



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

Report to the Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: April 11, 2024 REPORT NO. HRB-24-017

HEARING DATE: April 25, 2024

SUBJECT: **ITEM #3 – San Diego International Sports Arena**

RESOURCE INFO: [California Historical Resources Inventory Database \(CHRID\) link](#)

APPLICANT: Midway Rising, LLC; represented by ASM Affiliates

OWNER: City of San Diego

LOCATION: 3500 Sports Arena Boulevard, Peninsula Community, Council District 2
APN 441-590-0400

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the San Diego International Sports Arena located at 3500 Sports Arena Boulevard as a historical resource.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate the San Diego International Sports Arena located at 3500 Sports Arena Boulevard as a historical resource under Criteria A and B with a period of significance of 1966-1974, and Criterion C with a period of significance of 1966. The designation excludes the temporary storage container, the temporary office building northeast of the arena and the structures located at 3580, 3570, 3494, 3350, 3250, 3240 and 3220 Sports Arena Boulevard. This recommendation is based on the following findings:

1. The resource is a special element of the Midway-Pacific Highway Community and the City's historical, social and economic development and retains integrity to its 1966-1974 period of significance. Specifically, the resource, constructed during the Post WWII period, represents a time of growth throughout San Diego and the movement to expand the City's economic ventures into new industries comparable to other major cities in the country. The International Sports Arena was the most important catalyst in the Midway neighborhood's transformation from WWII housing into a lively entertainment and commercial hub. It was one of the first modern stadiums/arenas in San Diego and served as one of the major sports and entertainment venues in San Diego during the second half of the twentieth century. It was the home of the San Diego Gulls hockey team and San Diego Rockets Basketball team and attracted numerous successful and internationally known performing artists.

2. The resource is associated with Robert Breitbard, a significant person in the history of San Diego sports, and retains integrity for that association. Specifically, Breitbard was instrumental in acquiring the land and funding for the construction of the International Sports Arena in 1966. From 1966 to 1974 he was the owner of the San Diego Gulls, a Western Hockey League franchise who were the arena's first tenants. Breitbard also founded the San Diego Rockets, a National Basketball Association franchise that played at the arena from 1967 to 1971. His efforts to construct the International Sports Arena and general promotion of sports in San Diego as a member of the Greater San Diego Sports Council and founder of the San Diego Hall of Champions helped to attract major sports franchises to the city.
3. The resource embodies the distinctive characteristics through the retention of character defining features of the New Formalist style and retains integrity from its 1966 period of significance. Specifically, the resource features a monumental scale, raised platform, fins mimicking classical colonnades, strict symmetry and formality, a flat roof and ornamental concrete.

BACKGROUND

This item is being brought before the Historical Resources Board in conjunction with a proposed building modification or demolition of a structure of 45 years or more, consistent with San Diego Municipal Code Section 143.0212.

The property was identified in the [City of San Diego Midway-Pacific Highway Community Plan Area Historic Resources Survey Report: Historic Context & Reconnaissance Survey](#) and given a Status Code of 5S3, "appears to be individually eligible for local listing or designation through survey evaluation."

The historic name of the resource, the San Diego International Sports Arena, has been identified consistent with the Board's adopted naming policy and reflects the specific name placed on the building upon construction.

In order to be eligible for designation and listing on the City's Register, a resource must meet one or more of the City's designation criteria as specified in the Historical Resources Guidelines of the Land Development Manual and retain integrity as it relates to the significance of the resource. Integrity is the ability of a property to convey its significance, which requires an understanding of the physical features and characteristics that existed during the resource's period of significance. The National, California, and City of San Diego Registers recognize location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association as the seven aspects of historical integrity.

Although not all seven aspects of integrity need to be present for a property to be eligible for designation, the record must demonstrate that the property retains enough physical and design characteristics to reflect and convey the significance of the property. Each resource depends on certain aspects of integrity, more than others, to express its historic significance. Determining which of the aspects are most important to a particular property requires an understanding of the property's significance and its essential physical features. The [Guidelines for the Application of Historical Resources Board Designation Criteria](#) provide information regarding the City's designation criteria, as well as guidance on their application and how to evaluate the integrity of a resource.

ANALYSIS

The property located at 3500 Sports Area Boulevard is a large oval-shaped, New Formalist style stadium constructed in 1966 in the Peninsula Community Planning Area. Other buildings and structures present on the large parcel include Summit Gasoline/Auto Bistro (3580 Sports Arena) Chick-fila-A (3570 Sports Arena) and Chili's (3570 Sports Arena) restaurants, a one-story commercial shopping center (3350 Sports Arena), a Dixieline Lumber store (3250 Sports Arena), a Salvation Army Thrift store (3240 Sports Arena) and a vacant commercial structure (3220 Sports Arena). Additionally, there is a temporary office structure located northeast of the arena. All structures on the parcel are being separately evaluated for historic significance. The property is located in a densely developed commercial area. The property is in its original location.

