

Claremont Architectural Commission
League of Women Voters of the Claremont Area Observer Report
By Observer Jeanne Kennedy
May 11, 2017

Purpose of the Commission

The Commission reviews plans for developments, building alterations, signs and landscaping. It ensures proposed projects conform to City codes and standards. Commissioners strive to increase the quality of life by improving the visual aspects of the city. The Commission meets the 2nd and 4th Wednesday of each month at 7:00 pm.

Commission Members (7)

There has been significant turnover recently in the Architectural Commission. There have been vacancies for over a year, since February 2016. There was one open position for most meetings. For three meetings there were two vacancies. On March 29, with John Neieber's appointment, all positions were finally filled. Commissioner Bios and List of City Staff are at the end of this report.

Conduct of Meetings

Meetings are properly noticed and start on time. Chair James Manifold runs an excellent meeting, explains how the presentations will proceed and allows time for all to speak. Sadly, he will retire from the Commission this year. The applicants and architects are often the only people present. However, this year the Pomona College Art Museum brought out a crowd. There is good discussion among the Commissioners. They have done their homework. Members come fully briefed and ready to offer their expertise. Each brings a unique perspective to the discussions. Unfortunately their suggestions are sometimes overlooked. This means new projects, like the four- story Hampton Inn, will look just like every other basic Hampton Inn in Southern California.

Attendance

Commissioners' attendance has been very good. Of the 14 meetings held between May 25, 2016 and April 26, 2017, I attended 4. I did review Agendas and Minutes for most of the meetings I missed.

Projects Considered this Year

Hampton Inn 4-story Hotel at Indian Hill and San Jose

After much discussion and disappointment this hotel received final approval on September 28, 2016. Commissioners felt Claremont should have a project as good as or better looking than a similar Hampton Inn designed by the same architect in Highland. Commissioners offered many suggestions for improvement, most of which the architect rejected. In exasperation, the hotel was approved by a 4-1 vote.

Pomona College Museum of Art at the SW Corner of College and Bonita

This museum received final Commission approval on November 9, 2016. Many people spoke in opposition to this project along the way, including representatives of Claremont Heritage. Others spoke against moving Renwick House to accommodate the museum. Despite the design by nationally known architects, Machado Silvetti, Commissioners generally found the design to be unremarkable at best - an opportunity lost. For Commissioner Marta Perlas this seemed to culminate a frustrating year of inability to bring quality design to Claremont. She tendered her resignation.

Home Addition in Historic Claremont

Who knew? Renovation of Claremont vintage homes are on a major Cable TV channel. Residents Jessie and Tina Rodriguez (of Cal-American Homes) have bought, renovated and resold several homes in Claremont. Their progress appears on their show Vintage Flip on the Home and Garden TV Channel.

Most recently, the couple is proposing to add 2,400 square feet to a 1,200 square-foot-home at 255 W. Seventh Street. This house is on the city's register of historic structures. This will be their family home. The Commission approved it on March 29, 2017.

Update of Historic Register

Claremont Heritage presented information on the seriously outdated Historic Register. Claremont Heritage conducted a review and update. This item brought out interested residents.

Landscape Philosophy

Commissioner Robert Perry is taking the lead on this. Members of the public offered ideas to broaden the scope.

Old Schoolhouse Townhomes

Mr. Wu has again brought this project forward. The 30-unit three story condo development with a parking garage will locate just west of the Candlelight Pavilion. Thought to be more "urban", the plan lacks outdoor amenities for the residents. Commissioner Wheeler and other speakers argued for better, attractive space for residents to gather. Speakers also said the units should be able to receive FHA/VA financing to attract young families. Some units should be on one level to attract seniors. These changes would bring in homeowners rather than investors to lease them out or join Airbnb. The School House Condos remain under preliminary review.

A Bit of Controversy

Ms. Perlas' concerns and that of other current and past commissioners appeared in an article in the Courier in December. Are Commission decisions given enough weight? Could the community give more visible support to good design in projects? Should Commissioners be local architects who must recuse themselves when there is a conflict of interest? Is there enough training? Perhaps in response, this year Commissioners received training on the Brown Act (conduct of meetings), the Mills Act (preservation of historic properties) and CEQA (environmental protection).

Conclusion 2017 Report

The Claremont Architectural Commission works effectively for the community and respects applicants and residents. The Commissioners are bright, able and take their responsibility seriously. They want Claremont to have the very best in architectural design. This is a big, and often frustrating, challenge.

Commissioner Biographies

James Manifold, Chair since September, 2014 was appointed to the commission in 2009. He served as the Vice President of Business Affairs at Scripps College.

Mark Schoeman, is now Vice Chair. Appointed to the Commission in September 2013, he has served previously. He is a well-known architect in Claremont and has his own firm with his wife.

Bob Perry was also appointed in September 2014. He is a Professor Emeritus from Cal Poly Pomona and teaches Landscape Architecture at USC. He is an expert in sustainable landscaping.

Maureen Wheeler, serving since 2010, is a prominent architect and artist. She is a founding partner in Wheeler and Wheeler Architects.

Brian Worley is a new member, filling the vacancy when Clive Dym resigned in February 2016. Worley's first meeting was in September. Retired now, he has been a general contractor and served for 29 years as Director of Facilities for the University of La Verne and Claremont McKenna College. Into the mid-1980's he worked in the Millard sheets Studio helping to produce and install many of the Home Savings murals. He creates public art.

Benjamin McCoy resigned from the commission in June. He is a Landscape Architect at EPT Design in Pasadena. He was replaced in November by Waen Messner.

Waen Messner holds a Masters Degree in Urban and Regional Planning from UC Irvine. Her first meeting was in November. She has worked as an urban planner in several southern California cities. She has been an Olympic swimmer and now is taking time-out from her public service career to raise her family.

Marta Perlas resigned from the Commission in November. She is an architect with Mythograph and is on the faculty at Cal Poly Pomona in Planning and Environmental Design. She was replaced on March 29 by John Neuber.

John Neuber is a member of the Board of Directors of Claremont Heritage and writes articles for the Claremont Courier about Claremont history and historic preservation. He has been a Planning Commissioner for the City of Ontario and a member of the General Plan Committee for San Bernardino County. He also chaired the Feasibility Committee for the Ontario Convention Center.

Commission Staff (4)

Chris Veirs, Principal Planner
Mark Carnahan, Senior Planner
Luke Seibert, Associate Planner
Nikola Hlady, Assistant Planner
Carrissa Martinez, Administrative Assistant