Category 3, "contributing building" to Category 2, "major building". According to the city commissioned Page & Turnbull Historic Inventory Evaluation Memorandum, dated February 8, 2024, 261 Hamilton Avenue is eligible for elevation to Category 2: A "Major Building" of regional importance in the Palo Alto Historic Resources Inventory. The subject building meets Criterion 1, 2, 5 and 6 of the seven Criteria for Designation.


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In addition, in order for a building or landscape to qualify for listing under any local, state or national historic registry it must possess significance under at least one of the criteria described above and retain integrity. Page & Turnbull has concluded that the subject property retains integrity of Location, Setting, Design, Materials, Workmanship, Feeling and Association.

We look forward to a staff review and scheduling of an HRB hearing for the elevation of this major building.

Please call me at (650) 365-0600x115 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Ken Hayes, AIA
Principal

encl: Page & Turnbull HREM dated 2/8/2024

cc: Roxy Rapp, Hamilton Ramona Partners

MEMORANDUM

DATE	February 8, 2024	PROJECT NUMBER	16252B.29
TO	Kristina Paulauskaite, Associate Planner	PROJECT	261 Hamilton Avenue, Palo Alto
OF	City of Palo Alto Planning & Development Services	FROM	Samantha Purnell, Cultural Resources Planner, Page & Turnbull
CC	Christina Dikas, Principal, Page & Turnbull	VIA	Email

REGARDING 261 Hamilton Avenue – Palo Alto Historic Inventory Evaluation Memorandum

INTRODUCTION

The City of Palo Alto has requested a Palo Alto Historic Inventory Evaluation Memorandum for the commercial building at 261 Hamilton Avenue in Palo Alto's University South neighborhood. The building was designed by prominent local architect Birge M. Clark and constructed by builder Wells P. Goodenough in 1928. Clark designed the subject building for the property owner, Professional Building Inc., to function as a "professional building." It was later renamed as the "Medico-Dental" building upon completion. The United States Post Office originally occupied the ground floor until 1933, with medical offices on the upper floors.¹

METHODOLOGY

Limited historical research was performed through online sources to supplement previous findings. Sources include the Palo Alto Historical Association (PAHA) website, Ancestry.com, and Newspapers.com. Key primary sources consulted and cited in this report include Palo Alto building permit applications, historical photographs, and historical newspapers. City of Palo Alto staff provided Page & Turnbull with additional information, including:

- State of California Department of Parks and Recreation Historic Resources Inventory form for 261 Hamilton Avenue (1985)
- State of California Department of Parks and Recreation Series 523A, B and L forms prepared by Architectural Resources Group (2013)

¹ Architectural Resources Group, "261 Hamilton Avenue," Department of Parks and Recreation Primary Record and Building, Structure, and Object Record Forms, November 2013. Appendix D of Focus Historic Structure Report: 261 Hamilton Avenue, Palo Alto, CA (March 4, 2014).

- Focused Historic Structure Report prepared by Architectural Resources Group (2014)
- Building permits for 261 Hamilton Avenue
- Drawings by Cody Anderson Wasney Architects (2015)

HISTORIC STATUS

261 Hamilton Avenue has been previously evaluated and is currently listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the California Register of Historical Resources, and the Palo Alto Historic Inventory.

National Register of Historic Places

The subject property was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1986 as a contributor to the Ramona Street Architectural District.

California Register of Historical Resources

The California Register of Historical Resources was created in 1998. Because the subject property was already listed in the National Register, it was listed by default in the California Register of Historical Resources as a contributor to the Ramona Street Architectural District.

Palo Alto Historic Inventory

In 1985, 261 Hamilton Avenue was added to the Palo Alto Historic Inventory as an individual Category 3 resource, which constitutes a “Contributing Building” or a “good local example of an architectural style and relates to the character of a neighborhood grouping in scale, materials, proportion or other factors.”² In addition, the subject building is a contributor to the locally designated Ramona Street Architectural District.

