

## MEMORANDUM

### PLANNING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT CITY OF SANTA MONICA PLANNING DIVISION

**DATE:** November 12, 2007

**TO:** The Honorable Landmarks Commission

**FROM:** Planning Staff

**SUBJECT:** **Public Hearings to Consider Landmark Designation Applications 07LM-008 and 07LM-009 to determine whether the mature Ficus trees located on the east and west sides of Second and Fourth Streets between Colorado Avenue and Wilshire Boulevard should be designated, in whole or in part, as a City Landmark**

PROPERTY OWNER: City of Santa Monica  
APPLICANT: Jerry Rubin and Treesavers

#### INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

This staff report presents analysis relevant to the two applications filed on October 16, 2007 to designate as City Landmarks the mature Ficus trees located on the east and west sides of Second and Fourth Streets between Colorado Avenue and Wilshire Boulevard. One application was filed for each group of trees on Second Street and on Fourth Street. Since the nature of these improvements is similar, as a matter of efficiency, one staff report addresses the analysis for both pending applications.

There are a total of 153 Ficus trees located in the public right-of-way on the east and west sides of Second and Fourth Streets between Colorado Avenue to the south and Wilshire Boulevard to the north. Each of the Ficus trees is planted in grade-level openings in the sidewalk at the edge of the curb and has high rounded canopies that shade the sidewalks.

The Ficus trees on Fourth Street were planted in January 1965 and on Second Street in February 1967. The subject trees are located within the City of Santa Monica's downtown Central Business District area.

The applicant provided the following statements of significance for both groups of Ficus trees on Second and Fourth Streets (Attachment C):

- The trees are scenic, unified, large canopy Ficus trees that provide shade and beautification of the downtown area.
- The trees are over 40 years old and are a physical manifestation of Santa Monica's long-term commitment to sustainable environmental practices.
- The trees mitigate problems with excess stormwater runoff, heat island effect, air pollution, particulates, traffic noise and wind, as well as provide habitat for local and migratory birds and other wildlife.

Two Landmark Assessment Reports (Attachments A and B) have been prepared for the two pending applications by the City's historic resources consultant PCR Services Corporation. These Landmark Assessment Reports present the results of a pedestrian survey and historical analysis of the subject Ficus trees. The potential significance of the subject Ficus trees on Second and Fourth Streets was evaluated in light of two applicable associated contexts: Ficus trees in Santa Monica; and the potential Central Business Historic District.

### Historic Resources Inventory Status

The Central Business District was originally identified as a potential historic district in 1983 during Phase I of the City's Historic Resources Inventory survey. At that time, the boundaries of the potential Central Business District were identified as including buildings in the 100 - 700 blocks of Broadway, Colorado, Santa Monica, Wilshire, and the 1200-1500 blocks of Second, Fourth, and a small section of Fifth Street. In addition, contributors to the potential historic district were identified.

During Phase III of the Citywide Historic Resources Inventory conducted between 1990 and 1993, additional properties were identified as contributing to the potential Central Business District. The potential historic district was surveyed again in 1994 following the 1994 Northridge earthquake, and again in 1998 as part of the Central Business District/Third Street Promenade Inventory update.

The subject Ficus trees on Second and Fourth Streets have not been identified during any of the previous surveys of the potential Central Business District as either individually eligible for designation or as a contributor to the district. In addition, the subject Ficus trees have not been previously identified during Inventory survey efforts as a potentially significant example of street trees or as a contributor to an historical landscape or streetscape.

### **PUBLIC NOTIFICATION**

Notice of the public hearing was provided as follows: Pursuant to SMMC Section 9.36.120, notice of the public hearing was mailed to all owners and residential and commercial tenants of property within a 300-foot radius of the project and was published in the *Santa Monica Daily Press* at least ten consecutive calendar days prior to the hearing. A copy of the notice is included as Attachment D. Correspondence received regarding the subject application is included as Attachment E.

The applicants were notified of the public hearing date on October 25, 2007.

## **ANALYSIS**

### *Ficus microcarpa* 'nitida'

The Indian Laurel Fig is an evergreen tree which is a native of Asia, common in the central province of Ceylon, up to an elevation of 5,000 feet. It grows indigenously in the peninsula of India and in China, but has been widely planted in the tropics and was introduced into the United States for ornament in the early 1900s. The Laurel Fig has been popular as a street tree in warm weather states such as California and Florida for decades. The Indian laurel fig is taxonomically confusing in the horticulture industry because its scientific name has been changed so many times in the last 30 years. The Indian Laurel Fig, which has obtained the scientific name *Ficus microcarpa* 'nitida', is also commonly referred to simply as Ficus trees.

