



## AGENDA REPORT SUMMARY

**Meeting Date:** March 8, 2022

**Subject:** 347 First Street Historic Landmark designation

**Prepared by:** Sean K. Gallegos, Senior Planner

**Reviewed by:** Laura Simpson, Interim Development Director

**Approved by:** Gabriel England, City Manager

**Attachments:**

1. Resolution No. 2022-XX
2. Historic Resource Evaluation, Garavaglia Architecture, Inc.
3. Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) Primary Record

**Initiated by:**

Applicant, William Bassett

**Previous Council Consideration:**

None

**Fiscal Impact:**

None

**Environmental Review:**

The project is exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) per Sections 15308 (Actions for the Protection of the Environment), 15331 (Historic Resource Restoration), and 15061(b)(3) (Common Sense Exemption), in that the project does not involve groundbreaking activity or other activities that may cause significant environmental impacts, but instead involves designating a structure as a historic landmark to help ensure its future preservation. Furthermore, none of the circumstances stated in CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2 applies.

**Policy Question for Council Consideration:**

- Does the City Council wish to designate the American Legion Hall at 347 First Street a Historic Landmark?

**Summary:**

- The property owners seek to have the American Legion Hall at 347 First Street designated a Historic Landmark. This Historical Commission has recommended approval of this designation.

---

City Manager

GE

Reviewed By:

City Attorney

JH

Finance Director

JF

---



**Subject:** 347 First Street Historic Landmark designation

---

**Staff Recommendation:**

Move to adopt Resolution No. 2022-XX designating the American Legion Hall at 347 First Street as a Historic Landmark

**Purpose**

Consider the recommendation to designate the American Legion Hall at 347 First Street as a Historic Landmark.

**Background**

*Resource Description*

The application to the American Legion Headquarters for a charter for a Los Altos post occurred on March 11, 1938, by organizer Howard “Jack” Welch. The legion purchased the subject property in 1940 and construction began immediately. In fact, Post 558 obtained the permit prior to completing the purchase of the land from Altos Land Company. At this time, the town was an unincorporated area with the central business district located near today’s intersection of Foothill Expressway and Main Street, close to the subject property.

The 3,920 square-foot. building at 347 First Street (APN #167-40-048) is a single-story community recreational building, known as the American Legion Hall, Post 558, occupies a 6,970 square-foot lot adjacent to a historic neighborhood in Los Altos. The building is set back from the road approximately 20 feet. The building’s entrance faces southwest but for this report, we will refer the front entrance to be facing south and as the south elevation. The main body of the building is painted beige and the wood fascia is painted a burnt sienna red color that matches the other exterior trim features of the building.

The building sits on a rectangular shaped landlocked lot on the sides and rear, with frontage along First Street. Prior to the hall’s construction, the site was originally part of Sarah L. Winchester’s ranch land and then owned by Paul Shoup and the Altos Land Company. The property was bought in 1940 and construction began immediately by the legionnaires themselves. The building was occupied by 1941 with the rear addition constructed in 1948. At that time, the surrounding neighborhood was rural and even the lot had mature landscaping, pine trees and other shrubbery, plants within the front setback and along the west side of the building. By 1956 the immediate context depicts a significant increase in development of the neighborhood with new houses and increased density in the urban core.

The Minimal Traditional architectural style is associated with residential architecture characterized with either having a hipped-roof or front-gabled roof that is one story and simple in design. The style was in response to the Great Depression and WW II to satisfy the need for immediate housing, thus the small house developed. Pattern books and house plans for small houses in the Minimal



**Subject:** 347 First Street Historic Landmark designation

---

Traditional style were published between 1935 and 1950. These books also contained the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) loans available to build these homes. This style of residential architecture is commonly represented by 1940's tract homes. This style of architecture was used as barracks and temporary construction during World War II.

