



## CITY OF SAN ANTONIO OFFICE OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION

### APPLICATION FOR CHANGE OF ZONING

#### Request:

The Office of Historic Preservation requests a change of zoning to add “HL” Historic Landmark designation to 843 Rigsby Ave and to waive all related fees. *OHP staff recommends approval.*

#### Case Comments:

On February 20, 2019, the Historic and Design Review Commission (HDRC) agreed with the applicant’s finding of historic significance and supported the designation of the property as a local landmark.

#### Case History:

April 2, 2019	Zoning Commission hearing
February 20, 2019	Historic & Design Review Commission (HDRC) hearing
January 25, 2019	Application for Historic Landmark Designation submitted to OHP

#### Applicable Citations:

Note: In accordance with the process for designation of a historic landmark, as outlined in Section 35-607 of the UDC, properties must meet three of sixteen criteria. This property meets five Criteria for Evaluation.

*Unified Development Code Sec. 35-607. – Designation Criteria for Historic Districts and Landmarks.*

- a. **Process for Considering Designation of Historic Districts and Landmarks.** Historic districts and landmarks shall be evaluated for designation using the criteria listed in subsection (b) and the criteria applied to evaluate properties for inclusion in the National Register. In order to be eligible for historic landmark designation, properties shall meet at least three (3) of the criteria listed. Historic districts shall consist of at least two (2) or more structures within a legally defined boundary that meet at least three (3) of the criteria. Additionally, all designated landmarks and districts shall demonstrate clear delineation of the legal boundaries of such designated resources.
- b. **Criteria for Evaluation.**
  5. **Its embodiment of distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style valuable for the study of a period, type, method of construction, or use of indigenous materials;**
  7. **Its unique location or singular physical characteristics that make it an established or familiar visual feature;**
  8. **Its historical, architectural, or cultural integrity of location, design, materials, and workmanship;**
  11. **It is distinctive in character, interest or value; strongly exemplifies the cultural, economic, social, ethnic or historical heritage of San Antonio, Texas or the United States;**
  12. **It is an important example of a particular architectural type or specimen;**
  13. **It bears an important and significant relationship to other distinctive structures, sites, or areas, either as an important collection of properties or architectural style or craftsmanship with few intrusions, or by contributing to the overall character of the area according to the plan based on architectural, historic or cultural motif.**

#### Findings of Fact:

- a. The request for landmark designation was initiated by the property owner.

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- b. **HISTORIC CONTEXT:** The structure at 843 Rigsby Ave is single-story Asian-inspired Craftsman bungalow with detached garage located in the Highland Park neighborhood and built c. 1922. Marie A. Miller currently owns the property. Prolific San Antonio developer B.G. Irish subdivided The Highlands neighborhood in 1923. The current population density of this neighborhood was reached between World War I and World War II. Craftsman bungalows are the dominant style and house form found in the neighborhood, but many other influences and styles are visible, such as Tudor Revival cottages and minimal traditional homes. Many of the houses were constructed in part by use of pattern books, which resulted in houses with similar features such as hipped roofs with exposed rafters, triangular braces below the roof, and a variety of porch columns. The neighborhood has been identified by staff as eligible for local historic district designation; were it designated in future, 843 Rigsby Ave would be listed as contributing. 843 Rigsby Ave first appears in a June 4, 1922, advertisement for Highland Park, “the addition with character.” The ad touts the individuality of the neighborhood and chose this high-style and unique home to drive that point home. The current owner’s aunt, Annabelle L. Fisher (alternately Fischer), purchased the home c. 1963, and it has remained in the family since. The structure is an example of Asian-influenced—also known as Orientalist—architecture, an early 20<sup>th</sup> Century adaptation of Craftsman style attributed to widespread interest in Asian design following the construction of the Japanese Pavilion at the 1904 St. Louis World’s Fair. Pagoda houses, as they are sometimes known, are differentiated from other Craftsman structures primarily by their flared roof line. 843 Rigsby Ave has a few other features that, to Westerners, read as “Asian:” a cross-hatch pattern in the wood window screens; hourglass-shaped stone pedestals and chimneys; traditional columns replaced by four square posts topped with beveled, and stacked beams in place of a more recognizable capital. A photo included in the June 4, 1922, San Antonio *Light* advertisement for Highland Park also shows the pergola-style carport, since removed, that stretched from the pedestals on the east side of the porch across the driveway. The hourglass-shaped stone pedestals for the carport remain. The structure at 843 Rigsby Ave is one of the most elaborate and intact examples of the Asian-influenced Craftsman style found in the city.
- c. **SITE CONTEXT:** The subject structure is located on the north side of Rigsby Ave on the second lot west of the corner of Rigsby Ave and S Gevers St, but is the de facto corner property. Yards along the north side of Rigsby Ave have retaining walls and sloping driveways that illustrate the neighborhood topography. Lots are long and rectangular, with medium setbacks between 10 and 20 feet from the right-of-way. The street is dotted with old-growth trees along sidewalks with grass easements and concrete curbs. Driveways are typically full concrete with flared aprons, but ribbon drive, asphalt, and tile are also present. The structure abuts the west edge of the parcel, with a concrete driveway along the east side of the parcel leading to a detached garage (which doesn’t appear on Sanborn maps). The south edge of the lot along the right-of-way is bordered by a short stone retaining wall capped in concrete with four concrete steps and a walkway leading to the front porch; this wall continues west across the front of the neighbor’s yard. The west side of the parcel has a stone wall approximately five feet tall, built in a different style than the wall along the right-of-way. There is a wood picket fence along the east and north edges of the parcel with a gate centrally located at the rear of the yard (north side of the parcel) allowing access to the recently paved alley. The house sits roughly 11 to 20 feet from the right-of-way, in line with other homes in the neighborhood.
- d. **ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:** The house has an L-shaped plan with a front-gabled porch, hipped asphalt shingle roof and a small side-gable wing on the east elevation. The roof features metal barrel ridge caps across all forms, evidence perhaps of an historic tile roof; staff did not find evidence to corroborate this. The wide eaves are supported by decorative wood braces, and the roof

