MEMORANDUM

DATE April 2, 2021 PROJECT NUMBER 16252A.58

TO Danielle Condit, Associate Planner

OF City of Palo Alto
Planning & Development Services

FROM Clare Flynn, Cultural Resources Planner, Page & Turnbull

CC Christina Dikas, Associate Principal, Page & Turnbull

VIA Email

REGARDING 321 California Avenue – Character-Defining Features & Rehabilitation Recommendations Memorandum

INTRODUCTION

The City of Palo Alto has requested a Character-Defining Features Memorandum for the one-story commercial building at 321 California Avenue in Palo Alto’s Mayfield neighborhood. The building was completed in 1938 for owner D.H. Edwards as a “Super Drive-In Market” for the Safeway Grocers chain of markets and was constructed by building contractor J.S. Malloch and his partner, structural engineer W.H. Ellison.

METHODOLOGY

On March 9, 2021, Page & Turnbull staff conducted a site visit to document the subject property’s existing design and features. Limited historical research at the archives of the Palo Alto Historical Association was performed to supplement previous findings. City of Palo Alto staff provided Page & Turnbull with additional information, including:

- State of California Department of Parks and Recreation Historic Resources Inventory form for 321 California Avenue (2000)
- Assessment Record for 321 California Avenue (1979)
- Building permits for 321 California Avenue

HISTORIC STATUS

The subject property is not currently listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the California Register of Historical Resources, or Palo Alto Historic Inventory; however, is included in the California...
Office of Historic Preservation’s Built Environment Resources Directory (BERD) for Santa Clara County with a status code of 3S, meaning that it “appears eligible for NR as an individual property through survey evaluation.”¹ The most recent update to the BERD database was in March 2020.

The status code listed in BERD is based on a historical revaluation that occurred in 2000, when the subject property was documented in State of California Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) 523A (Primary Record) and 523B (Building, Structure, and Object Record) forms. The evaluation found that the building appeared to be eligible for listing on the National Register under Criterion A (Events) and Criterion C (Architecture):

Under criterion A, this represents a dramatic shift of retailing in general and in grocery retailing in particular – accommodating an increasingly automobile based society. It is also an early example of a major chain – Safeway. Under criterion C, this building is significant as an early example in Palo Alto of a new building type – the supermarket, which was larger than earlier food stores and was designed to facilitate automobiles. This building is a rare example of a once common type, a supermarket, to retain its original character.¹

The DPR forms identified a period of significance extending from 1938, when the building was constructed, to 1950, when Safeway moved to a larger building. This type of drive-in grocery store, of which an off-street parking lot was a distinguishing characteristic, is a precursor to the strip mall and modern supermarket grocery store. Another drive-in grocery built around the same time as 321 California Street is located in Palo Alto on Bryant Avenue; however, its adjacent parking lot has since been developed.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

The property at 321 California Avenue contains a one-story commercial building designed in mix of the Art Moderne and Art Deco styles (Figure 1). The building has a reinforced concrete post and beam structure, rectangular plan, and flat roof with three wire glass skylights. It is clad with painted stucco. A shorter one-story concrete block addition with a flat roof is located at the rear of the building. The front portion of the building is slightly wider than the rear volume of the building and features a parapet wall decorated with two horizontal bands and wide zigzagging vertical flutes. A flat, cantilevered metal awning with rounded horizontal bands extends across the width of the front façade and wraps around the east end of the northeast façade. Windows typically consist of large fixed, steel frame plate glass storefront windows.

¹ Michael Corbett, “321 California Ave,” Department of Parks and Recreation Primary Record and Building, Structure, and Object Record Forms, 2000, 3.
Primary (Northwest) Façade

The primary (northwest) façade faces California Avenue and contains the building’s main commercial storefront (Figure 2). The left (northeast) end of the façade begins with an aluminum framed glazed screen that supports the flat metal awning as it extends over the sidewalk at the northeast side of the building (Figure 3). The main portion of the façade to the left of this screen features a low bulkhead wall clad with square ceramic tiles and five large plate glass storefront windows with flush steel frames. The third bay contains the main entrance to the building, consisting of a recessed entry with an arched surround and infilled transom, ceramic tile threshold, and solid wood door with flat wood trim (Figure 4). The walls of the entry contain fixed steel frame corner windows that flank the main door. The walls above the windows and door are clad with painted plywood.
Northeast Façade