*Local Landmark Designation Criteria*

Under Municipal Code Sections 12.44.040 and 12.44.070.C – (Criteria for designation), a structure, property, or object may be eligible for designation as a historic landmark, if it satisfies each of the three criteria listed below:

A. Age.

A structure or property should be more than fifty (50) years in age. (Exceptions can be made to this rule if the building(s) or site(s) is/are truly remarkable for some reason - such as being associated with an outstanding architect, personage, usage, or event).

B. Determination of Integrity.

A structure or property should retain sufficient historic integrity in most of the following areas:

1. Design: The combination of elements that create the form, plan, space, structure, and style of a property.
2. Setting: The physical environment of a historic property.
3. Materials: The physical elements that were combined or deposited during a particular period of time and in a particular pattern or configuration to form a historic property.
4. Workmanship: The physical evidence of the crafts of a particular culture or people during any given period in history or prehistory.
5. Feeling: A property's expression of the aesthetic or historic sense of a particular period of time.

C. Historic Significance.

A structure or property should be clearly associated with one or more of the following areas of significance:

1. Event: Associated with a single significant event or a pattern of events that have made a significant contribution to broad patterns of local or regional history, or cultural heritage of California or the United States.
2. Person/People: Associated with the lives of persons important to the local, California or national history.
3. Architecture/Design: Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a design-type, period, region, or method of construction, or represents the work of a master or possesses high artistic value.



**Subject:** 347 First Street Historic Landmark designation

---

4. Archaeology: Yields important information about prehistory or history of the local area, California, or the nation.

Additionally, under Municipal Code Section 12.44.070.C.2, the City Council must find that a proposed landmark has special historical, cultural, archeological, scientific, architectural or aesthetic interest or value as part of the heritage or history of the city, the county, the state or the nation.

#### *Historical Commission*

The Historical Commission held a public hearing on January 24, 2022 to consider the request to designate the American Legion Hall at 347 First Street as a Historic Landmark. The Commission discussed the merits of the request, noting the structure maintains most of its historic integrity per the National Register seven aspects of integrity, and the American Legion Hall building was associated with a pattern of events that have made a significant contribution to broad patterns of local history. Following the discussion, the Commission voted unanimously to recommend that the City Council approve designating the American Legion Hall at 347 First Street as a Historic Landmark.

#### **Discussion/Analysis**

As a part of this investigation and evaluation, the building and its parcel were evaluated according to the City of Los Altos Historic Preservation Ordinance, and the property meets the criteria for designation as an Historic Resource according to the Municipal Code Section 12.44.040:

##### A. Age

The building was built after the turn of the twentieth century and prior to 1948, making it at least 80 years old, meeting the 50-year age criterion.

##### B. Determination of Integrity:

The property maintains most of its historic integrity per the five aspects of integrity. These aspects include **design, setting, materials, workmanship and feeling**.

1. Design: On balance, the property retains integrity of the original design. The American Legion Hall most closely resembles the Minimal Traditional style of architecture. The Minimal Tradition style of design has been altered due to replacing the original materials, including doors with commercial aluminum glass doors, replacing some of the original double hung window sashes with sliding or fixed sashes, and covering other window openings with plywood. However, the window fenestrations, window wood frames and wood sills have been left intact, and three facades have kept the original V-groove wood siding. The building retains the same horizontal massing, rectangular shape, and roof form. A rear addition alters the original scale and proportion of the original structure. Overall,



**Subject:** 347 First Street Historic Landmark designation

---

the features of Minimal Traditional design of architecture including its form, interior layout, structure, design are intact.