According to the City's Community Forester, the *Ficus microcarpa* 'nitida' is a fast growing, broad-headed, evergreen tree that can reach a mature height of sixty feet or more with an equal spread of its canopy. It is a commonly grown tree found throughout California due to its hardiness, and adaptability to urban conditions. With age, the Ficus tree can develop a massive spreading, dense canopy that will cast deep shade. The trunk of Ficus trees are smooth and light grey in color and can grow to three feet in diameter at the trunk flare supported by an extensive surface root system that does best in a 20 foot wide parkway. Research indicates that the combination of the Ficus tree's inherent canopy properties and the subsequent hybridized resilient characteristics made *Ficus microcarpa* 'nitida' the primary choice in Southern California for postwar urban redevelopment streetscapes.



*Perspective view of Ficus Trees on Fourth Street*



*Perspective View of Ficus Trees on Second Street*

### Central Business District

The Central Business District area is roughly bounded by Wilshire Boulevard to the north, Second Street to the west, Colorado Avenue/Santa Monica Freeway to the south, and

Fourth Street (south of Santa Monica Boulevard) and Seventh Street (north of Santa Monica Boulevard) to the east.

The Central Business District was part of the original Santa Monica tract subdivision. Most of the early commercial activities in the Central Business District served the burgeoning tourism business in the City, and the small population of residences built on the periphery of the district. Second Street, the oldest commercial street in Santa Monica, was supplanted by Third Street as the City's principal commercial street in the early twentieth century. A three-block stretch of Third Street was closed to vehicular traffic and became a pedestrian shopping mall in 1965. Fourth Street, between Wilshire Boulevard and Colorado Avenue, evolved from a primarily residential neighborhood at the turn-of-the-century to a predominantly commercial area by the early 1920s.

Buildings from 1875 through the present day make up the architectural fabric of the district.

According to the initial survey of the Central Business Historic District conducted in 1983 and revised in 1986, the period of significance for the district is from 1875, the construction date of the oldest building in the district, the Rapp Saloon, to 1944, the construction date of the youngest contributor to the potential district. The 1996 Historic Resource Inventory Update listed 77 contributing buildings to the Central Business Historic District and did not modify the previously established period of significance for the potential historic district.

There have been a total of ten individual City Landmarks designated within the Central Business District. These designated Landmarks include the previously-noted Rapp Saloon (1875), Santa Monica Bay Woman's Club (1914), Mayfair Theatre (1911); Lido Hotel (1931), Bay Cities Guaranty Building (1929), and the Santa Monica Professional Building (1928).

Based on historic photographs of the Central Business District, it appears that contiguous rows of street trees were not part of the streetscapes of Second or Fourth Streets during its identified period of significance. In fact, historic photos of the streetscape of both Second and Fourth Streets featured regularly spaced lampposts along the sidewalk instead of landscape elements during the historic period of significance associated with the Central Business District (Attachment G).

As previously noted, the subject trees, situated within the potential Central Business District, have not been previously identified in the City's Historic Resources Inventory or in subsequent survey updates and evaluations as being a contributor to the potential Central Business District within the City.

The subject trees were planted in 1965 and 1967, a timeframe outside of the period of significance for the potential Central Business District, and are therefore not contributors to the potential historic district. However, the subject Ficus trees are a compatible addition to the pedestrian experience of the district and, although the tree canopies obscure some of the significant architectural elements of buildings that contribute to the historic character of the Central Business District, the grouping of trees as a streetscape element do not appear

to substantially detract from significance of the district.

### Ficus Trees in Santa Monica

As detailed more fully in Attachments A and B, the City of Santa Monica has a long and rich history of both public and private involvement in tree planting. This is evident beginning from the planting of the Moreton Bay Fig tree on the grounds of the Miramar Hotel in the 1880s by Santa Monica founder Senator John P. Jones. Today, this Moreton Bay Fig tree is one of the largest examples of its type in the state of California and is also a designated City Landmark.