The northeast façade faces a paved parking lot at the southeast corner of California Avenue and Birch Street. The façade begins with the northeast façade of the shorter concrete block rear addition, followed by the stucco-clad main volume of the building and taller, parapeted front...
storefront volume (Figure 5). Flat vertical projections with stepped caps divide the main volume of the façade into roughly four bays (Figure 6). A grooved horizontal band intersects the top of the vertical projections and extends across the façade, stopping at the right storefront bay. A mural has been painted on this portion of the façade. The right storefront bay features a low bulkhead wall with square ceramic tiles, identical to those on the northwest façade (Figure 7). A secondary entrance, consisting of a solid wood door below a steel frame transom, is located inside a shallow recess. To the right, there are two steel frame plate glass storefront windows.
Rear (Southeast) Façade and Southwest Façade

The southeast façade faces a paved parking area and consists of the rear concrete block wall of the south addition. There is also a recessed, upper stucco-clad portion of the original building's southeast façade that contains no fenestration (Figure 8). The concrete block addition contains one solid metal door. Two metal brackets that appear to have once supported a sign are located above and to the right of this door. Metal drainpipes are attached at each end of the facade.

The southwest façade abuts an adjacent commercial building at 341 California Avenue and is not visible.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

According to DPR 523A and 523B forms prepared in 2000, the subject property at 321 California Avenue was constructed in 1938 for owner D.H. Edwards as a “Super Drive-In Market” for the Safeway Grocers chain of markets. The building was constructed by builder J.S. Malloch and his partner, structural engineer W.H. Ellison.

A 1941 aerial photograph and ca. 1945 fire insurance map published by the Sanborn Map Company show the building as a reinforced concrete building with a rectangular footprint, flat roof with three
wire glass skylights, and a flat awning that wrapped around the primary façade to the front portion of the northeast façade. The existing awning appears to match this original configuration. A paved parking lot covered the parcel to the northeast and southeast of the subject building.

Figure 9: 1941 aerial photograph. The approximate outline of the subject parcel is outlined with a dotted red line. Source: Flight C-7065, Frame 79, Fairchild Aerial Surveys, 1941 UCSB Library FrameFinder. Edited by Page & Turnbull.

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2 In the circa 1945 Sanborn Map Company fire insurance map, the subject building is labeled as 331 California Avenue.
The building remained in its original use until 1950, when Safeway relocated its operations to a larger store. The building continued to be used as a market for a few more years, operating as Pool Bros. Market in the 1950s. In 1961, interior alterations costing $15,000 were completed to convert the building into a restaurant. Restaurants that occupied the building in the 1960s included Cal Hofbrau and Red Hat Restaurant. In 1969, a new restaurant, The Annex, moved into the building and constructed a concrete-block addition at the rear of the building for use as a card room. The building’s longest tenant was Antonio’s Nut House, a restaurant and dive bar that occupied the building from roughly 1971 to 2020. Alterations to the building during its use as Antonio’s Nut House that are recorded in building permit records included various installations and removals of interior partition walls, the construction of a bar, addition of Dutch doors and a partitioned office area, and reroofing. Antonio’s Nut Bar closed in 2020 due to the effects of the COVID-19 economic

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3 Corbett, 2.
4 Palo Alto City Directories, Ancestry.com; Oscar Meyer advertisement, The Times (San Mateo, CA), 27 May 1958.
5 Palo Alto City Directories, Ancestry.com.
8 321 California Avenue, Various building permits on file at Palo Alto Development Services.
downturn. Over the course of its use as a restaurant, the interior of the building was altered many times; as a result, the interior does not appear to retain any historic features or materials from the building's period of use as a Safeway drive-in supermarket.

In addition to alterations recorded in building permits on file with the City of Palo Alto Development Services, alterations based on visual observations during a March 2021 site visit include infilling portions of the front and side entries, and installation of metal doors.

