

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATION  
OF THE HEARING EXAMINER FOR THE CITY OF SEATTLE

In the Matter of the Recommendation of  
the Landmarks Preservation Board for

FILE NO. LP 89-002

THE YMCA CENTRAL BRANCH,  
SOUTH BUILDING

Introduction

The Landmarks Preservation Board filed its Recommendation on Controls and Incentives with Hearing Examiner pursuant to Chapter 25.12, Seattle Municipal Code, for the YMCA Central Branch, South Building at 909 Fourth Avenue.

A hearing was held on the recommendation on April 17, 1990. The record was left open for presentation of additional evidence and lists of additional witnesses until July 6, 1990. No additional evidence or lists of witnesses were submitted by the parties following the hearing. The record was ordered closed on July 10, 1990.

Parties to the proceedings were the Landmarks Preservation Board represented by Karen Gordon, the City Historic preservation officer and Elizabeth Chave, the Landmarks Coordinator, and the YMCA Central Branch, represented by Larry Hall, Executive Director.

After due consideration of the evidence elicited during the public hearing, the following shall constitute the finds of fact, conclusions of law and recommendation of the Hearing Examiner on this matter.

Findings of Fact

1. In November, 1988, the Landmarks Preservation Board (hereafter "Board") voted to approve and recommend the designation of the YMCA Central Branch, South Building as a Seattle Landmark pursuant to Ordinance 106348. In November, 1989, this Board approved Controls and Incentives for Recommendation to the City Council for the YMCA Central Branch, South Building (hereafter "YMCA Central").

2. Larry Hall, executive director of the YMCA Central Branch, a non-profit organization, filed an objection to the controls and incentives recommended by the Board on the grounds, that the controls would deny a reasonable economic use of the site, are unreasonable, exceed the authority of the Board and are

in violation of Ordinance 106348. In specific, the YMCA objected to the west facade of the building being included in the controls.

3. The Board's decision to approve designation of the site was based on Section 3.01, Subsection (3) and (4) Ordinance 106348, according to Elizabeth Chave, the Landmarks Coordinator. Those standards were:

(3) is associated in a significant way with a significant aspect of the cultural, political, or economic heritage of the community, city, state or nation; or

(4) embodies the distinctive visible characteristics of an architectural style, or period, or of a method of construction...

4. After negotiating with the YMCA on the controls and incentives on the building, the Landmarks Preservation Board adopted the following control "...to assure the preservation of the specified features and characteristics of the landmark:

A certificate of Approval, issued by the City of Seattle's Landmarks Preservation Board pursuant to City Ordinance 106348, must be obtained, or the time for denying a Certificate of Approval application must have expired, before the owners may make alterations or significant changes to: the entire exterior of the building, including the roof, and the following areas of the interior: ...first floor-the main lobby and hallway, the boy's lounge and billiard room, and the two activity rooms; ...and basement...

Proposed controls and Incentives Agreement, (Exhibit 1).

5. The Landmarks Preservation Board noted that the following economic incentives are potentially available:

1. Section 24.74.020, of the Seattle Municipal Code entitled Special Exception; and SMC Sections 23.44.26; or 23.45.124 Administrative Conditional Uses, certain incentives are available, on an application basis, authorize, under certain circumstances, uses in a designated Landmark that are not otherwise permitted in the zone the Landmark is located.

2. Building and Energy Code exceptions on an application basis.

3. The availability of the Historic

Preservation Special Tax Valuation Chapter 84.26 RCW) to all Seattle landmarks subject to controls imposed by a designation ordinance on an application basis.

Proposed Controls and Incentives Agreement, Exhibit 1.

6. The distinctive visible characteristics of the architectural style noted in the report on Designation include Collegiate Gothic style, modern, virtually flat street facade, harmonious brick veneer over reinforced concrete and broken only by punched-out window and door openings. The alley facade is of utilitarian construction which has been modified and patched over time. The roof form and the lightwell are important elements in the massings of the building, and reflect the original function of the building. (Exhibit 6)

7. The Seattle YMCA Central Branch South Building is also significant primarily due to its association with the cultural heritage, civic, and social development of the city...Due to its highly visible presence downtown, and due to the size and variety of programs and the number of people it has served and continue to serve, the building is important as a symbol representing the culturally significant impact of the YMCA upon the community. (Exhibit 6)

8. The design of the building was from the architectural firm of A.H. Albertson and his associates John W. Wilson and Paul Richardson.

9. The Landmark Preservation Board's intention for the proposed control of the entire exterior of the building was articulated at a Board hearing on November 18, 1989, and included the following:

...the Board should be consistent, and should control all four walls and the roof...the controls would not preclude future development; it would ensure that future development would be compatible...the west wall is significant historically and architecturally...the Board would review the impact of development on the character and appearance of the building.

(Exhibit 23)

10. The YMCA objected to the designation of the west facade of the building as a landmark through its executive director, Larry Hall, as causing a significant economic impact to the designated property because development of the south building would not be economically feasible for the nonprofit organization due to the increased costs of development caused by the landmark controls. The YMCA was provided with two additional months to

provide additional evidence on the economic impact of the controls, the future and present needs of the YMCA Central Branch, South Building and the economic burden of maintenance, operation and rehabilitation of the building resulting from the landmark controls. Mr. Hall did not submit any additional evidence during the two month period.

Conclusions of Law


1. The control proposed by the Landmarks Preservation Board to require that a certificate of approval be required before any alternation or significant changes be made to the entire exterior of the buildings and roof is necessary since it is the style, form, and function, exterior ornamentation and cultural significance of the building that makes it distinctive and qualifies it as a landmark, along with the identity of the architect. No evidence was adduced to show that the control would operate to prevent the owners from realizing a reasonable return on the property. The control, in itself, does not preclude redevelopment of the property under standards in effect at that future time but requires that a certificate of approval be obtained.

2. Since the proposed control is adequately specific, is not inconsistent with any provision in Chapter 25.12, Seattle Municipal Code, and is needed to preserve the distinctive characteristics of this landmark, it should be imposed.

Recommendation

The Hearing Examiner recommends that the proposed control be imposed and the economic incentives be recognized by the City Council.

Entered this 30<sup>th</sup> day of July, 1990.

  
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NOTICE OF RIGHT TO PETITION  
FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION

Pursuant to 25.12.620, SMC, any party of record may file a

written notice of appeal with the City Council within 30 days after the date of mailing the recommendation of the Hearing Examiner. Copies must be served on all parties of record.