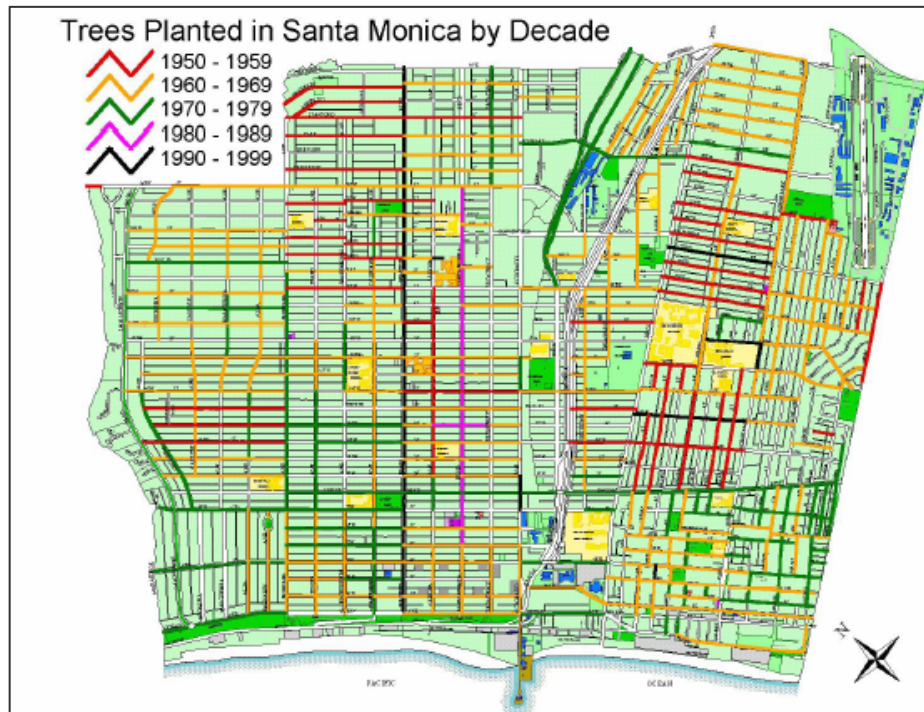
Following World War II, a series of efforts were undertaken by the City to document existing street trees and plan for new plantings Citywide. Many of the City's existing street trees were part of the postwar redevelopment of Santa Monica. The 1956 City of Santa Monica Master Plan included a five-year tree planting program that sought to infill trees on those streets that were not planted. The program was continued with the 1962 Public Works Master Plan that mapped existing rows of street trees and made recommendations for a planting schedule to add trees to the few remaining treeless streets.

Data from the City's Public Landscape Division indicate that nearly all of the Ficus street trees in Santa Monica were planted during the 1950s and 1960s. Maps prepared from the City's planting records show that Ficus street trees were not planted in one specific type of area or adjacent to certain building types; rather, the Ficus were planted in both residential and commercial areas, and were planted in great numbers on numerous streets throughout the City.



*Map of Ficus Trees in Santa Monica, City of Santa Monica Information Systems Division (2004)*

City planting records show that the Ficus trees along Fourth Street between Wilshire Boulevard and Colorado Avenue were planted in 1965 and the Ficus trees on Second Street were planted in 1967 as part of the redevelopment of the downtown area.



*Trees Planted in Santa Monica by Decade, City of Santa Monica Public Landscape Division (2006)*

The Ficus trees on Second and Fourth Streets are typical examples of the numerous Ficus street trees planted at the height of their popularity in the City's tree planting program. As a streetscape element, the subject Ficus street trees are representative of the continued tradition of tree planting in the City, and consistent with the applicant's statements regarding environmental benefits associated with the street trees, the subject Ficus provide benefits like the over 28,000 living trees inventoried and documented for the *City of Santa Monica Community Forest Management Plan (2000)*.

According to the 2000 *City of Santa Monica Community Forest Management Plan* there were 3,184 Ficus trees in Santa Monica based on actual field surveys conducted for this document. Based on this data, the Ficus tree is the second most prevalent tree in Santa Monica, second in number only to the Mexican fan palm (3,887 identified).

#### City Landmark Designated Trees

To date, there have been five individual trees designated as City Landmarks. In order to provide some context about this relatively uncommon type of Landmark designation, the

following is a brief description of some of the key characteristics that made each of these five trees significant as a Landmark landscape element:

- 1) Miramar Moreton Bay Fig Tree (101 Wilshire Boulevard)
  - Planted in 1889 on the grounds of the estate of one of the founders of Santa Monica, Senator John P. Jones. Documented as fine botanical example of its species.
- 2) California Live Oak Tree (1443 Tenth Street)
  - At the time of its designation in 1979, it was approximately 150 years old and was recognized as a large and rare example of its species in the City.
- 3) Eucalyptus Deanei Tree (522 24th Street)
  - Documented as a rare species in California; determined to be the tallest Eucalyptus deanei in the United States, according to both Hastings & Heintz' Trees of Santa Monica (1976) and Hodel's Exceptional Trees of Los Angeles (1988); over 80 years old at the time of designation; planted by influential horticulturist Hugh Evans; and associated with Santa Monica's early horticultural history.
- 4) Deodar Cedar Tree (918 Fifth Street)
  - Documented as over 100 years old at the time of designation; determined to be a large tree that has developed naturally therefore making it a unique and rare example of its species.
- 5) Eucalyptus Cornuta Tree (1407 Hill Street)
  - Determined to be unique as a rare example of its species with co-dominant trunks measuring over 33 feet in circumference and over 50 feet in height; estimated to be over 90 years old and planted prior to the development of the City's Sunset Park neighborhood in which it is located.

In contrast to the type of qualities attributed to the City's five designated Landmark trees described above, an evaluation of the subject Ficus trees prepared by the City's Community Forester and concurred with by the staff arborist at PCR Services Corporation indicates that these trees are not an excellent representation of their species and do not possess unique or noteworthy characteristics on an individual basis or as groups with their existing linear canopies. This is due in part to having undergone extensive root and canopy pruning over the years, a maintenance method required in part because of their placement in a confined grow space which has limited their ability to optimally develop in a manner that promotes the stability of their root system and limbs, while minimizing adjacent hardscape displacement. Furthermore, based on field surveys done for the 2000 *City of Santa Monica Community Forest Management Plan*, the subject trees on both streets represent less than 5% of the total number of approximately 3,100 Ficus trees in the City.

Although there are examples of Ficus trees in good, moderate, and poor conditions on Second and Fourth Streets, none of the subject trees are an excellent example of their type. In contrast, there are better examples of Ficus trees in the City that have been

planted in grouping that have thrived in more appropriate grow spaces and consequently have not been subjected to the same type of pruning practices employed on the Second and Fourth Street Ficus trees. Excellent examples of such Ficus can be found on Pearl Street between Fourteenth and Sixteenth Streets (see Attachments A and B).

In summary, within the context of the literally thousands of Ficus trees in the City, neither grouping of Ficus trees or their associated linear canopies on Second and Fourth Streets possess characteristics of noteworthy or aesthetic interest or value sufficient to warrant City Landmark designation based on factors such as historic association, age, size, condition, or rarity that have been consistently applied in previous Landmark tree evaluations. Furthermore, current research has not identified an association with a historic personage or correlated the subject Ficus trees on either street to a specific aspect of the City's history in a way that distinguishes these trees from the over 3,100 other examples in the City.

### Landmarks Ordinance/Findings

The Landmarks Ordinance (SMMC 9.36.100) requires the Landmarks Commission to review the individual eligibility of the subject trees on Second Street and Fourth Street as a Landmark based on the six criteria discussed below. The Commission may designate an improvement as a Landmark if it meets one or more of these criteria.

Based on the research and evaluation of the mature Ficus trees located on the east and west sides of Second and Fourth Streets between Colorado Avenue and Wilshire Boulevard, it appears that neither grouping of trees, in whole or in part, meet the designation criteria established in SMMC 9.36.100 and are therefore not eligible for City Landmark designation. The following draft findings are made to support this conclusion:

- (1) *It exemplifies, symbolizes, or manifests elements of the cultural, social, economic, political or architectural history of the City.*

The subject Ficus trees on Second and Fourth Streets between Colorado Avenue and Wilshire Boulevard are a typical example of the numerous Ficus street tree groupings planted in Santa Monica during the postwar years. The trees are not historically significant for their relationship to the cultural, social, economic, political or architectural history of the Central Business District. The period of significance for the district is from 1875, the date of construction for the oldest building in the district, the Rapp Saloon, to 1944, the construction date of the youngest contributor to the district. The Ficus trees were planted in 1965 and 1967, and therefore are not within the period of significance associated with the district. Ficus trees are part of the history of street trees in Santa Monica. Yet, based on existing available research and a site survey, it appears that the Ficus trees are not individually eligible under this criterion as they are a highly common street tree type as the second most prevalent tree in Santa Monica, and the row of trees on Second and Fourth Streets between Colorado Avenue and Wilshire Boulevard are not unique or rare, individually or as a group with their existing linear canopies, nor do they have any

specific historical importance in association with an important person or event. Based on field surveys done for the 2000 City of Santa Monica Community Forest Management Plan, the subject trees on both streets represent less than 5% of the total number of approximately 3,100 Ficus trees in the City. Furthermore, collectively, the subject trees are not good representative examples of their type. This is due in part to having undergone extensive root and canopy pruning over the years, a maintenance method required in part because of their placement in a confined grow space which has limited their ability to optimally develop in a manner that promotes the stability of their root system and limbs, while minimizing adjacent hardscape displacement.