Built Environment Resources Directory (BERD)

261 Hamilton Avenue is included in the California Office of Historic Preservation’s Built Environment Resources Directory (BERD) for Santa Clara County with two National Register status codes (which predate the current California Historic Resource Status Codes)³ and one current California Historic Resource Status Code:

- **1D** - Listed in NR as a Contributor to a district or multi-resource property (added 1986)
- **3S** - Appears eligible for listing in NR as a separate property (added 2000)

² City of Palo Alto, “Historic Registers,” Palo Alto Historic Inventory, 2024, <https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/Departments/Planning-Development-Services/Historic-Preservation/Historic-Registers>.

³ California Office of Historic Preservation, Technical Assistance Bulletin #8: User’s Guide to the California Historical Resource Status Codes & Historic Resources Inventory Directory (November 2004), <https://ohp.parks.ca.gov/pages/1069/files/tab8.pdf>.

- **2D3** - Contributor to a district determined eligible for NR by Part I Tax Certification. Listed in the California Register (added 2013)⁴

The most recent update to the BERD database was in September 2022. Each status code listed in BERD is based on historical revaluations that occurred in 1981, 1985, and 2013 when the subject property was documented in State of California Department of Parks and Recreation Historic Resources Inventory Forms, (DPR) 523A (Primary Record), and 523B (Building, Structure, and Object Record) forms. The DPR forms identified a period of significance for the building as an individual resource of 1927, the year of the building's construction. As a contributor to the Ramona Street Architectural District, the DPR forms identified a period of significance from 1927 to 1938.⁵

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT & ALTERATION HISTORY

Prior to construction of the subject property in 1928, an insurance map of Palo Alto from 1924 shows that the subject parcel and surrounding blocks were previously occupied by large, detached wood frame residences, with a section of attached wood frame and tile commercial buildings along University Avenue to the northwest (**Figure 1**).

⁴ While the Federal Tax Credit Application Part 1 was certified, the Part 2 certification was denied by the National Park Service in 2019 due to significant alterations to the interior that were determined not to meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. Website accessed on February 7, 2024 from:

<https://www.nps.gov/subjects/taxincentives/upload/appeal-2019-hamilton-building.pdf>

⁵ Architectural Resources Group, "261 Hamilton Avenue," 2013.

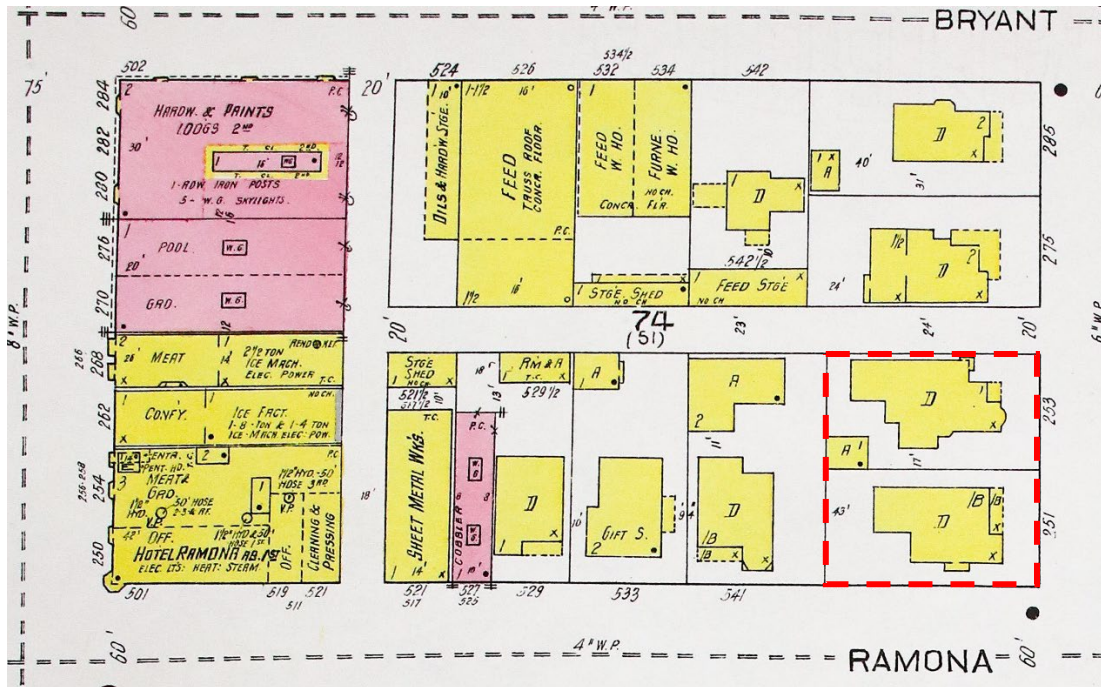


Figure 1: Sanborn Map Company fire insurance map of Palo Alto, 1924. Page 4. The future location of the subject property is outlined in red. Source: Historical Information Gatherers. Edited by Page & Turnbull.

