



Memorandum

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND
CITY COUNCIL

FROM: Stephen M. Haase

SUBJECT: SEE BELOW

DATE: September 8, 2005

COUNCIL DISTRICT: 3
SNI: University

SUBJECT: HL05-152. HISTORIC LANDMARK DESIGNATION FOR THE CURTIS HOUSE, LOCATED AT 254 SOUTH SEVENTEENTH STREET.

RECOMMENDATION

The Historic Landmarks Commission recommends the City Council adopt a resolution designating the Curtis House located at 254 South Seventeenth Street as Historic Landmark No. HL05-152.

BACKGROUND

In April 2005 The Curtis House, located at 254 South Seventeenth Street, was evaluated and found to qualify for listing as a City Landmark. Building owner, Gloria Sciara, submitted an application for Historic Landmark designation of the residence.

On August 16, 2005, the City Council adopted Resolution No. 72853 initiating proceedings to designate the Curtis House as a City Landmark of special historical, architectural, cultural, aesthetic or engineering interest or value of a historic nature. The Council referred the proposal to the Historic Landmarks Commission for its consideration at a public hearing and for its report and recommendation. On September 7, 2005 the Historic Landmarks Commission held a public hearing. The owner and former Historic Landmarks Commission Chair, Gloria Sciara, spoke to say that the house is largely original, and that she is proud to be the steward for the influential architect Ernest Curtis's property. Chair Youmans stated that this is an exquisite home, and that it is delightful to see this important local architect's design recognized. The Commission unanimously recommended (7-0-0) that the City Council adopt a resolution designating this structure as a City Landmark.



Designation of the structure would establish the requirement for the issuance of Historic Preservation (HP) permits to approve any exterior changes proposed to the structure. The designation would also allow the owners to apply for property tax reduction under the Mills Act and for CRMP construction tax exemption for work done in conformance with approved HP permits.

ANALYSIS

The subject site is currently zoned R-1-8 Residential.. The Landmark Designation for this single-family residence on a 0.21 gross-acre site may be determined to be in conformance with the San Jose 2020 General Plan Land Use/Transportation Diagram designation of Medium Low Density Residential, which establishes a minimum allowable density of 8 dwelling units per acre.

The attached Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) form states that the building exceeds the threshold for City Landmark status and appears to be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under all three Criteria. The property would also, therefore, be eligible for the California Register of Historical Resources under similar criteria. The Curtis House merits designation as a historic landmark based on its historical, cultural and architectural significance based on the following criteria of the Historic Preservation Ordinance (Municipal Code Section 13.48.110):

6. Its embodiment of distinguishing characteristics of the Tudor Revival architectural type or specimen.
7. Its identification as the work of architect Ernest Curtis whose individual work for the firm of Binder and Curtis has influenced the development of the City of San Jose.
8. Its embodiment of elements of architectural design, which represents a significant architectural innovation in its adaptation of traditional English countryside imagery in a modern residential design.

OUTCOME

Designation of the structure would establish the requirement for the issuance of Historic Preservation (HP) permits to approve any exterior changes proposed to the structure. The designation would also allow the owners to apply for property tax reduction under the Mills Act and for CRMP construction tax exemption for work done in conformance with approved HP permits.

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PUBLIC OUTREACH

The property owner requested City Landmark designation. A public hearing notice for the Historic Landmark designation hearings will be published in a local newspaper, posted at the site and mailed to all property owners and tenants within 500 feet of the subject site.

COORDINATION

Preparation of the City Council resolution to initiate proceedings has been coordinated with the City Attorney's Office.

