



City Council

Approval of a Resolution Designating the Olympia Armory a Local Heritage Resource and Adding it to the Olympia Heritage Register

Agenda Date: 5/4/2021
Agenda Item Number: 4.H
File Number:21-0391

Type: decision **Version:** 1 **Status:** Passed

Title

Approval of a Resolution Designating the Olympia Armory a Local Heritage Resource and Adding it to the Olympia Heritage Register

Recommended Action

Committee Recommendation:

The Heritage Commission unanimously favors approval of a resolution designating the Olympia Armory a local heritage resource and adding it to the Olympia Heritage Register.

City Manager Recommendation:

Move to approve a resolution designating the Olympia Armory a local heritage resource and adding it to the Olympia Heritage Register.

Report

Issue:

Whether to approve a resolution designating the Olympia Armory a local heritage resource and adding it to the Armory on the Olympia Heritage Register.

Staff Contact:

Marygrace Goddu, Historic Preservation Officer, Community Planning & Development, 360.480.0923

Presenter(s):

Marygrace Goddu, Historic Preservation Officer

Background and Analysis:

Note: The recent State Capital Budget, passed just before the close of the 2021 Legislative Session on April 25, 2021, included transferring the Olympia Armory to the City of Olympia. The nomination to add the Armory to the Olympia Heritage Register was received in September 2020.

Nomination Process

A proposal to place the Olympia Armory on the Olympia Heritage Register was received in September 2020 from a coalition of community members from the Eastside Neighborhood Association. The building's owner, the Washington State Military Department (WMD), was notified of

the nomination and declined to comment, citing an agency policy of neutrality relative to historic designation of properties in WMD ownership.

Per Olympia Municipal Code 18.12.085 - Historic Preservation, if an owner does not consent to placement of their property on the Olympia Heritage Register, the Heritage Commission may recommend that the City Council approve designation without property owner consent.

The Heritage Commission followed the process defined in OMC 18.12.085B to consider the proposed listing, providing due notice to the owner and holding a public hearing on January 27, 2021. A member of the Washington Military Department was present at the public hearing.

The Olympia Armory

The Olympia Armory is eligible for the Olympia Heritage Register for its architectural style and integrity, and for its association with important events that have contributed significantly to the broad patterns of Olympia and national history.

Built in 1939, the Armory is part of a long history of Army National Guard and Militia presence in Olympia from the earliest days of Washington Territory. It played an important role in Washington State and U.S. coastal defense systems as well as other operations during WWII, and today is home to the 81st Infantry Stryker Brigade headquartered at Joint Base Lewis-McChord. The Armory's units have been activated for State service in natural disasters and for various national service missions including in the Korean Conflict and Middle East deployments in the early 2000s, and recently, the Covid-19 response.

Alongside its military history, the Armory has been important to Olympia's community history as a familiar, well-used venue and community gathering place. It has hosted everything from auto shows and ski swaps to graduations and State Inaugural Balls. The two-story Drill Floor at the heart of the structure continues to be a popular location for indoor sports and community events.

The Olympia Armory is also significant because it carries the distinctive characteristics of the Art Moderne style of the Public Works Administration period, unchanged since its construction. Designed by Olympia's prolific, premier architect Joseph Wohleb, it is the most ornate among armories built in Washington during the late 1930s, befitting a capitol city.

Implications of Local Listing

Benefits of Armory Local Listing:

- Grant Eligibility. Improves eligibility for supporting grants.
- Protection. Ensures the Armory Building will always be recognizable to the community as the same historic structure.
- Identity. Building will continue to establish a sense of place and community identity.
- History. Connectedness to a common past engenders a sense of continuity and shared purpose.
- Revitalization. The visible stewardship of designated buildings can stabilize or improve the surrounding community and support property values.

Practical Aspects of Local Listing:

- The exterior of the building cannot be significantly altered. Essential exterior alterations require

preservation review, and changes must be compatible.

- Interiors of the building can be altered. Important interior elements are noted in the nomination as worthy of preservation. Changes to these will require preservation review.
- The “Vehicle Barn” structure on the west side of the property is secondary to the main building and can be altered or demolished.
- Preservation Review runs concurrent with the normal City permit process. It can be expedited through pre-permit consultative review.

Myth Busting:

- Listing does NOT prevent an owner from making changes to a building. Exterior preservation is a high priority, but changes can be made as necessary to meet access, code and safety requirements. For public buildings, important interior features may be identified as deserving of preservation.
- Preservation Review is NOT an extra, time-consuming step. It is a regular step in the city’s permitting process that proceeds alongside other permit review disciplines.
- Listing does NOT require re-investment in failed materials or design elements, i.e., systems or designs that didn’t work the first time around.
- Listing does NOT restrict future use of the Armory. The City’s vision for a Creative Campus is a great fit for the building. The Armory’s central gathering hall surrounded by offices, meeting rooms, and a commercial kitchen, offers a configuration that is highly adaptable for classrooms, studios, and flexible learning and meeting spaces. The ground level industrial space and high-bay loading dock present opportunities for big ideas to literally take shape.
- While older buildings can sometimes be inefficient and more expensive to maintain; traditional materials and skilled workmanship are typically higher quality, longer-lasting, sustainable, and wrought by local crafts people, so the investment stays in the community.

Neighborhood/Community Interests (if known):

The Eastside Neighborhood is uniquely interested in the Armory and has expressed strong interest in its future use and ongoing preservation with the goal of ensuring that it continues to be an asset to the neighborhood and the community. They included action steps for its preservation in their January 2020 Eastside Neighborhood Association Sub-Area Plan, which was adopted by City Council, and nominated it for local register listing.

Options:

1. Approve a Resolution Designating the Olympia Armory a Local Heritage Resource and Adding It to the Olympia Heritage Register
2. Amend and approve the resolution.
3. Do not adopt the resolution.

Financial Impact:

Designating the Olympia Armory a local heritage resource and adding it to the Armory on the Olympia Heritage Register does not have a financial impact.

Attachments:

Resolution
Statement of Significance

Type: decision **Version:** 1 **Status:** Passed

Olympia's Municipal Code 18.12.085