

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Send comments to editor@smdp.com

Just say no, City Council

Dear City Council Members:

Re: 08APP-004 (2617 Third St. project)

I am a 30-plus year Santa Monica resident, and 17 or 18 years ago lived on Third Street and was part of the group that helped form the wonderful, unique and tiny Third Street Historical District. The entire process was a beautiful example of democracy at work. The residents and concerned citizens came together to protect a very small portion of our communal heritage. We met for hours and hours (and hours), did all our homework, and presented our findings to the council, who approved the district. For all these years our work has brought pleasure and a better understanding of our history to those who live there, to those who live nearby, and to the thousands and thousands who visit our sweet neighborhood every year.

The person whose project you're now considering moved into the district fully knowing where he was about to live. He chose to live in a historic district. He chose to live in a neighborhood with special rules and regulations. He made that choice knowingly and conscientiously. No one made him purchase a home in the district; he did it because he wanted to.

That person now seeks to build something totally out of character with the historic district and in clear violation of district guidelines. His design would be lovely in the 99.99 percent of Santa Monica that is not the Third Street Historic District; because he chose to live in this .01 percent of town, it is inappropriate and therefore unacceptable.

The residents of the district, and those of us who live nearby and/or who participated in its creation, are united in opposition to the project. We thought we'd fought this battle 18 years ago, when we formed the district. Why are we fighting it again? What's the purpose of democracy if the citizens' almost unanimous choices are overridden on a whim?

Your choice is clear. You can protect our heritage and our democratic process, or you can ignore the citizenry and vote to override the Landmarks Commission. As before, the citizens of our wonderful city are watching and hoping you do the right thing.

Peter Spelman
Santa Monica

Sad to see the sign go

Editor:

I was happy to see that the iconic Santa Monica Ferris Wheel is up for auction with half the proceeds going to charity. However, I was sad to see the crumpled "Santa Monica Place" sign on the front page of the (April 18, 2008) SMDP.

It seems that the Santa Monica Place sign is equally iconic and would have made an even better charity auction item. It certainly would be easier for the winner to transport and display it than a Ferris wheel.

Eric Cooper
Santa Monica



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City chips away at historic districts

IN OCEAN PARK'S THIRD STREET Historic District, it's not what's up front that counts.

The home at 2617 Third St. is in the heart of the district. It's a single story, craftsman "front house" built in 1905. The controversy is what the property owner, Mark Woollen wants to build in his backyard: a "modern," two floor, 1,213-square-foot addition onto a non-historical 1946-era accessory building behind his landmark front house.

Neighbors argue that the large, cantilevered, two-story box proposed for the backyard of his historic California bungalow is inappropriate and not harmonious with the neighborhood. They say it does not conform to the district's design guidelines for new construction and additions. The project failed to receive Landmarks Commission approval on Jan. 14, so Woollen is appealing his new addition to the City Council, tomorrow night.

Woollen's neighbors and preservationists want to protect the historic feel of the neighborhood and oppose the project. They claim the neighborhood is under assault from developers and newer homeowners and their architects who are insensitive to the period atmosphere.

Another recent project at 2642 Second St. involves the demolition of a small, period-style, but non-historic bungalow by property owners who want to replace it with a new Modern style house. This two story home with 2,365 square feet of space, a roof deck and a detached two-car garage will go up 23 feet. The project is described as a pair of rectangular boxes clad in tan stucco and wood. Nevertheless, this particular project was approved by the landmarks commission. Neighbors opposing the project appealed the decision to City Council who denied their appeal on Feb. 12.

The historic Ocean Park neighborhood within roughly Second, Third and Hill streets and Ocean Park Boulevard represents architectural styles popular in Santa Monica from 1875 through 1935. In all, 42 structures in the district are original. It's the Victorian and California Craftsman style bungalows that define the early 20th century feel — an aura which neighbors want to maintain and preserve.

However, the criteria for issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness for new construction states that the project must be compatible with the scale, materials, and massing of contributing structures in the district. The adopted Ocean Park Neighborhood Development Guide specifies that new construction in the OP Zoning Districts must be International style/modern, craftsman bungalow or Spanish colonial revival/Mediterranean.

Neighbors and preservationists argue that Woollen's proposed project "damages the character of the district, violates the purpose for creating the district and is incom-

patible with the district's dominant architectural character found in its California bungalows." They maintain that "the Landmarks Commission substituted its own criteria; that new buildings should be 'of their time' (a standard not included in the any standards or guidelines relevant to the district) and that the project's size, massing, style, building shape and materials do not complement the surrounding contributing structures as required by the Neighborhood Design Guidelines."

I personally feel Woollen's appeal should be denied. A city government that professes to care about Santa Monica's past should derail this latest threat to the district's early 20th century integrity (what's left of it) and character. Santa Monica is a small town physically and the Third Street Historic District is the only neighborhood where there's any semblance of a historic or period atmosphere.

The architectural style Woollen contemplates for 2617 Third St. may (depending on how one views things) be "technically" appropriate, but my heart and intellect says, "Not." Projects like Woollen's chip away at the very character of the district, one building, one addition and one remodel at a time.

This raises a much bigger question about our future. Is Santa Monica's development to serve the community's residents (read: voters) or will our town become even more of a playpen for the very wealthy and a cash cow for speculators and developers?

However, the only way to end debates on appropriateness is to revise both the Ocean Park zoning codes and the Neighborhood Development Guide to reflect only those architectural styles — Victorian, Gothic, American Colonial Revival, American Foursquare, California Craftsman and Spanish Colonial Revival — which represent the neighborhood's turn-of-the century development before World War II.

In other words, it's time to close and lock the door before more cattle sneak out of the barn.

EARTH DAY IS A WEIRD SPECTACLE

My favorite Internet posting of last week was on the LAist Web site which recapped April 12th's Earth Day festival on the Third Street Promenade.

(laist.com/2008/04/14/santa_monica_go.php)

Be sure to open pictures in the photo gallery. My favorite is a shot of an overflowing (with bottles and cans) Promenade trash can. The caption: "Oddly, there were no recycling receptacles at the Earth Day festival. Hmmm." Only in "too green" Santa Monica.

To recycle your thoughts, contact **BILL BAUER** at mr.bilbau@gmail.com

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ODDS OF A CHILD BECOMING A PROFESSIONAL ATHLETE: 1 in 16,000

ODDS OF A CHILD BEING DIAGNOSED WITH AUTISM: 1 in 166

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