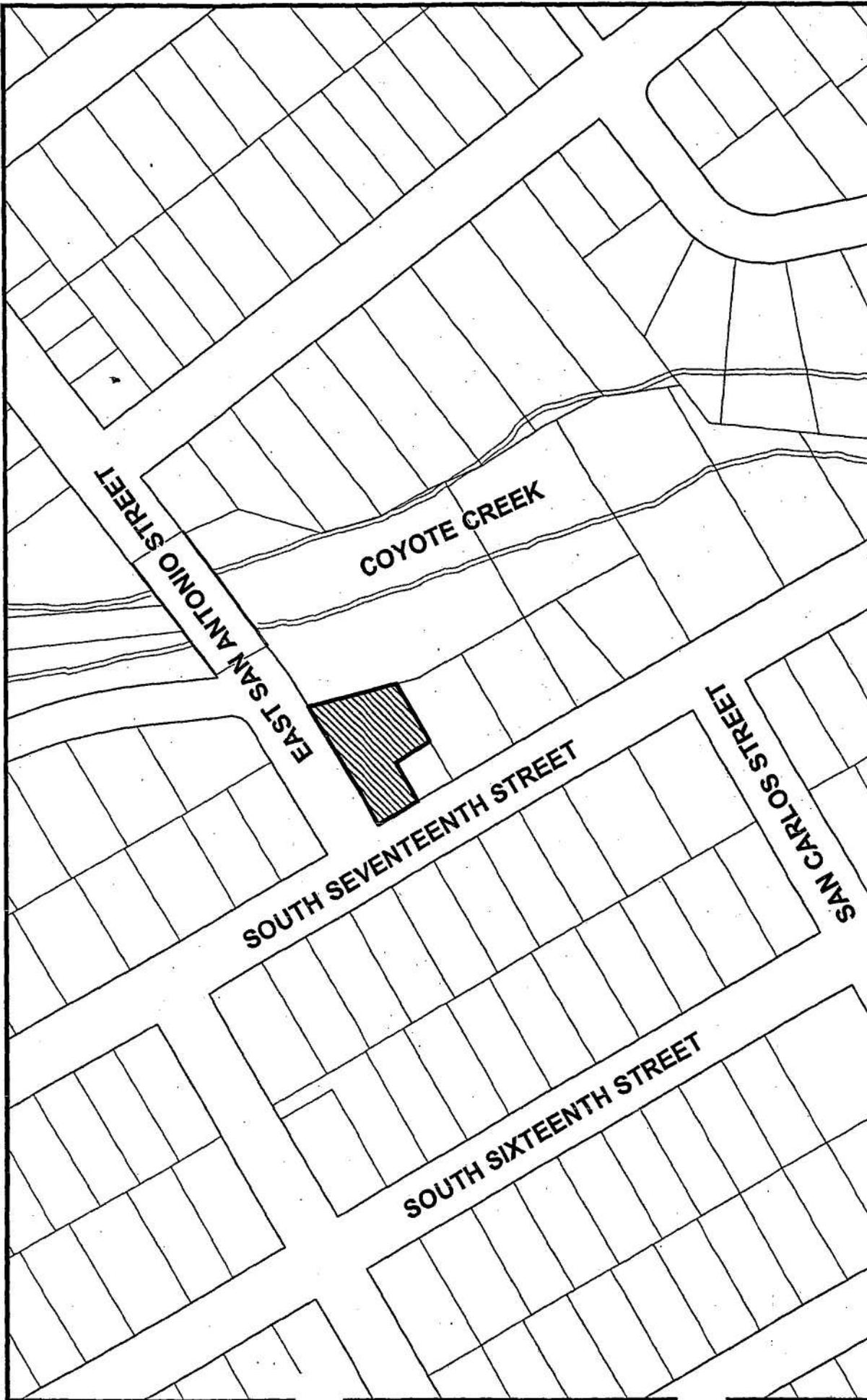
CEQA

Exempt. HL05-152

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stephen M. Haase", written in a cursive style.

STEPHEN M. HAASE
Secretary, Historic Landmarks Commission

Attachments



File No: HL05-152

District: 03

Quad No: 83

Scale: 1"=150'



Map Created On:

04/21/2005

State of California - The Resources Agency
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION
PRIMARY RECORD

Primary # _____
HRI # _____
Trinomial _____
NRHP Status Code _____

Other Listings _____
Review Code _____ Reviewer _____ Date _____

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*Resource Name or #: (Assigned by recorder) Curtis, Ernest and Lottie House

P1. Other Identifier: None

*P2. Location: Not for Publication Unrestricted *a. County Santa Clara

and (P2b and P2c or P2d. Attach a Location Map as necessary.)

