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PRESERVATION

STAFF REPORT

Tempe Historic Preservation Office

From: Joe Nucci, Historic Preservation Officer

Date: April 7, 2005

DSD# HPO-2005.30

Borden Homes Historic District Designation

Background + Status

On February 14, 2005, Barbra Worbington, Chair of the University Heights Neighborhood Association, submitted an application for designation of the historic 1947 Borden Homes Subdivision on the Tempe Historic Property Register. This submittal was in response to a presentation by the Tempe HPC to approximately 20 Neighborhood Association Members on February 10, 2005, where the eligibility of the district was communicated to property owners who reached consensus to bring forward an application.

The Borden Homes Subdivision is identified in the *Post World War II Subdivisions In Tempe Arizona; Neighborhood & House-Type Context Development 1945 – 1960*, prepared by Scott Solliday Historian (Solliday 2001) as currently age-eligible for designation as historic districts.

History + Context

Unprecedented annexation and development during the post World War II period in Tempe established broad patterns of community planning and development that characterize the city today. From 1945 to 1960, more than one hundred subdivisions were opened for development and thousands of homes were built in Tempe. During this fifteen-year period, Tempe's corporate limits increased by a factor of ten, and our historically stable population increased from less than 5,000 to nearly 25,000 persons.

Tempe Preservation recognizes the post-war era as a formative period significant in shaping our modern Tempe. Accordingly, in May 2001, operating under a Federal Historic Preservation pass-through grant from the Arizona State Historic Preservation Office, Tempe contracted with Historian Scott Solliday to conduct a survey and inventory of post-war subdivisions. The survey examined approximately 4,500 properties that were built in Tempe between 1946 and 1960. From this survey, historic property inventory forms were completed for nearly 1,800 individual properties in 62 subdivisions. These subdivisions were evaluated for historic and architectural significance, as well as integrity, and seven subdivisions were identified as currently age-eligible candidates for historic district designation including the historic 1947 Borden Homes Subdivision.

The Tempe Historic Preservation Commission has identified the seven currently age-eligible subdivisions as first tier subdivisions and has recommended proactively pursuing their historic designation as districts. These seven, along with an additional twenty five second tier subdivisions representing the field of candidates for future districts have been designated Cultural Resource Areas in Tempe General Plan 2030.

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The City of Tempe is a Certified Local Government, in association with the United States Department of the Interior/National Park Service



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Platted on October 9, 1947, by J. A. & Annie N. Farnsworth, the Borden Homes Subdivision originally included 79 lots in the area roughly bound by Orange Street, McClintock Drive, Apache Boulevard, and Una Avenue. Proposed district boundaries will designate that portion of the historic subdivision that is zoned single-family residential (R1-6) and which includes 68 properties built between 1947 and 1957, six of which are listed in the Tempe MRA.

J. A. Farnsworth began selling the first 40 lots in the western portion of the subdivision in 1947, and offered 32 other home sites in the eastern portion, known as "Farnsworth Homes," in 1950. In February 1950, 14 homes were under construction, with plans for starting 18 others. Lot sizes were typically 60' x 130', and the average home built had three bedrooms and 1,130 square feet. Farnsworth kept 300 feet of frontage on State Route 80 for future commercial development including the A. J. Bayless shopping center site. The subdivision was annexed into the city on March 27, 1950, under Tempe City Ordinance Number 201.

Subdivision Design

The Borden Homes Historic District exhibits a high degree of integrity at both the subdivision and parcel levels of analysis. Additionally, based on field recognizance undertaken by the Tempe Historic Preservation Commission in November 2004, this district has a frequency of contributing properties above the 88 percent level.

The original subdivision design concept is clearly intact at Borden Homes with the U-shaped street configuration resulting in an interesting subdivision layout overall. At the northern reach of the commercial frontage along Apache Boulevard, Una Butte Avenue divides in graceful curves to form the central neighborhood circulator streets; Una Avenue and Butte Avenue. These streets continue north to the subdivision boundary resulting in four uniform columns of residential lots 60 by 130 feet served by unpaved alleys at the rear of the lots. At the midpoint of these blocks, East Lemon Street enters the subdivision following its stepped east-west alignment connecting the neighborhood to South Dorsey Lane, the midsection collector west of Tomlinson Estates, and to McClintock Drive, the mile-grid arterial at the east. One hundred thirty feet north of the terminus of Una Butte Avenue, Twelfth Street tees from Butte Avenue and maintains a straight alignment east to McClintock Drive, fronted by uniform 60 by 130 feet residential lots to the district extent.

When Farnsworth platted Borden homes on October 9, 1947, Tempe's first zoning ordinance, Ordinance No. 177, was still in effect. The undifferentiated "Residence District" specified street and yard setbacks that remain today with no noticeable variation. Although two or more subsequent zoning ordinances would be adopted before the subdivision reached build-out in 1957, the initial standards provided under Ordinance 177 established the basic subdivision character that continued to be adhered to resulting in a regular streetscape rhythm throughout the Borden Homes Historic District.¹

The original subdivision layout is complimented by utility infrastructure for electrical service distribution and residential irrigation. Along the unpaved service alleys, power and telephone service is still distributed overhead from wood poles that additionally provide street lighting in some cases. At ground level, irrigation control devices, including delivery gates and lateral valves, are conspicuously part of a functioning system. At the parcel level, the continuing presence of residential irrigation is evidenced in perimeter berms and alfalfa valves maintained by property owners.

