

PLANNING DIVISION STAFF REPORT

To:	Historic Preservation Commission, Through Manuel Esquibel, City Manager
Prepared By:	Aja Tibbs, Long Range & Historic Preservation Planner
Date Prepared:	June 3, 2015
Requested Action:	Review at a public hearing and make a recommendation to the City Council for the nomination of the Brighton Buddhist Temple at 21 S. 1 st Avenue

PURPOSE:

In order to proceed with the designation of this property as a historic landmark, the Brighton Historic Preservation Commission (BHPC) shall review the nomination and application for designation as a historic landmark, conduct a public hearing, and approve a nomination resolution to the City Council.

BACKGROUND:

The BHPC received a nomination application to list the Brighton Buddhist Temple, addressed as 21 South 1st Avenue, as a historic landmark. The owner and applicant of the property is ModCOR Group, LLC with managers Bridgette Modglin and Carolyn Corogin, and they have consented to the nomination of the structure as a historic landmark.

HISTORIC LANDMARK ELIGIBILITY:

An individual property may be designated as a historic landmark if it is at least fifty (50) years old and possesses historic and/or architectural significance. If the property is not at least fifty (50) years old, it must possess exceptional historic and/or architectural significance. The finding of historic and/or architectural significance requires that the property meets at least one (1) of the Eligibility Categories. To meet an Eligibility Category, at least one (1) of the criteria must be satisfied. In order to find that a property possesses exceptional historic and/or architectural significance, it must meet at least two (2) of the following Eligibility Categories:

- 1) Architectural Category: In order to be considered significant in the Architectural Category, at least one (1) of the following criteria must be met:
 - a. exemplifies specific distinguishing characteristics of an architectural period or style;
or
 - b. is an example of the work of an architect or builder who is recognized for expertise nationally, state-wide, regionally or locally; or
 - c. demonstrates superior craftsmanship or high artistic value; or
 - d. contains elements of architectural design, detail, materials, construction or craftsmanship which represent a significant innovation; or
 - e. evidences a style particularly associated with the Brighton area.
- 2) Social and Historic Category: In order to be considered significant in the Social and Historic Category, at least one (1) of the following criteria must be met:

- a. is the site of an historic event that had an effect upon society; or
 - b. exemplifies cultural, political, economic or social heritage of the community; or
 - c. represents a built environment of a group of people in an era of history; or
 - d. has significant character, interest or value, as part of the development, heritage, or cultural characteristics of the City, State, or nation; or
 - e. has an association with a notable person(s) or the work of a notable person(s).
- 3) Geographic and Environmental Category: In order to be considered significant in the Geographic and Environmental Category, at least one (1) of the following criteria must be met:
- a. enhances a sense of identity of the community; or
 - b. by being part of, or related to, a square, park or other distinctive area which should be developed or preserved according to a plan based on an historic, cultural, or architectural motif; or
 - c. is unique in its location of singular physical characteristics; or
 - d. possesses unique and notable historic, cultural or architectural motifs; or
 - e. is an established and familiar mutual setting or visual feature of the community.

ARCHITECTURAL SUMMARY:

Construction of Brighton Buddhist Temple began on August 4, 1938 and was completed and dedicated on February 18, 1940. The building faces 1st Avenue just south of Bridge Street. It was constructed as 1-story building, with a walk-out basement and both floors are approximately 72' x 36'. The dominant feature of the temple is the frontal axial tower entrance which is approximately 8'x16' with crenellation topping the parapet. Early photos of the structure indicate that the building exterior consisted of a larger block size (approximately 6" x 16") for at least ten years, but the material is unknown. The block was later covered with stucco as it stands today (date currently unknown). The building has a gable roof with wood shingles. A smaller chimney also runs along the center of the rear (west façade) for ventilation to the existing boiler system in the basement. The front entrance includes two simple double doors, and a double hung 1/1 window in the upper part of the tower. The only remaining detail of the structure are the identical double hung 1/1 windows that wrap around the entire building on the main level and basement level at equal intervals. Six bays line the sides of the building (north and east facades) and two bays on the front and rear (east and west facades). A flight of cement steps lead to the main entrance, but the slope to the rear of the property requires a full story of wooden stairs to access the rear (west façade) exit on the second level. Overall, the exterior structure is a simple rectangular building with minimal ornamentation dominated by the novelty style front tower.

The interior of the structure consisted of two floors. The first floor contains a large open ceiling with exposed wooden beams. Originally, a golden alter was brought from the Tri-State Buddhist Temple in Denver that was restored during the relocation. In 1959, scrolls of the Seven Patriarchs were ordered in from Rev. Kanser Uyeki of Honolulu Hawaii, and the alter was remodeled to incorporate the new scrolls at that time. The basement held kitchen and classroom facilities for English classes, Sunday school, and other community gatherings. When the temple closed their doors, the alter was returned to the Tri-State Buddhist Temple in Denver.