*b. USGS 7.5' Quad San José East Date 1980 photo-revised T7S; R1E; Mount Diablo B.M.

c. Address 254 South 17th St. City San José Zip 95112

d. UTM: (Give more than one for large and/or linear resources) Zone 10S; 599998 mE/ 4133198 mN

e. Other Locational Data: (e.g., parcel #, directions to resource, elevation, etc., as appropriate)

Assessor's Parcel Number: 467-39-010,

southeasterly corner of South 17th St. & East San Antonio St.

*P3a Description: (Describe resource and its major elements. Include design, materials, condition, alterations, size, setting, and boundaries)

Located at the edge of the Naglee Park neighborhood on a site overlooking Coyote Creek at the San Antonio Street bridge located within the original city limits, this property contains a small, two-story stylized Cotswold Cottage of the American Tudor Revival style. The house is set back deep on a corner lot, establishing a dramatic picturesque, public setting when viewed from the intersection of South 17th and East San Antonio Streets. What portends to be a vernacular county residence with a spacious front yard - is in fact a highly articulated house design, created by the precise hand of one of San Jose's most significant and prolific architects. Designed for himself and his wife Lottie, architect Ernest Curtis built this house in the mid-1920s shortly after he had established himself as a partner of the firm of Binder and Curtis. The design of the house appears as a reflection of what one would find in the town of Gloucester located in the picturesque Cotswold Hills of Southern England - the town of his parents, who had immigrated to America in the 1880s.

(Continued on page 4, DPR523L)

*P3b. Resource Attributes: (List attributes and codes) HP2. Single family property

*P4 Resources Present: Building Structure Object Site District Element of District Other (Isolates, etc.)



P5b. Description of Photo: (View, date, accession #)

View looking northeast,
February 2005.

*P6. Date Constructed/Age and Sources:
 Historic Prehistoric Both

1924 (81 years) SJB# #676

*P7. Owner and Address:

Gloria M. Sciara
254 South 17th St.
San José CA 95112

*P8. Recorded by: (Name, affiliation, and address)