Since its construction in 1966 the property has been modified as follows: multiple telecommunications antennas have been added to the structure at various times, a temporary storage container was constructed between 2016 and 2020 adjacent to the eastern entrance and a portable office structure was constructed between 2020 and 2023 just northeast of the arena. In 2017 Heritage Preservation reviewed a project for the creation of a smoking area just north of the western entrance and determined it to be consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards. The scope of the project included adding a new door in the building's exterior façade, converting a planting area to a patio and adding a chain link fence.

A Historical Resource Technical Report was prepared by ASM Affiliates, which concludes that the resource is significant under HRB Criteria A, B and C and staff concurs. This determination is consistent with the *Guidelines for the Application of Historical Resources Board Designation Criteria*, as follows.

CRITERION A - Exemplifies or reflects special elements of the City's, a community's or a neighborhood's historical, archaeological, cultural, social, economic, political, aesthetic, engineering, landscaping or architectural development.

The 2018 *Midway-Pacific Highway Community Plan Area Historic Resources Survey Report: Historic Context and Reconnaissance Survey* discusses the evolution of the Midway-Pacific Highway area and identifies themes significant to the development of Midway-Pacific Highway and the City of San Diego as a whole. One of the themes identified in the context is "Post War Commercial and Residential Development (1945-1970)." The HRTR evaluated the subject property within this theme, expanding the analysis to provide additional historical content on sports and entertainment in San Diego as well as mid-twentieth century stadiums and arenas. Relevant excerpts from the analysis in the HRTR are summarized below.

The character of the Midway-Pacific Highway area as it exists today, began to take shape during the Post WWII era. Prior to WWII, the commercial and residential development of the area was random and sparse. Commercial businesses were largely related to the airport, aircraft plants and military bases. The Frontier Housing Project, constructed by the Federal Works Agency to provide massive amounts of temporary housing to wartime San Diego, was completed in May of 1944. The 1,100 units were located on the current site of the International Sports Arena and were only intended to only last for two years. The community began to transform during the 1960s, when modern

commercial buildings were constructed on vacant lots or replaced older commercial and residential buildings.

The greatest change to the area in the 1960s was the construction of the International Sports Arena. As early as the 1950s, San Diego had been seeking to attract professional sports franchises. Robert Breitbard acquired the Gulls, then a member of the Western Hockey League, and began to plan for the construction of an indoor arena. The land on which the International Sports Arena is currently located was purchased from the Federal government by the City of San Diego in 1955; however, the \$6,500,000 for construction was privately financed by Breitbard and his associates. The arena, which opened in November of 1966, was designed for seating 13,500 people for hockey and 16,000 people for other sporting and public events. Within a year, a professional basketball team, the San Diego Rockets, also began to use the arena. The area surrounding the arena began to grow as a variety of restaurants were established to feed sports fans before and after games.

The construction of the International Sports Arena was part of a broader trend of Modern-style stadiums constructed throughout the country during the mid-twentieth century. Having a major league professional sports team was a status symbol in the 1960s and construction of the International Sports Arena helped San Diego stay on par with other major U.S. cities. Other sports arenas constructed in Southern California in the 1960s era of Urban Renewal include the Los Angeles Memorial Sports Arena (1959), the Los Angeles Forum (1967) and the San Diego Stadium (1967). In San Diego, the construction of the San Diego Stadium and International Sports Arena represented the economic development of San Diego during the 1960s and the City's interest in expanding recreational venues.

Of the seven aspects of integrity, location, setting, feeling, and association are the most critical to the property's ability to convey significance under HRB Criterion A as a special element of historical, social and economic development. The property, which has been modified as detailed in the beginning of the analysis section of this report, has been minimally modified by the addition of antennas and a smoking area. Additionally, the more recent temporary storage structure and portable office building have been constructed in discrete locations and do not impair the building's ability to convey its significance as a special element of development of the Midway-Pacific Highway Community and the City as a whole. Therefore, the property does retain integrity to its 1966-1974 period of significance under HRB Criterion A.

Significance Statement: The resource is a special element of the Midway-Pacific Highway Community and the City's historical, social and economic development and retains integrity to its 1966-1974 period of significance. Specifically, the resource, constructed during the Post WWII period, represents a time of growth throughout San Diego and the movement to expand the City's economic ventures into new industries comparable to other major cities in the country. The International Sports Arena was the most important catalyst in the Midway neighborhood's transformation from WWII housing into a lively entertainment and commercial hub. It was one of the first modern stadiums/arenas in San Diego and served as one of the major sports and entertainment venues in San Diego during the second half of the twentieth century. It was the home of the San Diego Gulls hockey team and San Diego Rockets Basketball team and attracted numerous successful and internationally known performing artists. Therefore, staff recommends designation under HRB Criterion A.