The following is a brief overview of the development and major alterations that have taken place at the subject property since its construction:

- 1938 – Commercial building constructed as Safeway drive-in supermarket\(^9\)
- 1961 – Permit issued for $15,000 interior alterations to convert the building into a restaurant\(^10\)
- 1969 – Permits issued for the construction of a rear addition for use as a card room and installation of a sign for The Annex Restaurant\(^11\)
- 1973 – Permit issued to remove an interior wall and install a bar and Dutch doors\(^12\)
- 1974 – Permits issued to remove interior partitions and reroof the building\(^13\)
- 1984 – Permit issued to install demountable interior partitions inside the building for offices\(^14\)

CHARACTER-DEFINING FEATURES

For a property to be eligible for national or state designation under criteria related to type, period, or method of construction, the essential physical features (or character-defining features) that enable the property to convey its historic identity must be evident. These distinctive character-defining features are the physical traits that commonly recur in property types and/or architectural styles. To be eligible, a property must clearly contain enough of those characteristics to be considered a true representative of a particular type, period, or method of construction, and these features must also retain a sufficient degree of integrity. Characteristics can be expressed in terms such as form, proportion, structure, plan, style, or materials.

The character-defining features of 321 California Avenue include, but are not limited to:

- Rectangular plan

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9 Kadvany, “Palo Alto's last dive bar.”
10 Corbett, 2.
11 Corbett, 2.
14 321 California Avenue, Permit A-33409, 1974, on file at Palo Alto Development Services.
15 321 California Avenue, Permit B84-124, 1984, on file at Palo Alto Development Services.
• One-story massing with flat roof
• Reinforced concrete post and beam construction
• Stucco cladding
• Flat cantilevered metal awning with decorative horizontal grooves at the front and northeast facades
• Parapet walls decorated with horizontal bands and zigzagging vertical flutes
• Steel frame plate glass storefront windows
• Wire glass skylights
• Side entrance facing paved parking lot next to building
• Ceramic tiles along the storefront bulkhead walls

Features that are not original to the building, do not date to the period of significance, and therefore are not character-defining features, include, but are not limited to:

• Rear concrete-block addition
• Aluminum frame glazed screen at the northwest corner of the building
• Arched entry surround and plywood infill

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REHABILITATION

Based on the historic significance identified for 321 California Avenue in the 2000 DPR 523 forms and the list of character-defining features above, Page & Turnbull has prepared the following preliminary recommendations for rehabilitating the subject building:

• Retain and restore original exterior architectural features, including the existing awning, storefront windows, tilework, parapet walls, vertical projections with stepped caps, and decorative horizontal bands.
• Rehabilitate the side entrance facing the parking lot:
  o Restore the opening to its full width.
  o Replace the existing solid door and surrounding infill with glazed door(s) to restore the prominence and more welcoming character of this entry.
• Retain presence of paved open space facing the side entrance to convey building's original design as a drive-in supermarket.
• Remove accreted non-historic materials and infill from the recessed front entry and replace with design and materials that are more compatible with the historic character of the building.

Although not identical in design to the subject building, the following historic photographs of other contemporaneous drive-in markets are provided for reference about the general design and appearance of drive-in markets from the same period (Figure 11 – Figure 14).
Figure 11: A Safeway drive-in market built in Santa Rosa in 1939. The building is no longer extant. Source: “Newest Drive-in Market Opens Here Today,” The Press Democrat, 3 March 1939.

Figure 12: Safeway drive-in market in Palo Alto. Although the historic photograph is labeled as 321 California Avenue, this photo likely shows a different Safeway drive-in market that was located at 530 Bryant Avenue. The building remains but the parking lot has been infilled with more recent development. Source: Palo Alto Historical Association.

Figure 13: A drive-in Safeway constructed in Mill Valley in 1938. The building is no longer extant. Source: Mill Valley Record, 9 December 1938.

Figure 14: A drive-in Safeway in San Francisco in 1953. Current status unknown. Source: San Francisco Public Library.

QUALIFICATIONS

Page & Turnbull was established in 1973 as Charles Hall Page & Associates to provide architectural and conservation services for historic buildings, resources, and civic areas. The company was one of the first architecture firms in California to dedicate its practice to historic preservation and is among the longest practicing such firms in the country. Offices are located in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Sacramento, and staff includes planners, architectural historians, licensed architects, designers, and conservators. All of Page & Turnbull’s professional staff members meet or exceed the Secretary of the Interior’s Professional Qualifications Standards as published in the Code of Federal Regulations, 36 CFR Part 61.

As a cultural resources planner within Page & Turnbull's Cultural Resources Studio, Clare Flynn meets the Secretary of the Interior’s Professional Qualifications Standards for Architectural History.
She has extensive experience researching and evaluating historic properties, as well as analyzing proposed projects that impact historic resources using the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation.