

CITY OF GLENDALE
INTERDIVISIONAL COMMUNICATION
STAFF REPORT

Date: April 26, 2010

To: Historic Preservation Commission

From: Jay Platt, Planner, Historic Preservation and Urban Design

Subject: Rossmoyne Historic District Overlay Zone Designation Application

INTRODUCTION

The Planning Division of the Community Planning Department has received an application for a historic district overlay zone comprised of 504 properties in the Rossmoyne neighborhood. The area encompassed within the proposed district corresponds almost entirely to the area laid out and developed as “Rossmoyne” by the Haddock-Nibley Company beginning in 1923. It is one of Glendale’s few large, planned residential developments and today continues to retain a high level of integrity with regard to its overall plan, streetscapes, and the design of its individual houses. The proposed district lies to the southwest of the Royal Boulevard Historic District, designated as Glendale’s first district in 2008, which consists of part of the area developed in 1926 as the second phase of the Rossmoyne development.

The boundary proposed by the applicants contains properties with the following addresses or address ranges:

- 908 – 975 E. Glenoaks Boulevard
- 1000 – 1432 Ethel Street
- 1011 – 1219 Cordova Avenue
- 942 – 951 Cabrillo Drive
- 940 – 958 Stocker Street
- 940 – 948 Del Rey Drive
- 1003 – 1347 Rossmoyne Avenue
- 1011 – 1230 Cortez Drive
- 1105 – 1230 Viscano Drive
- 1100 – 1439 Moncado Drive
- 1116 and 1204 Don Jose Drive
- 1101 – 1125 La Zanja Drive
- 927 – 1365 E. Mountain Street
- 1400, 1406, 1410, 1414, 1420, 1424, 1430, 1434, 1440, 1444, 1450, 1460, 1470 E. Mountain Street (south side between La Zanja and the Verdugo Wash)
- 1300 – 1344 Sinaloa Drive
- 937 – 971 Rosemount Road

- 1300 – 1350 Loreto Drive
- 1000 – 1125 Hillcroft Road
- 1407 San Pablo Drive
- 1103 E. Mountain Street (Nibley Park)

The district designation process outlined in the City’s Historic District Ordinance requires that the Historic Preservation Commission review the application and make a preliminary determination regarding the area’s eligibility as a historic district. This is not a final determination or recommendation. It is only a judgment that the area appears to meet at least one of the criteria established by the ordinance in a meaningful manner that warrants further investigation. If the Commission makes an affirmative determination, it then authorizes district proponents to circulate a petition among property owners within the proposed boundary requesting that the City conduct a historic resources survey for the proposed historic district. The process beyond that point includes the retention of a consultant to conduct the survey, further public meetings and hearings, and a final petition from the proponents containing signatures of owners requesting that the district be designated. Ultimately, City Council must vote in favor of the designation for the zone change to be made. The various steps of the process are established by ordinance (Exhibit B) and are depicted in the historic district designation process flowchart (Exhibit C).

Although Planning staff considers the application to be complete, as the designation process proceeds, the components of the application may change due to new information supplied by the applicants, City staff, the project consultant and/or the public. Any changes to the application, such as adjustment of the boundaries or supplements to the Historic District Design Guidelines, must be made and approved by the Commission prior to its final review and approval of the historic resources survey.

HISTORIC BACKGROUND AND DESCRIPTION

The application provides an overview of the Rossmoyne area’s history and development. This information comes largely from the survey prepared by Historic Resources Group for the Royal Boulevard Historic District in 2008. Staff believes that the research conducted for that survey regarding the initial phase of the development of Rossmoyne is adequate for the purpose of the present nomination and provides a clear picture regarding the importance of the development and the persons associated with its inception.

The land that the Haddock-Nibley Company purchased and began to develop as “Rossmoyne” in 1923 was part of the large ranch of the same name that belonged to Judge Erskine Mayo Ross. Ross and his uncle, Captain Cameron Erskine Thom, were among the founding fathers who established the township of Glendale in 1887. Ross had purchased his ranch from his uncle, who had bought his even larger parcel of land directly from Catalina Verdugo, whose family was the recipient of the original Spanish land grant of Rancho San Rafael. Therefore the land on which the proposed historic district sits is tied directly to several of the most important people in the city’s history.

The area developed as Rossmoyne area differs from many of the other neighborhoods in Glendale that sprang from former agricultural land during the boom years of the 1920s. The Haddock-Nibley Company strove to create a sense of exclusivity by establishing tight control over the neighborhood's physical development. Curving concrete streets, underground utilities, and decorative street lights were touted in advertisements and promotional literature by Haddock-Nibley and its successor in 1925, the Nibley Investment Company. Alex Nibley himself donated a large parcel to the city to create the public park that still bears his name. Restrictions prevented the subdivision of lots and mandated that only newly-constructed single-family homes could be built. It was these improvements and restrictions that produced the distinctive and cohesive appearance of the homes and streets that make Rossmoyne such a desirable neighborhood today. Other restrictions that limited residency to members of the "white (Caucasian) race" remind us of the terrible, still shocking, role that racism played in the marketing of many new developments throughout the nation during this period.

By the end of the 1920s, the majority of Rossmoyne's lots had been built out, though there was still considerable development in the 1930s and, to a lesser degree, 1940s. Period revival styles predominate throughout the area, with a particularly fine representation of the Spanish Colonial Revival style. Tudor Revival, Colonial Revival, and Mediterranean Revival style homes are also found in large number. Minimal Traditional-style homes began to infill the last unbuilt lots in the late 1930s and 1940s. Lot sizes were varied considerably to allow access for owners of differing income levels. The grander homes were built on the larger lots that tend to be found along Rossmoyne Avenue, Cortez Drive, Mountain Street, and Rosemount and Hillcroft Roads. The smaller homes have the same mix of architectural styles and also have uniform setbacks and complementary massing and scale that allow the entire neighborhood to cohere aesthetically. As noted in the application, nine homes within the proposed district are listed on the Glendale Register of Historic Resources. Many of the cast iron street lights installed by the Nibley Investment Company remain a distinctive part of the neighborhood's streetscape.

PRELIMINARY STAFF DETERMINATION OF ELIGIBILITY

In addition to assessing the nomination with regard to the eligibility criteria established by the Historic District Ordinance, Planning staff also considers the apparent appropriateness of the district boundary, period of significance, and name proposed by the applicants. Staff also visits the proposed district to make a preliminary visual estimation of the level of alterations to properties that could affect a potential district's eligibility based on the ordinance's requirement that a minimum of 60% of a district's properties be considered "contributors". Contributing structures are those that were built within the period of significance and maintain enough physical integrity to continue to convey their historic associations and original architectural design.

Proposed Boundary

The boundary proposed by the applicants encompasses almost all of the original Rossmoyne development laid out by Haddock-Nibley in 1923. A portion of the original

tract, located to the south of the Verdugo Wash, was largely obliterated by the construction of the 134 freeway. While the few blocks that remain contain housing stock similar to that found in parts of the proposed district, the area's physical separation by the wash and proximity to the freeway give it a different character than the area north of the wash and diminish its sense of historic connection to the Rossmoyne development. *Staff believes the proposed boundary is appropriate.*

Proposed Name

Since its inception as a residential neighborhood, the area encompassed by the proposed district has been known as Rossmoyne. Historic tract or development names are generally seen as the most appropriate names for historic districts when they correspond to the boundary of a proposed district, and this is the case for Rossmoyne. *Staff believes the proposed name is appropriate.*

Proposed Period of Significance

The applicants have proposed a period of significance of 1923 to 1948. The initial date is clearly appropriate because it was at that time that the Haddock-Nibley Company laid out the tract, built streets and other improvements, and began to sell parcels. The latter date is derived from the period of significance determined in the historic resources survey for the Royal Boulevard Historic District. 1948 was chosen as the end date for that district's significance because it was then that Rossmoyne Village, Inc. ceased marketing both the Royal Boulevard tract and the earlier Rossmoyne development under the name "Rossmoyne Village." Rossmoyne Village Inc. succeeded Nibley Investment after the latter firm fell victim to the Depression in 1936. While the earlier Rossmoyne development still had unbuilt lots at this point, the large majority of the building in the area had already been completed. Staff believes that the 1948 date may be more germane to the development of Royal Boulevard than it is to that of the earlier Rossmoyne tract, which may have an earlier end date for its period of significance. *Staff believes that 1923 is the appropriate starting date for the period of significance; the historic resources survey will include a historic context that will help definitively establish an ending date appropriate to the proposed Rossmoyne district. Finalizing this date is not a requirement for considering the district's eligibility for designation.*

Contributing Structures

Staff has spent considerable time within the proposed district and believes that it is very likely that at least 60% of the properties would be considered contributors to the historic district (302 of the 504 properties within the proposed boundary). The area is widely noted for its high level of historic integrity, but a quantitative assessment can only be made through a parcel-by-parcel survey. The percentage of contributors will change depending on the proposed district's period of significance, with the percentage likely to rise as the ending date becomes more recent. Regardless of this, *staff believes it is likely that the proposed district will meet the 60% threshold.*

Eligibility Criteria

A proposed district must meet at least one of the nine criteria established by the historic district ordinance in order to be considered for designation. *Staff believes that the proposed Rossmoyne Historic District appears to meet five of the nine criteria, as follows:*