F. Maggi w/ G. Sciara
Archives & Architecture
PO Box 1332
San José CA 95109-1332

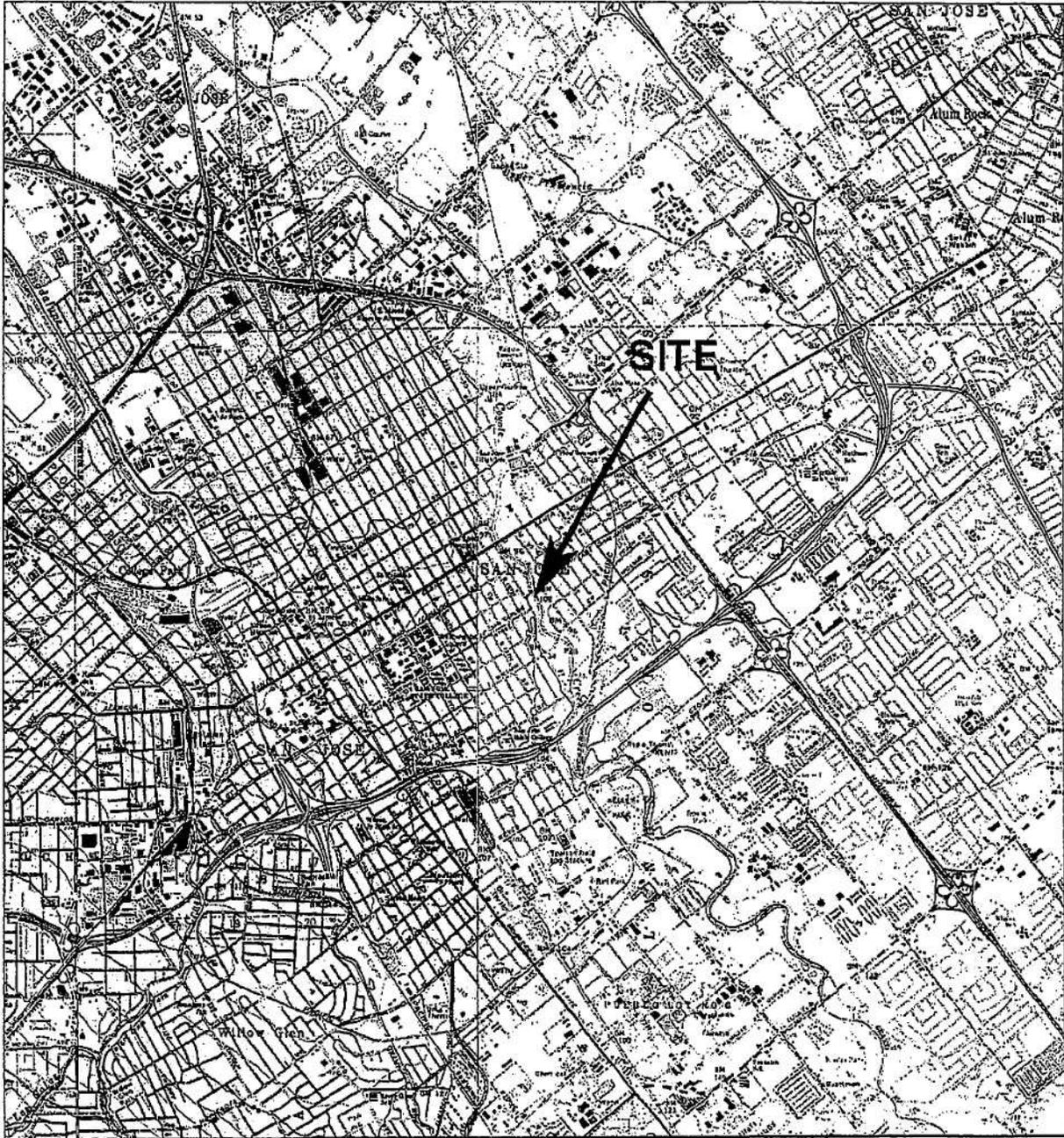
*P9. Date Recorded: 4/11/05

*P10. Survey Type: (Describe)
Intensive

*P11. Report Citation: (Cite survey report and other sources, or enter "none".)

None

*Attachments: NONE Location Map Sketch Map Continuation Sheet Building, Structure and Object Record Archaeological Record
 District Record Linear Feature Record Milling State Record Rock Art Record Artifact Record Photograph Record Other (List)



Map created with TOPO! 8 ©2005 National Geographic (www.nationalgeographic.com/topo)

(Continued from page 1, DPR523a, P3a)

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

The stucco-clad Curtis House is characterized by an asymmetrical floor plan capped by what appears to be two, simple, one-and-one-half story gabled structures patched together by a roof-ridge oriented perpendicular to the front and rear cross-ridges. The front volume is offset laterally towards San Antonio Street to distinguish it from the rear volume, the stucco wall of the splice merging into the sidewall of the rear volume where the exterior wall of the stairwell is juxtaposed onto the steeply pitched, cedar shingle covered roof. The apparent I-shaped roof of the house is clipped at the right (or south) side elevation, the sidewalls rising up to a full two-story with roof pitches less inclined than what is visible on the two street elevations. This variation in wall and roof shapes between front and rear (public and private) clearly establishes the character of the house as a modernistic interpretation of a historic vernacular building type, the front is "quaint" and "picturesque", while the rear is an abstract composition that frames the small rear yard.

The front façade is enhanced with a full-story hipped bay window with heavy mullions encasing 15 stationary divided nine-lite wood framed windows. The size of the glass panes is carried throughout most of the house, with varying casement window sizes and adornments, ranging from custom sized false shutters, a second-story oriel window facing San Antonio Street, to an art-glass window with wavy mullions and decorative art glass with heraldic shields at the stair tower. Only the east (rear) elevation and the rear portions of the right elevation have single-pane sash, a detail that has not been determined as being original. The shed dormer on the rear elevation has these single-pane casements, and the kitchen window below is a fixed-window that appears to be a modification.