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has exposed rafters except on the flared gables. It is clad in ribbon-course wood shingle that runs from eaves to ground, including the skirt, with white trim and details. When present, peaks of gables (which also feature ribbon-course shingle) have white-painted vents flanked by decorative braces. Rough stone pedestals for the porch and carport and the stone chimneys are hourglass-shaped and topped with concrete capitals. Porch pedestals are topped with four square columns and beveled, stacked beams. The house retains all of its original one-over-one wood windows and patterned wood screens, and all but one of its original wood doors and wood door screens, as well as its original footprint; there are no additions to the primary structure. The south and primary façade's dominant feature is the front-gabled porch with stone pedestals and decorative wood columns and capitals. There are five steps with white painted risers and weathered wood runners leading to the painted wood porch deck, which has a low stone wall topped in concrete along the east edge with a break in the low wall for a short staircase to the driveway. The porch ceiling is lacquered beadboard with a small metal (possibly copper) Arts and Crafts-style pendant light at center. There are three ganged wood windows with decorative screens to the left of the porch with a wood planter box running the length of the windows. The north wall of the patio has French doors with wood screen doors. The west wall of the patio has the original wood front door with a wood screen door flanked by one-over-one wood windows with decorative wood window screens. Protruding from roughly the southwest corner of the roof is one of two hourglass-shaped stone chimneys, visible from the right-of-way. East of the porch are pedestals that remain from the historic wood carport. There is an iron fence between the house and the left rear carport pedestal and an iron gate between the rear carport pedestals. On the east façade, from south end to north, are a pair of ganged one-over-one wood windows with decorative wood screens followed by a single one-over-one wood window with decorative wood screen. This side of the house has a small gabled wing; the south elevation of the wing has a wood door and wood screen door on the left and a one-over-one wood window with decorative wood screen on the right. The gable end has three ganged one-over-one wood windows and decorative wood screens with braces at each side of the elevation. The north (rear) elevation, from east to west, has two pairs of ganged one-over-one wood windows on the first plane. A room breaks from this elevation, with a small one-over-one wood window and undecorated wood screen centered on the projection. The elevation steps back again and has what appears to be a more modern door with a decorative metal screen door flanked by one-over-one wood windows with undecorated wood screens. From the projection to the west edge of the façade, the roofline remains the same despite changes in the elevation, creating a covered stoop at this rear entrance. There is a brick patio separated from the house by a concrete sidewalk and three steps up to the back door; the sidewalk connects to the driveway. The second chimney is visible when facing this elevation, exiting roughly the northwest third of the roof. Just north of the northeast corner of the house is a cistern roughly 10 feet from the north elevation. The lid is gone, and the cistern itself appears to be filled. North of the house in the northeast corner of the parcel is a detached garage with a flared roof and the same metal barrel ridge caps and asphalt shingles as the primary structure. The hipped roof has exposed rafters, shallow braces under wide eaves, and clapboard siding. The south façade of the garage has a pair of ganged swinging garage doors followed by a single wood door and two-over-two wood door screen. The door is followed by a single one-over-one wood window with a four-over-one wood window screen. From left to right, the elevation has a single one-over-one wood window with undecorated wood window screen, then a smaller one-over-one wood window with wood window screen. The trim of a third window is just visible beyond the third brace; no other details are visible due to landscaping. Roughly five feet from this elevation is a stone wall four- to five-feet tall with jagged rocks at the top instead of a smooth cap. The stone differs from that used on the primary structure's