The subject building was constructed in 1928 for Professional Building Inc. and was designed by prominent local architect of merit Birge Clark with builder Wells P. Goodenough. Upon completion, it was the tallest building in Palo Alto at three stories over a basement and mezzanine level. The subject building is also notable for housing the city's first drive-in garage in the basement level.

Early photographs of the subject building c.1928 show the east and south facades along Ramona Street and Hamilton Avenues shortly after the building's completion with original ornamentation including wrought iron balconies, storefront window systems with wood spindles at the transoms, flat roll-out awnings, and tilework, along with hanging signage and tilework above the Hamilton central entryway (**Figure 2 and Figure 3**).



Figure 2. Subject building, c.1928. Source: Palo Alto Historical Association.



Figure 3. View of the west and south facades of the subject building from Ramona Street, c.1928. Source: Palo Alto Historical Association.

In photographs from 1928 to the early 1930s, parts of the north and east facades are visible from Hamilton Avenue. In both photographs, two wood frame residences that originally neighbored the subject building can also be seen at center prior to their demolition (**Figure 4 Figure 5**).



Figure 4. Context view of the north and east façades of the subject building, viewed from Hamilton Avenue c.1928. Source: Palo Alto Historical Association.



Figure 5. Context view of the north façade and upper levels of the east façade of the subject building, viewed from Hamilton Avenue c.1930s. Source: Palo Alto Historical Association.

A photograph likely dating to the later 1930s and taken from a similar angle along Hamilton Avenue and to the southwest shows the demolition of the two frame residences neighboring the subject

property (**Figure 6**). From this angle, most of the north façade is visible, including the original fenestration pattern at the ground floor.



Figure 6. Context view of the north and east façades of the subject building, viewed from Hamilton Avenue, c.1930s. Source: Palo Alto Historical Association.



Figure 7. View of Ramona Street and the former Ramona Hotel, with the west façade of the subject building visible in the background at right, 1937. Source: Palo Alto Historical Association.



Figure 8. View of Hamilton Avenue with the south and east facades of the subject building visible in the background at right, c.1944. Source: Palo Alto Historical Association.

A Sanborn insurance map from 1947 notes the “Garage” located in the basement level, which was a somewhat advanced structural and social feature at the time of the building’s construction (**Figure 9**). The map also notes a drugstore, office, and other stores on the ground floor along with an upper floor lobby with elevator. The map confirms that the subject building’s footprint has remained unchanged over time.

Permit records from 1965 indicate that there were alterations and a remodeling of storefront windows.⁶ This information is corroborated by a photograph likely dating to the early 1960s, which shows rounded and square awnings added to two of the storefront windows along with new signage in the place of the original Post Office tilework.⁷ From visual analysis, it appears that hanging retail signs were also removed during the period, however the remaining windows on the ground floor appear to have retained their original awnings and storefront configurations (**Figure 10**).

⁶ Architectural Resources Group.

⁷ Date of the photograph can be estimated based on the presence of a large parking lot opposite the subject building’s east façade, which therefore predates the excavation of the block for construction of the Civic Center Plaza site in 1967.



Figure 9: Sanborn Map Company fire insurance map of Palo Alto, 1947. Page 4. The subject property is outlined in red. Source: Historical Information Gatherers. Edited by Page & Turnbull.



Figure 10. Context view of the south and east facades at the corner of Ramona Street and Hamilton Avenue, c. early 1960s. Source: Palo Alto Historical Association.

A photograph from 1967 shows that the remaining storefront windows were altered and replaced with more rounded awnings in the intervening two years (**Figure 11**). It also appears that the north façade facing the alleyway retained the original fenestration pattern shown in earlier photographs dating to the 1930s.