- A. Exemplifies or reflects special elements of the City's cultural, social, economic, political, aesthetic, engineering, architectural, or natural history.**
Rossmoyne appears to be one of the largest and best planned residential developments in the Glendale, of which there are only a few known examples. The development of the area helped spur the city's phenomenal growth during the 1920s, making Glendale one of the most important and desirable residential suburbs in the Los Angeles area. The character and quality of the neighborhood's Period Revival housing stock and its streetscapes stems directly from the layout and design restrictions established by the original developers. As such the area appears to exemplify special elements of Glendale's social, economic, and architectural history. *Staff believes the proposed district appears to meet Criterion A.*
- B. Is identified with persons or events significant in local, state, or national history.**
Rossmoyne is associated with Judge Erskine Ross, who sold off his large land holdings for development as did many of the other key players in Glendale's early history. Ross' role as one of the founders of Glendale and an early booster of its development enhances the significance of his association with Rossmoyne. Alex Nibley, individually and in partnership with Lon Haddock, envisioned the layout and overall appearance of Rossmoyne, as well as developed the marketing campaigns and materials that led to the project's success, contributing strongly to the city's success in attracting new residents throughout the 1920s and 30s. Reminders of the Ross and Nibley names are found in the names of the neighborhood and its park. *Staff believes the proposed district appears to meet Criterion B.*
- C. Embodies distinctive characteristics of a style, type, or method of construction, or is a valuable example of the use of indigenous materials or craftsmanship.**
The proposed historic district contains homes reflecting the stylistic range typical of residences built between the 1920s and 1940s in Southern California. Many properties in the area embody the character-defining features associated with the major Period Revival styles associated with the 1920s and 1930s (Spanish Colonial, Tudor, Colonial, and Mediterranean). The area is particularly notable for its fine collection of Spanish Colonial Revival homes, as well as the quality of the construction and design of its homes, regardless of style. *Staff believes the proposed district appears to meet Criterion C.*

D. Represents the work of a notable builders, designers, or architects.

Though the layout of Rossmoyne is distinctive within the range of Glendale's residential neighborhoods and was undoubtedly influenced, if not fully designed, by its original developers, there is no information to suggest that their work is part of any larger or notable body of work. Some individual architects, designers, or builders of note may be associated with individual properties, but no research has been conducted to determine if Rossmoyne features any unusual concentration of such works. *Staff believes that the proposed district does not appear to meet Criterion D.*

E. Has a unique location or is a view or vista representing an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood community or of the city.

Rossmoyne's site at the base of the Verdugo Mountains is striking and was clearly an important component of early marketing efforts, but its overall setting is similar to other neighborhoods built along the base of Glendale's hills. *Staff believes that the proposed district does not appear to meet Criterion E.*

F. Embodies a collection of elements of architectural design, detail, materials or craftsmanship that represent a significant structural or architectural achievement or innovation.

While some of the homes in Rossmoyne appear to be among the best examples of their type in the city, the overall application of the designs, details, materials, and craftsmanship associated with the various Period Revival styles is not strikingly different from that of other neighborhoods. The overall collection of homes cannot be seen as a significant architectural achievement or innovation when viewed as a totality. *Staff believes that the proposed district does not appear to meet Criterion F.*

G. Reflects significant geographical patterns, including those associated with different eras of settlement and growth, transportation modes, or distinctive examples of park or community planning.

The proposed Rossmoyne Historic District is significant as a reflection of Glendale's skyrocketing growth during the 1920s and 1930s. Residential development during that period was largely driven by the availability of public transportation that linked Glendale directly with downtown Los Angeles, making the city, particularly its foothill areas, particularly desirable for middle-class families. Rossmoyne is one of the prime examples of planned development in the city. Its street pattern, underground utilities, and design restrictions make it one of the most distinguished examples of private-sector community planning. In addition, Alex Nibley's donation of the land for his namesake park is an early, and rare, example of a developer's recognition of the value of creating a neighborhood amenity at the expense of enhanced profit. While Nibley Park is not itself a distinctive example of park planning, it plays an important role as a feature of the overall development. *Staff believes that the proposed district appears to meet Criterion G.*

H. Conveys a sense of historic and architectural cohesiveness through its design, setting, materials, workmanship or association.

Rossmoyne serves as virtual museum of Period Revival architecture from the 1920s and 30s. It is distinguished by its ability to synthesize the era's stylistic diversity with an overriding sense of aesthetic cohesion. Grand and modest homes alike were designed in the various styles, with adjustments made to account for differing scales and to reflect the designs of adjacent properties. The underground utilities and curving street pattern also set Rossmoyne apart as a distinctive entity when compared with other Glendale neighborhoods. *Staff believes that the proposed district appears to meet Criterion H.*

I. Has been designated a historic district in the National Register of Historic Places or the California Register of Historical Resources.

The area has not been previously designated or determined eligible for the National or California Registers. *The proposed district does not meet Criterion I.*

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Based on the information submitted with the nomination and the assessment above, staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission preliminarily find that the proposed Rossmoyne Historic District is eligible as an historic district overlay zone and authorize the circulation of a petition among property owners within the proposed boundary requesting a historic resources survey.

EXHIBITS

Exhibit A: Historic District Application

Exhibit B: Chapter 30.25 of the Glendale Municipal Code

Exhibit C: Flow Chart Summarizing Historic District Designation Process