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pedestals and wall along the right-of-way: stones are set with the largest face visible. This stone wall runs the length of the west façade.

Character-defining features of 843 Rigsby include:

- Flared roof line
- Wide eaves with decorative braces
- Exposed rafter tails
- One-over-one wood windows
- One-over-one wood window screens with cross-hatch design
- Hourglass-shaped stone pedestals
- Hourglass-shaped stone chimneys
- Columns comprised of four square posts topped with beveled, stacked beams
- Barrel ridge caps

- e. **EVALUATION:** In order to be eligible for historic landmark designation, properties shall meet at least three (3) of the 16 criteria listed. Staff evaluated the structure against all 16 criteria and determined that it was consistent with UDC sec. 35-607(b):
5. **5: Its embodiment of distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style valuable for the study of a period, type, method of construction, or use of indigenous materials;** This house embodies numerous distinguishing characteristics of Craftsman-style structures including multiple roof levels, a prominent gabled front porch with stone pedestals, and wide eave overhangs featuring exposed rafters and triangular knee braces, and uses indigenous materials such as stone in its construction.
  7. **7: Its unique location or singular physical characteristics that make it an established or familiar visual feature;** this house is one of a small collection Craftsman bungalows in San Antonio that display Asian design influences. These features make it a unique and established visual feature of the block and surrounding neighborhood. It is located near a corner on a prominent thoroughfare in the Highland Park neighborhood and was displayed in newspaper advertisements for the development in 1922.
  8. **8: Its historical, architectural, or cultural integrity of location, design, materials, and workmanship;** as a high-integrity example of Asian-influenced Craftsman architecture, the historic fabric of the structure remains almost entirely intact.
  11. **11: It is distinctive in character, interest or value; strongly exemplifies the cultural, economic, social, ethnic or historical heritage of San Antonio, Texas or the United States;** the structure is an example of a pagoda home, a style attributed to widespread interest in Asian design following the construction of the Japanese Pavilion at the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair.
  12. **12: It is an important example of a particular architectural type or specimen;** 843 Rigsby is one of the most elaborate examples of the pagoda house form found in San Antonio, with its flared roof form; cross-hatch pattern on the wood window screens; hourglass-shaped stone pedestals and chimneys; and beveled, stacked beams in place of column capitals.
  13. **13: It bears an important and significant relationship to other distinctive structures, sites, or areas, either as an important collection of properties or architectural style or craftsmanship with few intrusions, or by contributing to the overall character of the area according to the plan based on architectural, historic or cultural motif;** the



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Highland Park neighborhood has been identified by staff as eligible for local historic district designation; were it designated in future, 843 Rigsby Ave would be listed as contributing.

- f. The City offers a tax incentive for the substantial rehabilitation of historic properties because historic landmarks possess cultural and historical value and contribute to the overall quality and character of the City and its neighborhoods. If historic designation is approved, rehabilitation and restoration work may be eligible for this incentive. State and Federal tax incentives are also available for properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places and provide substantial relief for rehabilitation projects.
- g. If the HDRC approves the Finding of Historic Significance, then the recommendation for designation is submitted to the zoning commission. The zoning commission will schedule a hearing and then forward its recommendation to the City Council. City Council has the ultimate authority to approve the historic designation zoning overlay.
- h. Per UDC Sec. 35-453, once the commission makes a recommendation for designation, property owners must receive a written approval (a Certificate of Appropriateness) for any exterior work until the City Council makes their final decision.

### **ATTACHMENTS:**

HDRC recommendation  
HDRC published exhibits  
Letter of support