Figure 11. Context view of the east and north facades from across the construction site of the future City Hall building and plaza, 1967. Source: Palo Alto Historical Association.

Photographs dating in range from 1986 to 1994 show that the east façade remained mostly unaltered beyond further changes to the storefront systems at the ground floor of Hamilton Avenue, which included the addition of a new metal grate at the central northern storefront (**Figure 12 and Figure 13**).



Figure 12. View of the east façade of the subject building along Hamilton Avenue, 1986. Source: Palo Alto Historical Association.



Figure 13. View of the east façade of the subject building along Hamilton Avenue, 1994. Source: Palo Alto Historical Association.

Photographs dating from April to May 1994 show alterations to the fenestration of the north façade, which faces the alleyway, including what appears to have been the removal or enclosure of six windows with stucco (**Figure 14, Figure 15, and Figure 16**).



Figure 14. Context view of the north and east facades of the subject building, viewed from Hamilton Avenue, April 1994. Source: Palo Alto Historical Association.



Figure 15. View of the north façade facing Centennial Walk, viewed from Hamilton Avenue, May 1994. Source: Palo Alto Historical Association.



Figure 16. View of the north façade facing Centennial Walk, 1994. Source: Palo Alto Historical Association.

The following is a brief overview of the development and major alterations that have taken place at the subject property since its construction, based on building permits and visual analysis:

- 1965: Permit issued to remodel storefront⁸
- c.1965-1967: Storefront windows along the east façade were altered, and flat awnings were replaced with rounded awnings. Original tilework, hanging retail signage, and light fixtures were also removed and replaced with retail signage for the University Art Center.
- 1972: Permit issued to install a glass window display and close off partitions of the lobby⁹
- 1983: Permit issued to remove existing load bearing walls and replace existing lighting¹⁰
- c.1986: A metal grate was added to the central northern storefront
- Prior to 1994, alterations were made to the fenestration of the north façade, including the removal or enclosure of six windows with stucco paneling.

⁸ 261 Hamilton Avenue, Permit 24498, 1965, on file at Palo Alto Development Services.

⁹ 261 Hamilton Avenue, Permit A31165, 1972, on file at Palo Alto Development Services.

¹⁰ 261 Hamilton Avenue, Permit B83-479, 1983, on file at Palo Alto Development Services.

- 1999: Permit issued replace an existing door in compliance with an exemption from accessibility standards¹¹

2015 REHABILITATION PROJECT

In 2015, Cody Anderson Wasney architects undertook a rehabilitation project, which included the following work:

Throughout all facades:

- Refurbished and repaired existing steel sash windows
- Repaired and restored existing terracotta roof tiles
- Repaired wrought iron balconies and ornamentation
- Repaired and cleaned surface stucco

North Façade (alley):

- Removed window mounted air conditioners from the third floor
- Removed electrical panels and conduits as well as conduit cuts into windows at second floor
- Removed non-historic gates from doors at the ground floor level
- Removed non-historic windows from the ground and mezzanine levels
- Removed light fixtures from the mezzanine level to be repurposed and relocated
- Installed new sconces at the ground floor level on either side of the window and door systems
- Replaced steel bollards with architectural bollards at ground floor level
- Installed a new wood double door at ground floor level exit passageway
- Installed a compatible metal storefront system at the original entry alcove
- Installed new steel windows to the ground floor
- Installed two sets of three vertical stone slab Centennial Plaques at the ground floor level that commemorate 100 years of Palo Alto's history
- Added a fence around rooftop mechanical at rear

East Façade (Hamilton):

- Replaced all non-historic aluminum storefront windows with steel frame windows and historically compatible wood doors with transoms
- Removed existing infilled plaster panels from some windows
- Where possible, repaired and refurbished existing wood awning boxes with metal liners, wood spindles, wood transom windows, glazing, and frames
- Removed and replaced arched fabric awnings with historically compatible flat awnings under the transom level

¹¹ 261 Hamilton Avenue, Permit 99-338, 1999, on file at Palo Alto Development Services.