The interior floor plan consists of irregularly shaped rooms, and the upper rooms have sloping walls with dormers, all typical of this English Tudor sub-type.

A travertine patio leads to a brick stoop and arched-top entry alcove and door. The door, although full-height, visually appears to be a short old-style door, the distortion achieved by the juxtaposition of a matching arch in the wall to the front that is slightly larger creating a perspective effect to the eye. A wrought iron speakeasy and decorative gothic-style door escutcheon accents the channel-groove wood front door. The English-style front yard landscaping was completed in 2004 by the current owner and consists of English roses, English yew (*taxus baccata auerea*), delphinium, dwarf English boxwood and evergreen topiaries and various perennials. The property is surrounded by four very large American Elm trees which predate the house as documented in photographs from 1926. The property is surrounded by a low granite cobblestone wall, part of which is historic (flanking the East San Antonio elevation), with newer constructed sections along the front yard area and at the driveway. The walls are complimented by new European style wood gates with wrought iron strap hinges and pulls at the front entrance and at the driveway.

The garage has a side-facing gable over a two-car structure with v-groove joined roughewn redwood garage doors with straps and iron bolts. The fascia treatment on the garage features decorative herringbone patterns bricks trimmed in wood. A small gabled potting shed is attached to the south side of the garage and both doors match the garage doors and feature redwood and medieval-style wood straps and decorative bolts.

It is likely that a semi-open courtyard area existed prior to the construction of a den/family room tucked into the right elevation. The enclosed area appears to have been constructed in the late 1940s or early 1950s by Ernest Curtis, as the design is of newer materials such as 1 x 10 plank siding, but done in a way that is complementary to the original design while at the same time linking the materials to what was probably a remodeling of the garage.

The character of the house is clearly reminiscent of the rural architecture of the pastoral Cotswold region of England, the house having storybook imagery, cozy corners, quirky angles, and charming vernacular appearing (but studied) details.

Page 5 of 7 *Resource Name or # (Assigned by recorder) Curtis, Ernest and Lottie House

*Recorded by Franklin Maggi and Gloria Sciara *Date 4/11/05 Continuation Update

(Continued from page 2, DPR523b, B10)

The Frederick Curtis family moved to Naglee Park after the turn-of-the-century, first living at 86 South 14th Street, then 96 South 17th Street. Ernest himself lived in three other houses in the Naglee Park neighborhood before building the cottage: 130 South 16th, 480 South 12th, and then 256 South 17th Street (which included the vacant parcel that he would build his final house upon). The lot was apparently reconfigured to an L-shape to include the garage that was already at the rear of the house at 256 South 17th St.