2. **Setting:** The building maintains its original location within the parcel, but the site has not preserved the integrity of the setting. The setting is the physical environment of a historic property. The property's former landscaping is no longer extant, and the front, side and rear yards have been filled with concrete. Concrete also surrounds the building on the sides and rear portion of the building. Originally, the site was in a more rural setting, but the original setting has become more urbanized due to the incorporation of the City in 1952.
3. **Materials:** Although the property retains the integrity of some of its building materials, on balance it does not satisfy this criterion. 347 First Street retains some elements of its original materials, including the wood V-groove siding (on the north, east and west facades), window fenestrations, wood window frames, wood windowsills and wood roof framing. The V-groove wood siding on the front facade has been covered over with plaster, but this occurred sometime between 1960-66, after the period of significance. At the same time, the window sashes on the front facade windows were also changed. All of the original window sashes on the building, except for the one on the east facade have been replaced or covered over with plywood. The exterior doors are not original and have been replaced with modern commercial aluminum and glass doors.
4. **Workmanship:** The property maintains the physical evidence of the workmanship of a particular culture or people during any given period in history or prehistory. The American Legion Hall was constructed by WWI veterans. Traditional architectural elements include single story, with horizontal massing, and dominant gable front. Other features include small scale, minimal architectural decoration, and simple windows, typically double-hung windows. The Minimal Traditional building elements and original workmanship are still apparent; therefore, 347 First Street does maintain integrity of workmanship.
5. **Feeling:** The hall continues to embody the feeling of a Minimal Traditional architectural style, a representative style from 1935 to 1955. Feeling is a property's expression of the aesthetic or historic sense of a particular period of time. The hall continues to embody the feeling of a Minimal Traditional architectural style, a representative style from 1935 to 1955. The minimal alterations over time have not diminished its origins of that architectural style, and it continues to embody the property's feeling with early 20<sup>th</sup> century development in Los Altos.

Although the property has lost some of its historic integrity, it meets three of the five criteria listed in the code, and therefore can be said to have retained most of its historic integrity.



**Subject:** 347 First Street Historic Landmark designation

---

**C. Historic Significance**

The American Legion Hall building was associated with a single significant event or a pattern of events that have made a significant contribution to broad patterns of local or regional history, or cultural heritage of California or the United States. The American Legion building at 347 First Street is strongly associated with the area's transition from an unincorporated town to an incorporated city and to the broad pattern of development of Los Altos and of Santa Clara County. The subject property has been found to have a particular or important association with all of the towns' activities that led to the incorporation of the City of Los Altos. Therefore, the American Legion Hall at 347 First Street qualifies as historically significant under criterion 1: "Event."

As indicated above, to designate the property as a landmark, the City Council must also find that the proposed landmark has special historical, cultural, archeological, scientific, architectural or aesthetic interest or value as part of the heritage or history of the city, the county, the state or the nation. This finding can be made because the Legion Hall was instrumental in the incorporation of the City of Los Altos. The Hall functioned as the town's de facto town hall building and held town forum meetings. Future Senator Alan Cranston and other prominent community members of Los Altos met there regularly. With nowhere for the townspeople to meet, the Legion Hall, Post 558 at 347 First Street became the central meeting area for all of the towns' political, civic, and social events. The American Legion Hall was the meeting place for all the city functions prior to Los Altos becoming an official city of Santa Clara County. By 1949, many Los Altos residents were dissatisfied with the zoning policy of Santa Clara County. Due to the threat of annexation by neighboring Palo Alto and Mountain View, the citizens of Los Altos decided to incorporate. On December 1, 1952, Los Altos became the eleventh city of Santa Clara County.

The building functioned as the town hall building from 1940 up until the time that the Civic Center was occupied in 1959. The subject property has been found to have a particular or important association with all of the towns' activities and events until the late 1950's, when other gathering places and the Civic Center were built. Construction of the Civic Center began in 1958 and occupation began in 1959.

The American Legion Hall at 347 First Street was found to have a special historical, cultural value as part of the heritage or history of the City of Los Altos. It was found to be a significant resource under events associated with its significant contribution to the heritage and history of the City. Therefore, 347 First Street does display a level of significance or integrity that would qualify it for designation as a local City of Los Altos landmark at the local level.

**Recommendation**

Staff concurs with the recommendation from the Historical Commission and also recommends approval of this designation.