- Added tile wainscoting to match existing tilework at storefront windows (and to replace non-historic) and added tile squares above the entryway
- Added light fixtures to the storefront entryway at the northern side
- Replaced existing wood plank planter boxes at the base of windows along the northern side of the east facade with historically compatible tilework
- Restored any non-historic rounded transoms back to a historically compatible shape
- Removed all existing pigeon spines on existing storefronts
- Removed all exterior surface mounted conduits attached to existing storefront systems
- Added a wall-mounted, projecting clock at the east end of the facade
- Recessed entrances where they had been made flush in earlier alterations

South Façade (Ramona):

- Removed non-historic aluminum entrance systems
- Replaced all non-historic aluminum storefront windows with steel frame windows and historically compatible wood doors with transoms
- Restored non-historic rounded transoms back to a historically compatible shape and installed new historically compatible fabric awning
- Where possible, repaired and refurbished existing wood awning boxes with metal liners, wood spindles, wood transom windows, glazing, and frames
- Removed existing retail signage lettering that was mounted on the building
- Repaired existing steel sash windows at upper floors
- Replaced wood spindles in transoms where missing

West Façade:

- Removed window mounted air conditioners.
- Removed conduit boxes.

INTEGRITY

While the Palo Alto Historic Register does not specifically discuss the concept of integrity, typically to qualify for listing in any local, state, or national historic register, a property or landscape must possess significance under at least one evaluative criterion and retain integrity. Integrity is defined by the California Office of Historic Preservation as “the authenticity of an historical resource’s physical identity evidenced by the survival of characteristics that existed during the resource’s period of significance,” or more simply defined by the National Park Service as “the ability of a property to convey its significance.”¹²

¹² California Office of Historic Preservation, *Technical Assistance Series No. 7: How to Nominate a Resource to the California Register of Historical Resources* (Sacramento: California Office of State Publishing, September 4, 2001), 11; and National Park

In order to evaluate whether the subject property retains sufficient integrity to convey its historic significance, Page & Turnbull used established integrity standards outlined by the *National Register Bulletin 15: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*. Seven variables, or aspects, that define integrity are used to evaluate a resource's integrity—location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. A property must possess most, or all, of these aspects in order to retain overall integrity. If a property does not retain integrity, it can no longer convey its significance and is therefore not eligible for listing in local, state, or national registers.

The seven aspects that define integrity are defined as follows:

Location is the place where the historic property was constructed or the place where the historic event occurred;

Setting addresses the physical environment of the historic property inclusive of the landscape and spatial relationships of the building(s);

Design is the combination of elements that create the form, plan, space, structure, and style of the property;

Materials refer to the physical elements that were combined or deposited during a particular period of time and in a particular pattern or configuration to form the historic property;

Workmanship is the physical evidence of the crafts of a particular culture or people during any given period in history or prehistory;

Feeling is the property's expression of the aesthetic or historic sense of a particular period of time; and

Association is the direct link between an important historic event or person and the historic property.

In the case of 261 Hamilton Avenue, an integrity evaluation is important to understand the effect of the 2015 rehabilitation project on the building's eligibility for designation on the Palo Alto Historic Inventory.

Service, *National Register Bulletin 15: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1995), 44.

Location

261 Hamilton Avenue retains integrity of location. The subject building has remained situated at its location of original construction since 1928.

Setting

261 Hamilton Avenue retains integrity of setting. The subject building retains its historic relationship with both Hamilton Avenue and Ramona Street. While several buildings on the adjacent blocks and opposite the subject building along Hamilton Avenue have been replaced with newer infill since construction of the subject building in 1928, the block remains notably intact with buildings from the same period of construction, including the other buildings within the Ramona Street Architectural District. For these reasons, the subject building retains integrity of setting regarding surrounding urban commercial fabric.

Design

261 Hamilton Avenue retains integrity of design. While there have been several notable alterations, mainly to the storefront window and door systems along the Hamilton Avenue and Ramona Street level facades, the most recent rehabilitation project implemented by Cody Anderson Wasney Architects had inserted elements of restoration, based on historic drawings and documentation, which have elevated the building to a high level of integrity. Upper floors and secondary facades appear to be largely unaltered and retain the majority of their original character-defining features including steel casement windows, wrought iron ornamentation, and unique cross gabled massing. The ground-floor storefront systems have been largely restored to their original condition and have received compatible new storefront systems, wood doors, tilework, wood spindles, awnings, and awning boxes.