Landscaped Environment

As the post-war demand for city services grew, municipal boundaries began expanding to incorporate new neighborhoods as they were built. Landowners in subdivisions outside the city limits often requested annexation to connect to city water and sewer service and to eventually get residential irrigation and paved streets. This was not always the case, however, as some residents resisted annexation to avoid property tax increases. The Tempe City Council considered annexing the area including Borden Homes as early as 1948, but would wait two more years until protest from property

¹ On September 16, 1948, Tempe's second zoning ordinance went into effect, Ordinance No. 193 created additional zoning districts and differentiating residential and business classifications in greater detail. On October 11, 1951, Tempe's third zoning ordinance went into effect, Ordinance No. 209. On February 6, 1957, Tempe's fourth zoning ordinance went into effect, Ordinance No. 268.

owners gradually turned to a desire for irrigation leading to creation of an improvement district for expanded infrastructure. On August 13, 1953, E. W. Daley, Tempe Superintendent of Streets, established Improvement District Number 43, providing additions to Tempe's irrigation system to extend service to the Borden Homes and Tomlinson Estates subdivisions. The historic 1870 Kirkland-McKinney Ditch at the north edge of the University Heights Neighborhood Association boundary is an integral part of Tempe's earliest history and the associated flood irrigation delivered to Borden Homes over more than 50 years has significantly contributed to the present character of the neighborhood.

The concentration of mature mesic vegetation resulting from sustained flood irrigation contributes to the character of the area and creates a distinct microclimate that is discernable on site and has been measured using infrared thermal imaging photography by students at Arizona State University.

Architectural Environment

The Borden Homes Historic District contains numerous transitional early ranch style homes including approximately forty constructed in row-lock brick masonry. Brick masonry and especially row-lock brick masonry houses are rare to Tempe, and very rare throughout the Valley. Row-lock brick masonry was only used during a brief period before reinforced concrete block largely replaced this method of residential construction. The remainder of the homes in the subdivision are constructed in the more common reinforced block style. Taken together, this collection provides an interesting reflection of the evolution of residential construction technology at the point in time when modern building codes began to have influence in the valley metro area.²

Summary

The combination of a high frequency of contributing properties, the continuous presence of flood irrigation and its resulting mature vegetation, along with good integrity of the historic streetscape and formal subdivision layout are significant character defining features of the Borden Homes Historic District.

Significance

The subject property meets the following criteria for designation, as found in section 14A-4 of the Tempe City Code.

(b) The following criteria are established for designation of an historic district:

(1) The district consists of an area in which are located a substantial concentration of properties, buildings or structures which individually meet the criteria in subsection (a) of this section above, as well as others which contribute generally to the overall distinctive character of the area, and are united historically or visually by plan or physical development; district boundaries coincide with documented historic boundaries such as early roadways, canals, subdivision plats or property lines; other district boundaries coincide with logical physical or man-made features and reflect recognized neighborhood or area boundaries; and other noncontributing properties or vacant parcels are included where necessary to create appropriate boundaries.

Recommendations

Staff have placed this item on the Planning and Zoning Commission agenda for Public Hearing on April 12, 2005, and recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission approve the nomination and recommend to the Planning and Zoning Commission and City Council that the Borden Homes Historic District be designated as a Tempe Historic Property (#24) applying Historic Overlay Zoning to the district.

² On June 12, 1952, the Tempe City Council adopted the 1949 Edition of the Uniform Building Code, as Section 301(a) of the Tempe City Code, the first Tempe building regulation to provide minimum standards to safeguard life, limb, health, property and public welfare.

Historic Preservation staff recommends that the character defining features of the neighborhood be preserved and the forces acting against these features be evaluated and the type of alterations that can be occur without adversely affecting these features can be identified.

Historic Preservation staff recommends following designation of an historic district, and until such time as district-specific design guidelines can be adopted, the commission shall refer to such professional or commonly recognized standards as may be appropriate and available to ensure the overall neighborhood character will be conserved and enhanced while responding to current trends. The example of the Willow Neighborhood in Phoenix, where the houses are very small and the neighborhood is experiencing large additions to the homes that will eventually overwhelm the character of the historic neighborhood should be considered.

references:

Janus Associates, 1983 *Tempe Historic Property Survey: and multiple resource area nomination to the National Register of Historic Places*. Tempe Historical Society.

Ryden Architects, 1997 *City of Tempe Multiple Resource Area Update*. City of Tempe Historic Preservation Office.

Scott Solliday, 2001 *Post World War II Subdivisions Tempe, Arizona: 1945-1960; Neighborhood & House-type Context Development*. Tempe Historic Preservation Commission.

attachments: application
vicinity map
site plan
photographs