During Earnests' youth, his father Frederick became a successful masonry contractor in San José. Among his commissions were: the St. James Hotel, Carnegie Library at Washington Square, and the Jose Theater (all William Binder designs), and the Hayes Mansion (George W. Page's design). At age 17, Earnest began work as an apprentice for architect George W. Page who had returned to San José from Honolulu to rebuild the Hayes Mansion in 1905. During the last phase of Page's illustrious career, Ernest learned the trade as Page designed such buildings as the Robert's Temple and House (1909) and the Masonic Temple (1909). Page during this period was a polemic, espousing innovation in design and was an outspoken proponent of the new Craftsman style. However, it was also the end of his career as much of his late work was done in partnership with other architects such as Wolfe and McKenzie, and by 1911 Ernest had gone to work as a draftsman for architect William Binder, another Page protégé, who had become a prominent local designer in his own right. At the time that Curtis began employment with Binder, the firm had already established itself in commercial architecture in downtown San José; San Jose's first hi-rise, the Garden City Bank Building had been designed by Binder and in 1911 T. S. Montgomery built the Binder designed Montgomery Hotel. Binder had started his firm about 1898 after Page's partnership with M. M. Bruce had dissolved and Page relocated to Honolulu. During Ernest's work under Binder the firm designed numerous buildings in San Jose's downtown, including the Elks Building, the YMCA, the DeLuxe Theater, and the Burrell Building. In 1917, the firm prepared plans for the Twohy Building, a commission that presumably Curtis had played a significant role in, for by 1918 Binder had incorporated Ernest Curtis as his junior partner; the only such relationship Binder had in his 57 years in business. Together, Binder and Curtis would go on to create a large body of work over the next thirty-five years. Among their many commissions are the California Prune and Apricot Growers' Building (1918), the American Theater (1919), Petite Trianon (1921), St. John XXIII Center and the Wilder House (1923), Commercial Building (1926), San Jose's Hospital's first major expansion (1926), the Hester/Towne Theater (1928), Hale's Department Store (1931), County Courthouse reconstruction (1931/1932), the Willow Glen Theater (1933), and the Civic Auditorium and San Jose Water Company (1934). Following World War II, the firm embraced the Modern Movement, remaining for a decade the leading local firm in institutional design, with projects such as Fire Station #1 (1952), De Saisset Art Gallery and Museum (as well as the Law Library and Administration Building at Santa Clara University), along with a number of schools and other public buildings. Ernest continued the firm after Binders 1953 death until he died unexpectedly at age 67 on September 16, 1956. The firm of Binder and Curtis continued on after his death for about four more years until his son Norton established his own firm in San José under the name of Norton S. Curtis & Associates.

The firm of Binder and Curtis was prolific in San Jose with many designated historic landmarks bearing the signature of their firm. Early in his career as a partner in the firm Earnest Curtis was appointed to San Jose's nascent Planning Commission, a volunteer position in which he served the City of San José for 28 years (10 as chairman) until he stepped down for health reasons in 1948. He took part in the establishment of the local land planning process and San Jose's first Zoning Ordinance in 1929 while on the Planning Commission. In the last years of his life (in the early 1950s) he took on coordination for the development of San Jose's civic center site on North First Street, managing the implementation of a complex master plan between the City and County public agencies. He was released from this thankless job fraught with interagency squabbling by his untimely death in September 1956 at about the time that San José had finally begun construction on its new City Hall.

His wife Lottie vacated the South 17th Street residence soon after, moving to the Hanchett Park neighborhood near Park Avenue. The house has had a number of tenants and owners since 1956 until purchased by the present owner in 1998.

(Continued on next page)

(Continued from previous page)

EVALUATION

The building is presently listed on the San Jose Historic Resources Inventory as IS (Identified Structure), originally listed on the Inventory as a part of the establishment of the Naglee Park Conservation Area in the early 1980s. Neighborhood streetscapes in the Naglee Park Conservation Area have remained virtually unchanged by new development for over eighty years. The City of San José considers the Naglee Park residential neighborhood within this locally designated conservation area as being eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Curtis House is consistent with the nature, scale, and character of the neighborhood and contributes to the uniqueness of this area as the architectural work of a prominent, local, twentieth century architect that has contributed greatly to the urban fabric of the cityscape through his work within the firm of Binder and Curtis. The house itself is a creative work that reflects residential design in the interwar period, when American architects sought European precedents in their domestic designs. Curtis has a large body of residential work that has yet to be catalogued. However, this particular house is special, a building design that clearly seeks the pastoral image of the Curtis family homeland, yet being modern in its thoughtful preciseness of detail and function.

The property appears to be eligible for the National Register on all three Criteria (A, B, and C), as a reflection of important patterns (contributing to the National Register eligible Naglee Park neighborhood), as an important representation of a person, Ernest Curtis who is important to our past, and as an architectural work that is distinctive for its time and style, a unique implementation of the Tudor Revival style that was popular in the United States in the 1920s and 1930s. In concert with this eligibility, the property would also therefore be eligible for the California Register of Historical Resources under similar criteria.

Evaluating the property within the City of San Jose's evaluation rating system resulting in a point score of 106, far above the 67-point threshold for landmark status. The point score reinforces the findings under the San José Historic Preservation Ordinance that the property is a significance historic resource within the greater San José.



View from San Antonio Street
looking east

Photo below - view at rear
looking west