Several differences from the original design by Clark include the lowering of tile bulkheads, replacement of formerly tripartite divided light glazing at storefront systems with single pane glazing, and the exclusion of original transoms to two storefronts on the east façade. Other elements of the fenestration located along the north (alley) façade were not restored to the original design by Birge Clark and have instead been updated to modern functionality. Those include original windows that were removed and later covered with commemorative panels, along with the installation of a large steel door system to replace a set of two smaller doors. Overall, implementation of new tilework and all other work to storefront systems and entryways on the ground floor level appear to be historically compatible and differentiated, in compliance with previous guidance set forth in a Focused Historic Structure Report prepared by Architectural

Resources Group in 2014.¹³ The overall composition of the building's design, including the fenestration pattern, rooflines, cornices, and decorative detailing at the upper floors, all remain generally intact and contribute to the Spanish Colonial Revival stylistic elements designed by Birge M. Clark. For these reasons, 261 Hamilton Avenue retains integrity of design.

Materials

261 Hamilton Avenue retains integrity of materials. The upper three floors of the building appear to retain nearly all original materials and the original fenestration pattern. Furthermore, alterations by Cody Anderson Wasney Architects in 2015 have utilized historically compatible materials and treatments where possible, thus restoring many original materials at the storefronts such as the tile bulkheads, spindle transoms, metal awning boxes, liners, and fabric awnings, along with glazed wood doors. Installation of new tilework at the ground level and all other restorations to materials at the upper floors, including refurbishment of terracotta roof tiles, steel sash windows, and stucco finishes, appear to be historically compatible and differentiated where necessary, in compliance with previous guidance set forth in a Focused Historic Structure Report prepared by Architectural Resources Group in 2014.¹⁴

Workmanship

261 Hamilton Avenue retains integrity of workmanship. Features providing evidence of period workmanship and construction methods include original steel casement windows with multi-light panes, wrought iron ornamentation, turned wood spindles, and cast stone arched corbels. The high level of workmanship in the decorative detailing of the building reflects early twentieth century construction methods in prominent high style Spanish Colonial Revival commercial buildings and architect-designed buildings.

Feeling

261 Hamilton Avenue retains integrity of feeling. The building overall retains the feeling of its original design by Birge M. Clark as constructed in 1928, as its design, materiality, and workmanship remain highly representative of its original Spanish Colonial Revival aesthetic. The north (alley) façade has been altered most extensively compared to the original design by Birge Clark in the installation of a new steel door system and six-foot stone slab commemorative panels, and removal of smaller fixed windows at the ground and mezzanine levels. However, as this façade is not primary street-facing and historically functioned as the access point for automobiles to enter the building's basement level garage, the ground level fenestration was arguably designed with a utilitarian

¹³ Architectural Resources Group, "261 Hamilton Avenue," Focused Historic Structures Report, 2014.

¹⁴ Architectural Resources Group, "261 Hamilton Avenue," Focused Historic Structures Report, 2014.

functionality and therefore can be assessed to a lesser standard of stylistic integrity than the upper floors or facades facing Hamilton Avenue and Ramona Street. Apart from the ground level of the north façade, all other elements of the building's integrity have not diminished in terms of form, height, massing, or materiality such that its feeling is impaired.

Association

261 Hamilton Avenue retains integrity of association. The subject building is significant as a representative of an important period of early commercial growth in Palo Alto's urban core, and as a contributor to the Ramona Street Architectural District which comprises an enclave of buildings with important artistic, architectural, commercial, and spatial value to the cultural heritage of Palo Alto. Through its association with architect of merit Birge M. Clark and connection to surrounding buildings along Ramona street, 261 Hamilton Avenue retains integrity of association.

PALO ALTO HISTORIC INVENTORY EVALUATION

The Palo Alto Historic Inventory is the official list of sites, structures and districts designated by the City Council as possessing significant historical and/or architectural value. Originally adopted in 1979, the Inventory has been updated and added to over time. Any individual or group may propose designating a historic structure, site or district to the Inventory according to the procedure found in the Historic Preservation Ordinance (Municipal Code Section 16.49.040). Properties nominated for designation are recommended by the HRB and decided upon by the City Council. The following Criteria for Designation, along with the definitions of historic categories and districts in Section 16.49.020, is used to designate historic structures, sites and districts 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 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.