CULTURAL SUMMARY:

The Brighton Buddhist Temple is known as a physical icon of the Japanese American population important to Brighton's agricultural history. At the turn of the 20th century many Japanese immigrants integrated into Brighton's farming community as both independent and labor force workers. An estimated 3,000 Japanese Americans worked the fields in Colorado by 1909, with a concentrated group working in the Brighton/Fort Lupton/Greeley area. Brighton welcomed several independent Japanese American land owners; however, many Japanese Americans worked labor and were hired locally through a local Japanese labor contractor named Harry Naoye Hokasono to work in the fields and canning factories. During this time, Japanese Americans also constituted one-sixth of the sugar beet workforce of Colorado, which is a direct association to Brighton's sugar factory opening in 1917.

The concentration of Japanese American families in the Brighton area led to the establishment of the Brighton branch of the Japanese American Association (JAA) in 1914. By 1924, several of the families began gathering once a month to learn the Dharma and hear the Teachings of Buddha in various locations. Shortly after, the Brighton Pavilion was purchased by the JAA for English classes and Sunday school in 1925, and purchased in 1927. However, threats by the Klu Klux Klan required the children to be escorted by armed guard. By 1938, it was decided that a church was needed for the group and a ground breaking ceremony was held on August 4, 1938. Together, as a group, they worked every spare moment to build their church. Working long days in the fields and yet still making time to build the church together. The construction of the building took 18 months, but was dedicated on February 18, 1940.

Opening just two years before the forced Japanese American evacuation of the west coast during World War II, this church and the Brighton community served as a refuge in a state full of controversy. During the eastward migration of Japanese Americans, Denver became known as the unofficial capital of the United States. While the much of the nation held anti-Japanese sentiments, Colorado's Governor, Ralph L. Carr, openly stated that Japanese Americans are "...as loyal to American Institutions and you and I." and was the only Governor willingly at the table to help relocate and resettle Japanese Americans. While services at the church were limited during the war, Brighton's Japanese American population continued to grow as people were released from concentration camps in surrounding areas.

As the Nisei (children of American immigrants) generation aged, the church attendance declined making the maintenance and upkeep of the church too difficult to continue. The building was then sold to Mr. Clark Carlson in 2005 where it has remained vacant for the last ten years.

PUBLIC INQUIRIES AND INPUT:

Notice of the public hearing, regarding the nomination of the Brighton Buddhist Temple, was published in the *Brighton Standard Blade* and posted on the property for no less than fifteen (15) days prior to the date of the public hearing. As of the date this report was published, the Historic Preservation Administrator has not received any formal public inquiries or input regarding this project.

STAFF ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATION:

The Brighton Buddhist Temple was built in 1940 and is more than 50 years old. Therefore, Section 17-52-40 of the *Brighton Municipal Code* requires that at least one criteria under one of the three Eligibility Categories be met. In consideration of the architectural and cultural history listed above, staff finds the application for designation is meeting the following criteria (*justification has been provided in bold below each criteria*):

1) Architectural Category:

e. **evidences a style particularly associated with the Brighton area**

While the gable roofed rectangular building is typical for churches during this era, the somewhat novelty styled tower is a rare and unique element unseen throughout the community or region.

2) Social and Historic Category:

b. **exemplifies cultural, political, economic or social heritage of the community;** or

The temple is a physical structure that represents the Japanese American community which provided a significant contribution to the social heritage of Brighton during the 20th century.

c. **represents a built environment of a group of people in an era of history;** or

Constructed by the members themselves, the temple demonstrates the perseverance and commitment the Japanese Americans had to their community and their beliefs.

d. **has significant character, interest or value, as part of the development, heritage, or cultural characteristics of the City, State, or nation;** or

The temple is associated with the Japanese American people over two major movements in the nations/states history. First, their population growth during the Colorado agricultural industry boom at the turn of the 20th century. Secondly, the widespread racial struggles and eastern migration occurring in the United States during World War II.

3) Geographic and Environmental Category:

e. **is an established and familiar mutual setting or visual feature of the community.**

The uniquely styled tower on the front (east) façade is a recognized feature throughout the community and has continued to be known at the Brighton Buddhist Temple even in while vacant over the last ten years.

As listed above, staff finds that the significance of this structure is primarily met through the Social and Cultural Category. However, the front axial tower and upper crenellation creates a unique and distinct feature that the community identifies as the Brighton Buddhist Temple and should be recognized as a defining feature of the structure. In addition, the simplicity and lack of detailed features help to demonstrate the work of a group of people with little spare time or money for extravagance.

POTENTIAL ACTIONS BY THE HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION:

The BHPC shall hold the public hearing to review a nomination for designation of a Historic Landmark, and shall make a determination as to the appropriateness of the nomination, according to the standards and criteria adopted. If the nominated cultural resource is found to possess significance, as determined by the standards and criteria of this Article and rules and

regulations, the Commission shall make a recommendation of approval to designate the cultural resource as a Historic Landmark to the City Council. At the close of the public hearing, the Commission shall take one of the following actions:

- Approve the draft Resolution making a recommendation of designation to the City Council.
- Approve the draft Resolution, with specific changes or conditions, making a recommendation of designation to the City Council.
- Continue the public hearing to a date certain, with findings of fact to justify the decision.
- Direct staff to draft a Resolution to recommend denial to the City Council, with specific findings of fact to justify the decision.

ATTACHMENTS:

- Application Submittal Items: photographs of the site, and the application questionnaire (specific criteria analysis from the applicant).
- Resolution (draft)