

# PRESERVATION PLANNING ASSOCIATES

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May 4, 2016

DRAFT

Members of the Historic Landmarks Commission  
630 Garden Street  
Santa Barbara, CA 93102

*Re: Letter Addendum for 1601 State Street, El Prado Inn. Reevaluation of the Significance of the Annex*

Dear Members of the Historic Landmarks Commission:

I wrote a Historic Structures Sites Report in May 2013 analyzing the significance of the El Prado Inn and evaluating the proposed changes to it. In it I determined that the El Prado Inn was eligible as a City Structure of Merit; it was considered significant as an intact representation of the commercial vernacular version of the Mid-Century Modern style, prevalent from the 1940s to the 1960s. Its character-defining features were considered to be the scored concrete blocks on the first floor, canted balcony walls on the second and third floors, the pierced concrete screens, the overscale jazzy "El Prado" and "Inn" signs, and the open-tread staircases. The Annex, designed by Alex D'Alfonso in 1963, was also determined eligible as a City Structure of Merit under City of Santa Barbara Criteria 3D and F, for its association with the builder Alexander D'Alfonso. Therefore it was considered an historic resource according to CEQA guidelines.

The later determination and listing of the El Prado Inn as a Structure of Merit did not include the Annex. The present plans for an addition to the El Prado Inn would demolish the Annex and build a larger complex compatible with the style of the El Prado Inn. Because I originally determined the Annex significant, its demolition would constitute a significant impact.

As a result of the proposed changes, I have been tasked to review my original evaluation of the significance of the D'Alfonso Annex. My significance evaluation rested primarily on its importance as the work of Alex D'Alfonso, a noted builder and contractor in Santa Barbara, whose firm was active from 1921 to 1978. Best known for his residential work, D'Alfonso also designed a number of commercial buildings in Santa Barbara.

Born in L'Aquila, Italy, D'Alfonso moved to Santa Barbara in 1915 and began work as a carpenter at the Flying A Studios. In 1921 he began designing and building houses; he drew up the plans, generally in the Mediterranean style, and maintained his own crew of plasterers, painters, carpenters, electricians and plumbers. In 1946 at the end of World War II, D'Alfonso was joined by his son Daniel. The firm bought a tract of land on the lower Riviera above Ortega and de la Guerra Streets and built over thirty houses in the Mediterranean style, laying out the roads and building the sandstone retaining walls. This development, along Diana Lane and Diana Road remains intact and serves as an excellent example of house siting and design.

D'Alfonso also designed several commercial buildings. In 1926 he designed the Sanchez building, at 301 East Haley Street, in the Mission Revival style, with two towers and arched windows. It was a dominant corner building housing stores, a barber shop, and a pool room (see

Plate 1). It was an industrial building with slight Mission Revival details such as the bell towers and arched windows.

In 1939 he designed the Live Oak Dairy (now Arden Dairy) at the corner of Milpas and Canon Perdido Streets, as well as the garage behind it on Philinda Street, in the Streamline Moderne style (see Plate 2). With its canted front entrance, rounded engaged columns, and stepped piers rising to the central platform supporting the iconic cow statue, it is a significant feature of the Milpas corridor. It was an early example of the “flyless” dairy designed by D’Alfonso. During World War II D’Alfonso designed a modernistic “flyless” dairy for Mr. Prevedello at La Cumbre Road. As a result D’Alfonso became known for his innovative “flyless” design, and was commissioned to build many more dairies in Los Angeles and Moorpark. During the war he was able to get material for dairies, and made his living that way when building materials were scarce (Preservation Planning Associates 1998: page 2).

In 1949, D’Alfonso built a mixed use building at the corner of Bond Avenue and Milpas Streets, 631-635 N. Milpas Street, housing four commercial storefronts and a second floor office for his contracting firm. Designed in the Spanish Colonial Revival style, its notable features are the tile work on the bulkheads, entry surround, and stair risers, as well as the roof cresting and balcony railings modeled on a 1940s geometric pattern (see Plate 3). D’Alfonso constructed this building at the same time he was building the 34-home development at Diana Lane nearby (Preservation Planning Associates 1998).

A recent reevaluation of D’Alfonso’s buildings has led me to determine that the three D’Alfonso buildings listed above are more important to his heritage than the Annex, **because the Annex does not relate to the El Prado hotel building, the streetscape, or to the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century building to the north. This building, unlike his buildings cited above, does not have distinct excellent architectural features nor a commanding street presence.** Therefore in my professional opinion, the Annex is no longer considered significant as a D’Alfonso design. Its proposed demolition, therefore, would not constitute a significant impact.

#### Sources

Preservation Planning Associates. 1998. “Addendum to Report on 100 State Street, Santa Barbara, California”

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call me at 450-6658.

Sincerely,

Alexandra C. Cole



Plate 1. Sanchez Building, 301 East Haley Street



Plate 2. Arden Dairy, 901 North Milpas Street



Plate 3. D'Alfonso Office, 631-635 North Milpas Street