Properties listed in the Palo Alto Historic Inventory are organized under the following Historic Categories:

- **Category 1:** An "Exceptional Building" of pre-eminent national or state importance. These buildings are meritorious works of the best architects, outstanding examples of a specific architectural style, or illustrate stylistic development of architecture in the United States.
- **Category 2:** A "Major Building" of regional importance. These buildings are meritorious works of the best architects, outstanding examples of an architectural style, or illustrate stylistic development of architecture in the state or region.
- **Category 3 or 4:** A "Contributing Building" is a good local example of an architectural style and relates to the character of a neighborhood grouping in scale, materials, proportion or other factors.

While 261 Hamilton Avenue is currently listed as a Category 3 historic resource, that designation was made in 1985, at which time the building has sustained a number of alterations to the ground floor facades. Following the 2015 rehabilitation project, which restored many the original features and installed a handful of compatible new elements, the property appears eligible for elevation to Category 2: A "Major Building" of regional importance in the Palo Alto Historic Resources Inventory. The subject building meets the following Criteria for Designation:

- **Criterion 1** (The structure or site is identified with the lives of historic people or with important events in the city, state or nation)

261 Hamilton Avenue is an important early building within Palo Alto's urban core and is representative of a period of commercial development in the Downtown South neighborhood and the Ramona Street Architectural District. At the time of construction, the subject building was the tallest building in Palo Alto and was also the first building to feature a drive-in garage at the basement, which operated from 1928 to 1965.¹⁵ The design of an underground parking garage speaks to Palo Alto's formal transition away more traditional transportation methods of horse, carriage, and rail to an era of modernity and invention with the personal automobile. It also symbolizes the development of Palo Alto's downtown as a destination for commercial and social activity. For these reasons, 261 Hamilton Avenue meets Criterion 1.

¹⁵ Architectural Resources Group, "261 Hamilton Avenue," 2014.

- **Criterion 2** (The structure or is particularly representative of an architectural style or way of life important to the city, state or nation)

261 Hamilton Avenue is an important early commercial work in the Spanish Colonial Revival style. 261 Hamilton Avenue retains its Spanish Colonial Revival character-defining features including original steel casement windows, terracotta roof tiles, elaborate wrought ironwork, variation in massing and rooflines, arched openings, and stucco cladding. Overall, the subject building remains an important and elegant anchor within the Ramona Street Architectural District and provides a stylistic and spatial connection to nearby civic, cultural, and commercial spaces. For these reasons, the subject building meets Criterion 2.

- **Criterion 5** (The architect or building was important)

Birge M. Clark is an architect of merit who is widely considered to be the most influential architect in Palo Alto's history. Clark was active during much of the twentieth century and was a proponent of the Spanish Colonial Revival style, which he called "Early California." Clark played a major role in the creation of Palo Alto during the boom times of the 1920s and his prolific output and stylistic consistency greatly contributed to Palo Alto's current architectural character. Clark designed a variety of commercial, residential, institutional, and industrial buildings, including 98 residences in Palo Alto and 39 on the Stanford campus. In Palo Alto, Birge Clark's most well-known commercial and public buildings include the Police and Fire Station at 450 Bryant Street (now the Palo Alto Senior Center) (1927), the Post Office at 380 Hamilton Avenue (1932), the Lucie Stern Community Center at 1305 Middlefield Road (1932) and commercial buildings along the 500 Block of Ramona Street (1920s) including the subject property. For these reasons, 261 Hamilton Avenue is significant under Criterion 5 as the work of important local architect of merit Birge M. Clark.

- **Criterion 6** (The structure or site contains elements demonstrating outstanding attention to architectural design, detail, materials or craftsmanship).

