

Shape Our Fremont

Postwar Buildings May Gain New Status

Banks, bowling alleys, and other structures built in Fremont during the years following World War II may have historically significant architecture and should be considered for preservation. In some cases, entire residential neighborhoods could also be considered because the house designs are rarely found today and are valued by the residents who want to preserve the unique character of the area.

These are some of the recommendations contained in a 118-page report prepared by an independent consultant group. The report will be part of the presentation to the Historical Architectural Review Board (HARB) on April 5.

It's the Architecture

The focus of the report was on the architectural significance of structures built from 1945 to 1970, rather than on the history associated with individual structures. The report considered all kinds of structures including residences, businesses, churches, schools, and even industrial plants such as the General Motors plant in Warm Springs, now the Tesla assembly facility.

For example, some of the residential neighborhoods mentioned as having potentially significant architecture include the houses in the Orchard Homes tract of Niles, which were built starting in the late-1940s and featured a variety of roof styles and orientations on their lots to give the area an open and rural feel. Another example was the Glenmoor Homes tract built in the 1950s in Centerville with their broad, low, one-story Ranch-style houses.

Business buildings with potentially notable styles of architecture from the postwar era include the former Southern Alameda County Office Building (now New Horizons School) on Peralta Boulevard in Centerville, which was built in 1948 in the Post Moderne style, and the Cloverleaf Bowl on Fremont Boulevard in Irvington, which was built in 1959 with its exuberant Googie-style angled roof entrance.

Other potentially significant buildings include various schools, churches, fire stations, hospitals, meeting halls, and shopping centers throughout the city.

To Preserve or Not

According to the report, simply identifying a postwar building as having potentially significant architecture is not enough to actually recommend it for preservation. A building must also be evaluated by a set of standards regarding its eligibility, character, and integrity. These standards vary for each type of building.

For example, most postwar residential buildings were single-family houses that were part of a larger housing tract. As such, postwar tracts would be evaluated as a whole, rather than by evaluating individual houses. It is unlikely that the presence of an individual house that meets the standards would be sufficient to declare that the house, or the entire tract, meets the standards.

To meet the eligibility standards, a housing tract must have been built by a notable developer, or was an example of a significant architectural style of the time, or represented a significant new direction in development standards set by the city. The consultant's report listed some of the notable developers and architectural styles of the era. Not all tracts would be eligible.

To meet the character standards, a tract must have been built with distinct boundaries, usually within a specific period of time, and have a uniform pattern of streets, sidewalks, curbs, and street landscaping -- or have a deliberate lack of these features in order to achieve a specific effect such as providing a rural setting.

And finally, in order to meet the integrity standards, a tract should retain the overall look and feel of the original development. Specifically, it must retain a majority of the houses and street features that date from the original development and have not been significantly altered. Because the size, look, and architecture of many tract houses have been changed over the years, not all tracts would retain enough overall integrity to be considered for preservation.

What's Next?

The Historical Architectural Review Board will meet to review city staff's recommendations of standards and criteria for evaluating the architectural significance of post-1945 buildings, objects, sites, and districts in Fremont.

To learn more about this topic, and to express your comments and concerns, the public is invited to the HARB meeting on Thursday, April 5, at 6:30 p.m. in the Niles Conference Room of the Fremont Planning Department at 39550 Liberty Street.