

REVISED LEGISLATIVE DIGEST

(10/24/2016, Amended in Committee)

[Planning Code - Amending Landmark Designation - 140 Maiden Lane (aka V. C. Morris Gift Shop)]

Ordinance amending the Landmark Designation of 140 Maiden Lane (aka V. C. Morris Gift Shop), Assessor's Parcel Block No. 0309, Lot No. 019, under Planning Code, Article 10; affirming the Planning Department's determination under the California Environmental Quality Act; and making environmental findings, findings of public necessity, convenience and welfare, and findings of consistency with the General Plan, and the eight priority policies of Planning Code, Section 101.1.

Existing Law

Under Article 10, Section 1004 of the Planning Code, the Board of Supervisors may, by ordinance, amend the designation of an individual structure that has special character or special historical, architectural or aesthetic interest or value as a City landmark. Once a structure has been named a landmark, any construction, alteration, removal or demolition for which a City permit is required necessitates a Certificate of Appropriateness from the Historic Preservation Commission ("HPC"). (Planning Code Section 1006; Charter of the City and County of San Francisco, Section 4.135.) Thus, landmark designation affords a high degree of protection to historic and architectural structures of merit in the City. There are currently more than 250 individual landmarks in the City under Article 10, in addition to other structures and districts in the downtown area that are protected under Article 11. (See Appendix A to Article 10.)

Amendments to Current Law

This ordinance amends the Planning Code to amend the landmark designation for 140 Maiden Lane (known as V. C. Morris Gift Shop) under Article 10.

The ordinance amends the landmark designation for 140 Maiden Lane to include interior character defining interior features that are eligible for designation as a City landmark under National Register of Historic Places Criterion C (as it embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction; and represents the work of a master architect). Specifically, designation of the V. C. Morris Gift Shop is proper given that Wright's design for the V. C. Morris Gift Shop breaks the rules of conventional department store design. Instead of a visually open storefront and open floor plan, the building's solid brick façade with narrow arched tunnel entrance gives no indication of the interior's double-height, mezzanine-ringed, top-lit circular interior space with distinct sales areas. It is the first building to be constructed using what became his favorite structural shape, the spiral, which dominated his work

throughout his final years. The façade of the V. C. Morris Gift Shop was also the first time Wright incorporated the Romanesque arch in five decades, a design motif which he had often used in his early work.

Frank Lloyd Wright is by far the most well-known and influential American architect. Although Wright produced several designs for other buildings in San Francisco, the V. C. Morris Gift Shop is the only one that was realized. The V. C. Morris Gift Shop is also significant as a rare extant Modern building designed by the master architect.

Background Information

On February 5, 1975, Ordinance No. 22-75 designated 140 Maiden Lane (aka V. C. Morris Gift Shop), Assessor's Block No. 0309, Lot 019, as Landmark No. 72. That Ordinance, required "that the said Landmark should be preserved generally in all of its particular exterior features," but did not list all the character-defining features that have to be preserved in any amount of detail. Moreover, it did not include any of the interior character-defining features as part of the Landmark Designation.

The landmark designation amendment was initiated by the HPC pursuant to its authority under the Charter to recommend approval, disapproval, or modification of landmark designations and historic district designations under the Planning Code to the Board of Supervisors. The HPC held a hearing to initiate the landmark designation amendment of 140 Maiden Lane (V. C. Morris Gift Shop) on May 4, 2016. On June 1, 2016, after holding a public hearing on the proposed designation amendment and having considered the Landmark Designation Case Report prepared by Planning Department staff Shannon Ferguson, the HPC voted to recommend approval of the proposed landmark designation amendment of 140 Maiden Lane to the Board of Supervisors.