FILE NO. 260587

LEGISLATIVE DIGEST

[Planning Code - Landmark Designation - Richard Spreckels Mansion / Buena Vista Studios]

Ordinance amending the Planning Code to designate the Richard Spreckels Mansion / Buena Vista Studios, located at 737 Buena Vista Avenue West, Assessor's Parcel Block No. 1256, Lot No. 078, on the west side of Buena Vista Avenue West between Frederick Street and Central Avenue, as a landmark consistent with the standards set forth in Article 10 of the Planning Code; affirming the Planning Department's determination under the California Environmental Quality Act; and making public necessity, convenience, and welfare findings under Planning Code, Section 302, 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, designate an individual structure that has special character or special historical, architectural or aesthetic interest or value as a City landmark. Unless prohibited by state law, 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. (Planning Code § 1006; Charter of the City and County of San Francisco, § 4.135.) Thus, landmark designation generally affords a high degree of protection to historic and architectural structures of merit in the City. There are currently more than 300 individual landmarks in the City under Article 10, in addition to structures and districts in the downtown area that are protected under Article 11. (See App. A to Article 10.)

Amendments to Current Law

This ordinance amends the Planning Code to add a new historic landmark to the list of individual landmarks under Article 10: the Richard Spreckels Mansion / Buena Vista Studios, located at 737 Buena Vista Avenue West, Assessor's Parcel Block No. 1256, Lot No. 078. The ordinance finds that the Richard Spreckels Mansion / Buena Vista Studios is eligible for local designation as an intact example of a Classical Revival home with exemplary features, as the residence of Blanche and Gertrude Partington, and for serving as an early recording studio for 1960s counterculture bands who exemplified the "San Francisco Sound". The property was constructed in 1897 in its present location in the Haight Ashbury neighborhood and designed by Architect Edward J. Vogel. The property's original owner was Richard Spreckels, manager of the Western Sugar Refinery in Potrero Hill, and member of the Spreckels family, who accumulated great wealth from the sugar industry. Spreckels resided at the property until circa 1922. From 1922-1955, sisters Blanche Partington and Gertrude Partington Albright resided at the property. The sisters were San Francisco pop culture notables, with Gertrude associated with the California Impressionism art movement due to her

career as a teacher and painter. Located in the Haight-Ashbury, a neighborhood which gained global attention as the hub of hippie counterculture in the 1960s and early 1970s, the subject property is also significant as the location of Buena Vista Studios, known as one of the first hippie-friendly recording studios. While under the ownership of Gene and Sara Estribou, the top floor ballroom was converted into a recording studio. Notably, the Grateful Dead made some of their earliest recordings, known as the Scorpio Records sessions, out of the studio in 1966. Other quintessential San Francisco Bands, including Quicksilver Messenger Service and the Steve Miller Band, also recorded in the studio.

As required by Section 1004, the ordinance lists the particular features that shall be preserved, or replaced in-kind, as determined necessary.

Background Information

On May 20, 2026, after holding a public hearing on the proposed designation and having considered the specialized analyses reviewed by Planning Department staff and the Landmark Designation Fact Sheet, the Historic Preservation Commission voted to recommend landmark designation of the Richard Spreckels Mansion / Buena Vista Studios to the Board of Supervisors.