

COUNCIL COMMUNICATION

	Number: 20-287	Meeting: June 22, 2020
	Agenda Item: 81	Roll Call: 20-1078
	Submitted by: Chris Johansen, Community Development Director	

AGENDA HEADING:

Hearing on the designation of the Drake Park Playground Shelter at 2300 Drake Park Avenue as a local landmark and on the issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness for exterior alterations to the shelter.

SYNOPSIS:

- The Park and Recreation Department and the Community Development Department are seeking landmark status for the shelter at Columbus Park in accordance with Chapter 58 of the City Code.
- The Landmark Review Board (LRB) and the Plan and Zoning Commission recommend approval of the nomination.
- The LRB recommends conditional approval of the issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness to allow exterior alterations to the shelter.
- Staff recommends approval of designating the subject building as a local landmark and issuance of an issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness for exterior alterations to the shelter subject to the conditions recommended by the LRB.

FISCAL IMPACT: NONE

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

- Drake Park shelter is positioned slightly southeast of the center of the park. Construction of the shelter started in 1933 and was completed in 1934. It is a 1-story, stone wall building with a hip roof.
- The building originally contained boys and girls dressing rooms and an office space to serve the adjoining wading pool. The secondary roof on the north façade covered an open-air porch facing the pool. The office was located in the space to the west of the porch and had glass windows allowing light into the space. The exterior wall openings into the changing rooms were filled with wood slates to allow air flow while maintaining privacy. The building was converted to an open-air shelter with restrooms in 1984.
- The Parks and Recreation Department is planning a \$765,000 renovation and expansion of the shelter. Construction would start this fall and extend into summer 2021. After completion the shelter would have an occupancy of 75 people.

- The shelter “is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.”
 - The development of the Drake Park Neighborhood soared after the establishment of nearby Drake University in 1881. Lots were sold with a quarter of the proceeds being donated to the University. Land speculation further west soon reduced the demand on lots in the area, allowing lots to remain unsold. For this reason, one can experience a wide range of architectural styles built over several decades throughout the neighborhood.
 - In 1907, The Des Moines Register reported that renderings were provided for plans to “beautify Drake Park.” Landscape artist M. J. Wragg’s plans were described as having “tennis courts, croquet grounds, a band stand, a fountain and the beautifying of the walks with plants and shrubbery.” Future plans for a possible statue honoring Governor Francis M. Drake were also noted. Additional plans were revealed in 1910, which noted that “Cement walks will cross the square diagonally, meeting at the center, where a fountain is to be erected...” The plans also called for widening the intersection of Cottage Grove Avenue and Kingman Boulevard at 24th Street to improve the view of the park. It is unclear if either of these plans were carried out, as public park improvements were not documented on the Sanborn Maps. Regardless of their execution, the work described in the various newspaper articles over the many decades of the park’s history show that the City of Des Moines was consistently interested in improving the public spaces available to the residents of this neighborhood.
 - Iowa was not spared from the high unemployment numbers during the Great Depression. Nationally, nearly a quarter of the workforce was looking for jobs. Then-president Franklin D. Roosevelt and his administration sought ways to put people back to work. The Civil Works Administration employed approximately four (4) million people at its height in early 1934, the time The Drake Park Playground Shelter was constructed. This project is a textbook example of the type of permanent, public improvement projects that Roosevelt felt would encourage the American people and get the economy moving once again.
 - The Shelter’s association with the Civil Works Administration is an important cultural context in not only local history, but for the nation as well. It maintains its original feeling of place as its setting has changed little over the years, making it an excellent example of a place worth preserving.
- The shelter “embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.”
 - The Drake Park Playground Shelter was designed by architect Amos B. Emery and constructed under the Civilian Works Administration, a short-lived relief program during the Great Depression. It is a quintessential example of architecture constructed during this period.
 - At age 18, Emery began working for Proudfoot, Bird & Rawson, a local firm. Emery’s relationship with Proudfoot, Bird & Rawson would be off and on for the rest of his life.

During World War I, Emery enlisted in the army and served as a pilot. While waiting to be sent back home he would take advantage of the educational opportunities available to troops and enroll in the Ecole de Beaux-Arts in Paris. As an architect, Emery could receive a certificate of credit after four (4) months.

- Back in the United States, Emery received a B. Arch from the University of Pennsylvania while working for Proudfoot, Bird & Rawson during school breaks. In 1923 Emery worked as a draftsman in New York City before returning to Des Moines and Proudfoot, Bird & Rawson.
- In 1927, Emery was registered by exemption and entered into private practice with John Normile, forming the firm Normile & Emery. For the next few years, Emery was an active member of the Des Moines architectural community, serving as the president of the Iowa Chapter of the AIA in 1930 (and again in 1941 and 1942) and serving on the City of Des Moines Park Board alongside board president Jay “Ding” Darling. He designed a variety of project types including the then-modern Leo Weeks home and the sun dial at the rose garden in Greenwood Park. Emery was also responsible for the design of the Walker Playground Shelter, the first park shelter constructed by the City of Des Moines Playground Commission.
- In 1933, Emery was selected to become a Park Inspector for the National Parks Service, Department of the Interior where he would oversee many projects throughout the Midwest. It was during this transition that Emery completed the drawings for the Drake Park Shelter.
- On May 5, 2020, the LRB unanimously approved the recommendation that the Drake Park Playground Shelter be designated a local Landmark. The LRB also reviewed the proposed renovations and is recommending that the City Council issue a Certificate of Appropriateness subject to the following conditions:
 1. Three-piece simulated divided lite products shall be used for all windows with a divide lite pattern.
 2. Any mechanical equipment and meters shall be screen with architectural and/or landscape material as approved by the City’s Planning Administrator.
 3. Review and approval of the finalized landscaping plan by the City’s Planning Administrator.
 4. The bracket details shall be retained. The glass shall be recessed to emphasis the brackets, columns and beams to the satisfaction of the City’s Planning Administrator.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL ACTION(S):

Date: June 8, 2020

Roll Call Number: [20-0908](#)

Action: [On](#) city-initiated request for the designation of the Drake Park Playground Shelter at 2300 Drake Park Avenue as a local landmark, (6-22-20). Moved by Gatto to adopt. Motion Carried 7-0.

BOARD/COMMISSION ACTION(S):

Board: Plan and Zoning Commission

Date: May 21, 2020

Resolution Number: 20-2020-4.02

Action: Recommend approval of designating the Varsity Theatre a local landmark.

Board: Landmark Review Board

Date: June 5, 2020

Resolution Number: 20-2020-4.02

Action: Recommend approval of designating the Varsity Theatre a local landmark.

ANTICIPATED ACTIONS AND FUTURE COMMITMENTS: NONE

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