261 Hamilton Avenue features excellent examples of Spanish Colonial Revival ornamentation that showcase the craftsmanship and artistry of both Birge M. Clark's original design and construction by important local builder Wells P. Goodenough. The subject building expresses the high style Spanish Colonial Revival design and craftsmanship that was characteristic of Clark, using features such as cross-gabled terracotta rooflines, arcades and arched openings, stucco cladding, steel casement windows, exposed carved wood rafters, turned wood spindles, and elaborate wrought ironwork. In addition to these high style Spanish Colonial Revival design elements, Clark's design also incorporates several more

subtle Gothic motifs through the use of pointed elliptical storefront windows and arched corbeled balcony supports. This integration of stylistic variety represents his adaptability as an architect and his artistic vision for both the building and the block, aligning his vision with that of local artist and craftsman Pedro de Lemos to create a cohesive commercial and pedestrian experience along Ramona Street. For these reasons, 261 Hamilton Avenue meets Criterion 6.

Criterion 3 and 4: The subject building does not appear to meet Criterion 3, as the building is an example of the Spanish Colonial Revival Style, which would have been considered common at the time of construction but would not be considered rare in the current day. Lastly, the subject building does not appear to meet Criterion 4, as its early use as a commercial building with medical and post office use would have been considered common at the time of construction, but would not be considered rare today.

In conclusion, 261 Hamilton Avenue meets Criteria 1, 2, 5 and 6 in consideration for eligibility as a Category 2: "Major Building."

CHARACTER-DEFINING FEATURES

For a property to be eligible for national or state designation under criteria related to type, period, or method of construction, the essential physical features (or character-defining features) that enable the property to convey its historic identity must be evident. These distinctive character-defining features are the physical traits that commonly recur in property types and/or architectural styles. To be eligible, a property must clearly contain enough of those characteristics to be considered a true representative of a particular type, period, or method of construction, and these features must also retain a sufficient degree of integrity. Characteristics can be expressed in terms such as form, proportion, structure, plan, style, or materials.

The character-defining features of 261 Hamilton Avenue include, but are not limited to:

- Irregular massing and roof forms
- Low-sloped roof with moderate overhang and exposed eaves
- Use of stepped facade with recessed portions along Hamilton Avenue and Ramona Street, along with cross-gabled rooflines to create the illusion of two separate buildings
- Use of balconies to differentiate the first and second floors from the street level
- Wrap-around balcony connecting the east and south facades with arched corbelling supports detail
- Wrought ironwork at railings, grilles, and corbels
- Colonnades along the top floor
- Arched openings at the street level of Hamilton Avenue and Ramona Street

- Multi-light casement windows with steel sash
- Stucco cladding
- Terracotta roof tiles
- Use of wood spindles at the transoms above ground floor windows
- Recessed storefront entrances
- Tiled bulkheads

Features that are not original to the building, do not date to the period of significance, and therefore are not character-defining features, include, but are not limited to:

- Tile or lettered signage and ornamentation at the ground floor
- Light fixtures at the ground floor
- Replacement materials, such as glazed wood storefront doors (though compatible), the new storefront system on the north façade, fabric awnings, attached hanging clocks, retail signage, and Centennial Plaques on the north façade

CONCLUSION

This Palo Alto Historic Inventory Evaluation Memorandum finds that 261 Hamilton Avenue appears eligible for elevation within the Palo Alto Historic Inventory from a Category 3: “Contributing Building” to a Category 2: “Major Building” of regional importance. The subject building is a meritorious work of an important regional architect of merit, Birge M. Clark, and is an excellent example of commercial design in the Spanish Colonial Revival style that is both individually significant and contributes to the Ramona Street Architectural District.

QUALIFICATIONS

Page & Turnbull was established in 1973 as Charles Hall Page & Associates to provide architectural and conservation services for historic buildings, resources, and civic areas. The company was one of the first architecture firms in California to dedicate its practice to historic preservation and is among the longest practicing such firms in the country. Offices are located in San Francisco, Los Angeles, San Jose, and Sacramento, and staff includes planners, architectural historians, licensed architects, designers, and conservators. All of Page & Turnbull’s professional staff members meet or exceed the Secretary of the Interior’s Professional Qualifications Standards as published in the Code of Federal Regulations, 36 CFR Part 61.

Samantha Purnell, a cultural resources planner within Page & Turnbull’s Cultural Resources Planning Studio, is the primary author of this report. Project manager and principal leading this project is Christina Dikas, Director of Page & Turnbull’s Cultural Resources Planning Studio. Both meet the Secretary of the Interior’s Professional Qualifications Standards for Architectural History.

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