TO: HONORABLE CITY COUNCIL

FROM: CITY MANAGER DEPARTMENT: PLANNING AND COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT

DATE: MAY 14, 2007 CMR:233.07

SUBJECT: 564 UNIVERSITY AVENUE: RECOMMENDATION FROM THE HISTORIC RESOURCES BOARD AT THE REQUEST OF AIDA MERRILL, OWNER, TO RECLASSIFY A CATEGORY 4 BUILDING ON THE CITY OF PALO ALTO'S HISTORIC INVENTORY TO CATEGORY 2 PURSUANT TO MUNICIPAL CODE CHAPTER 16.49 (HISTORIC PRESERVATION ORDINANCE)

RECOMMENDATION
The Historic Resources Board (HRB) and staff recommend that the City Council reclassify the property located at 564 University Avenue as a significant building in Category 2 consistent with the definition of Historic Category 2 in Municipal Code Section 16.49.020(b).

BACKGROUND
The two-and-a-half story residential building at 564 University Avenue was constructed by one of Palo Alto’s earliest builders, A. N. Mills, in 1904. As the last remaining residence in the commercial zone of University Avenue, the house is a surprising sight on its retail block. The house achieves architectural distinction through its classical symmetry and its powerful presence produced on the front façade by the full-width overhanging second floor enhanced by projecting corner bays and a pyramidal roof containing a prominent third-floor dormer. The house exhibits an unusually high degree of integrity throughout having undergone almost no alteration since 1904. The architect of the house has not yet been determined, and the builder may have taken the design from a pattern book of the period. It is remarkable that the house has survived intact in an area of University Avenue where all the surrounding original houses were demolished decades ago for commercial buildings. It is also notable that the original owning family retained the house until recently.

The house is historically significant for its first owner, pioneer Palo Alto resident Thomas Forbes, and for its initial use as a rooming house located on the University Avenue streetcar line. During the early 20th century, a number of boarding houses and rooming houses were built in Palo Alto along streetcar lines to provide respectable housing in
conveniently located safe neighborhoods adjacent to public transit for moderate and low income residents who could not afford automobiles. During its first four decades, 564 University provided such housing to a number of diverse short-term renters. The importance of this type of housing to the early social history of Palo Alto was not fully understood in 1980 when the City Council originally designated the property in the lesser Category 4.

During the 1950s and 1960s, when the downtown commercial district was expanding eastward, the use of the house changed from wholly residential to primarily commercial. The variety of small business tenants included some essential community services. Subsequently, in the 1970s, two of Thomas Forbes’ children moved into the house and remained as the sole residents until their deaths (see Attachment A). In 2006, the house was purchased by the current owner who plans to restore it for commercial use and to design a historically appropriate front garden in consultation with staff at Gamble Gardens.

HISTORIC RESOURCES BOARD REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATION
The HRB, at its meeting on April 4, 2007, reviewed the application to reclassify 564 University Avenue to Category 2. Staff, in its presentation to the HRB, observed that good architecture typically combines unity of design with elements of dramatic contrast and that 564 University accomplishes this feat by combining an overall unified symmetrical style with two dramatically contrasting elements: the long open porch of calm and cordial character and the overhanging second floor whose powerful massing and corner bays thrust forward toward the viewer on the sidewalk. These two contrasting features are tied together by the row of simple classical porch columns. Staff also noted the significant early use of the building as a modest cost rooming house conveniently located on a major streetcar line.

The HRB concurred with staff’s conclusions on the significance of the property and, based on consideration of the definitions of the Historic Categories and the criteria for designation in Municipal Code Chapter 16.49, unanimously voted (7-0-0-0) to recommend to the City Council the reclassification of 564 University Avenue as a Category 2 historic building (see Attachment B).

RESTRICTIONS ON DOWNTOWN PROPERTIES IN CATEGORY 2
If the City Council elects to reclassify the property in Category 2, the following regulations would apply:

- Upon designation in Category 2, demolition of the building at 564 University Avenue in the downtown CD zone would be prohibited unless certain economic and safety findings were made as set forth in PAMC 16.49.060.

- Upon designation in Category 2, review of proposed alterations or additions to the building by the Historic Resources Board would be required as provided in PAMC 16.49.050 (a)(1)(A).
• Upon designation in Category 2, the building would be subject to maintenance regulations for downtown historic structures as set forth in PAMC 16.49.080, and enforcement provisions as set forth in 16.49.090.

**RESOURCE IMPACT**
There is no direct impact on City resources associated with the action recommended in this staff report.

**POLICY IMPLICATIONS**
This recommendation does not represent any change to existing City policies.

**ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW**
A Category reclassification of a Historic Inventory property is not a project under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), per Section 21065.

**ATTACHMENTS**
Attachment B: Minutes of the HRB Meeting of March 19, 2003.

PREPARED BY: __________________________________________________________
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