- (2) *It has aesthetic or artistic interest or value, or other noteworthy interest or value.*

The improvements do not appear to meet this criterion. Although the trees contribute to the pedestrian experience on Second and Fourth Streets, street trees of this type and condition are too common in the City to meet this criterion. Based on field work conducted for the 2000 *City of Santa Monica Community Forest Management Plan*, there are over 3,100 Ficus trees in the City. Furthermore, there are other better examples of Ficus trees in Santa Monica. This is due in part to having undergone extensive root and canopy pruning over the years, a maintenance method required in part because of their placement in a confined grow space which has limited their ability to optimally develop in a manner that promotes the stability of their root system and limbs, while minimizing adjacent hardscape displacement. Nonetheless, as a community design feature or streetscape element, the trees do not distract from the significance of the potential Central Business Historic District in which they are located.

- (3) *It is identified with historic personages or with important events in local, state or national history.*

Current research did not reveal information regarding historic personages or important events in local, state, or national history that are associated with the Ficus trees on Second and Fourth Streets to indicate historical significance or notability. Therefore, the subject Ficus trees does not appear to satisfy this criterion.

- (4) *It embodies distinguishing architectural characteristics valuable to a study of a period, style, method of construction, or the use of indigenous materials or craftsmanship, or is a unique or rare example of an architectural design, detail or historical type valuable to such a study.*

The Ficus trees were planted after the period of significance for the potential Central Business Historic District and therefore, the subject trees do not appear to satisfy this criterion. The subject Ficus trees are symbolic of the urban redevelopment projects of the 1950s and 1960s. Specifically, the Ficus trees were one of the predominant street tree types used in Santa Monica and throughout Southern California during this period. Individually, the rows of trees on Second and Fourth

Streets between Wilshire Boulevard and Colorado Avenue do not possess any distinguishing or outstanding characteristics valuable to the study of local history, landscape history, or horticultural history, and therefore do not appear to satisfy this criterion.

- (5) *It is a significant or a representative example of the work or product of a notable builder, designer or architect.*

Current research did not reveal any information on the designer, landscape architect, or arborist related to the subject Ficus trees. The Ficus trees along Second and Fourth Streets were planted as part of a larger Citywide tree planting program. Therefore, the subject trees do not appear to satisfy this criterion.

- (6) *It has a unique location, a singular physical characteristic, or is an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community or the City.*

Application of this criterion does not indicate that the subject Ficus trees are an established and familiar visual feature in that application of this criterion has been consistently applied to important visual monuments in the City such as the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium due to its grand scale, and unique design, and presence that commands attention as one travels south along Main Street. Furthermore, it is the architecture that best visually manifests the significance of the Central Business District. The subject trees were planted outside of the district's period of significance in 1965 and 1967 are therefore non-contributing resources in the district. The trees do not add substantially to the character of the street and to the historic fabric of the district. The subject street trees are not excellent, distinctive, noteworthy, unique or rare examples, but are typical examples of Ficus trees planted in Santa Monica during the 1950s and 1960s. They are not planted in a unique location or configuration, nor do they possess singular physical characteristics of their type. Therefore, the subject trees do not appear to satisfy this criterion.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Based on the entirety of the record, it is recommended that the Landmarks Commission deny Landmark Designation Applications 07LM-008 and 07LM-009 for the mature Ficus trees located on the east and west sides of Second and Fourth Streets between Colorado Avenue and Wilshire Boulevard.

Pursuant to SMMC 9.36.180, the Landmarks Commission's determination regarding this application may be appealed to the City Council if the appeal is filed with the City Planning Division within ten (10) consecutive days commencing from the date that the decision is made by the Landmarks Commission.

Attachments:

- A. PCR Services Corporation Landmark Assessment Report for Ficus trees on Second Street (November 2007)
- B. PCR Services Corporation Landmark Assessment Report for Ficus trees on Fourth Street (November 2007)
- C. Application and Photos
- D. Memorandum from Community Forester (November 3, 2007)
- E. Public Hearing Notices
- F. Correspondence
- G. Historic photos of Central Business District