



On My Mind These Days

By Glenn Lambdin

Saving a Part of Our Forgotten History: Conclusion

For those that have been following over the past few weeks, you know that I nominated the old City owned Christian Science church to the California Register of Historical Places. So what exactly does that mean, what happens from here, and why did I nominate the property in the first place? I'll try to explain.

If you've read my last two articles on a few of the historical accounts of the property, I hope that you'd agree that the property meets the criteria to qualify for designation. And if you agree that it meets the criteria, then I hope that you'd agree that there is value in placing the property on the register.

Back in October of last year, I nominated this property to our local register of historical properties. The City Council decided that they just wanted to wait (and wait, and wait) before even looking at the historical merits of the property, let alone even considering designating the property to our local list. As it stands, the Council has an active nomination application before them, however they seem to be about as interested in the nomination as they do in repairing any of the broken windows in the church itself. If I had my way, I'd rather see the church on Sierra Madre's local register than the State's register, keeping greater control at the local level. But with the lack of any interest by our City Council, I felt the need to take it to the State, and as I mentioned a few weeks ago, if the State declines then I'll try the national register.

Last month when I notified the City that I am nominating the property to the State, it started a 90 day period for the City to comment on my nomination. At the end of the 90 days, should they comment and send me their comments, I will add them to the State application and send the entire package to Sacramento for their consideration.

So what would it mean if the state approves the nomination? To clear a few misconceptions about being a designated historical resource, a historical building can still be altered, added on to, and even demolished. The zoning designation does not change nor does the rightful use of the property. Once a property receives a historical designation, the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) adds a layer of protection to the property that requires any "project" to go through more stringent levels of discretionary reviews, requirements, and environmental analysis. CEQA attempts to preserve the historical integrity of a property or at least mitigate any adverse affects a project may inflict on a historical property.

The City bought this property with the intention of creating affordable housing. It would be very disheartening to see a developer butcher or demolish the church only to slap up a few housing units in its place. Once upon a time, American architecture honored the very institution that it housed. I believe that the church building can be creatively altered for an affordable housing project that maintains the historical elements of the building, honors the past, and makes way for the new. A historical designation will certainly help.