CRITERION B - *Is identified with persons or events significant in local, state or national history.*

Football coach and businessman Robert Breitbard was instrumental in initiating and helping to fund the construction of the International Sports Arena. Born in San Diego in 1919, Breitbard attended Hoover High School where he was class president and played on the football team. In 1941 he graduated from San Diego State College with a bachelor's degree in physical education. While in college, he played guard and center in football and lettered in the sport for three years. After graduation, he coached freshman football at State for the 1941 season. After that, he became a coach for the varsity football team at Hoover and the head baseball coach. Breitbard was rejected from military service during WWII because of flat feet and he earned a master's degree in education from USC while coaching at Hoover. In 1945 he returned to State as the football team's head coach and helped to reestablish the school's football program after it was put on hold during WWII. He eventually stopped coaching to operate his family's laundry business but continued to stay active in San Diego's sports scene.

Breitbard was critical to the construction of the International Sports Arena. Along with four partners, he leased 80 acres of land from the City and was issued \$6.4 million in bonds to be paid from arena revenue. The arena's first tenant was the San Diego Gulls, a Western Hockey League franchise that had been awarded to Breitbard on the condition of providing an arena. He hoped to further enhance San Diego's stature as a major sports city by gaining a National Hockey League (NHL) franchise. The NHL franchise never materialized, but Breitbard was able to attract a National Basketball Association franchise, the San Diego Rockets, to the International Sports Arena in 1967. In 1971, Breitbard sold the Rockets to Houston-based investors for \$5.5 million. Breitbard sold the Gulls and retired in 1974; however, the team continued to play in the arena until 1995. The Gulls returned in 2015 and currently call the arena home.

In addition to his efforts to attract major sports franchises to San Diego, Breitbard founded the Breitbard Athletic Association in 1946 to honor local high school, amateur and professional athletes. The association spawned the founding of the Breitbard Hall of Fame which is now called the San Diego Hall of Champions, a sports museum in Balboa Park opened by Breitbard in 1961. He was also a member of the Greater San Diego Sports Council. Breitbard passed away in 2010 at the age of 91.

Of the seven aspects of integrity, location, setting, feeling, and association are the most critical to the property's ability to convey significance under HRB Criterion B for its association with Robert Breitbard. The property, which has been modified as detailed in the beginning of the analysis section of this report, has been minimally modified by the addition of antennas and a smoking area. Additionally, the more recent temporary storage structure and portable office building have been constructed in discrete locations and do not impair the building's ability to convey its association with Breitbard. Therefore, the property does retain integrity to its 1966-1974 period of significance under HRB Criterion B.

Significance Statement: The resource is associated with Robert Breitbard, a significant person in the history of San Diego sports, and retains integrity for that association. Specifically, Breitbard was instrumental in acquiring the land and funding for the construction of the International Sports Arena in 1966. From 1966 to 1974 he was the owner of the San Diego Gull, a Western Hockey League franchise who were the arena's first tenants. Breitbard also founded the San Diego Rockets, a

National Basketball Association franchise that played at the arena from 1967 to 1971. His efforts to construct the International Sports Arena and general promotion of sports in San Diego as a member of the Greater San Diego Sports Council and founder of the San Diego Hall of Champions helped to attract major sports franchises to the city. Therefore, staff recommends designation under HRB Criterion B.

CRITERION C - *Embodies distinctive characteristics of a style, type, period or method of construction or is a valuable example of the use of natural materials or craftsmanship.*

The subject resource located at 3500 Sports Arena Boulevard is a large, oval-shaped stadium constructed in 1966 in the New Formalist style. The arena sits at the center of a large parcel surrounded by an asphalt parking lot. A concrete pathway leads to the southern entrance from Sports Arena Boulevard. The building is elevated on a concrete pedestal emphasizing its monumental scale. The exterior is concrete and features projecting fins at regular intervals which mimic the appearance of a colonnade on the upper two-thirds of the building. Telecommunications antennas are located between many of the fins just below the flat roof. The bottom portion of the exterior consists of smooth concrete. Four, similarly designed entrances are located on the exterior of the building and are characterized by a wide, low staircase and a concrete overhang that covers the entryway. The entry storefront is comprised of floor-to-ceiling fixed glass windows and doors. The side walls of the entrances extend from the exterior into the interior of the building and feature a geometric design. Planters with palm trees flank the west, south and east entrances. The box office is located between the west and north entrances and projects from the main façade. A garage door and loading ramp are located between the north and east entrances and are adjacent to a low, one-story concrete projection.

New Formalism is an architectural style that emerged in the United States during the mid 1950's and 1960's. The style rejects the rigid form of Modernism and embraces Classical precedents such as building proportion and scale, classical columns, highly stylized entablatures, and colonnades. The newly discovered plastic-like qualities of concrete allowed the style to utilize new forms such as umbrella shells, waffle slabs and folded plates. New Formalism was typically used for high-profile cultural, institutional and civic buildings designed on a monumental urban scale. Other common features of New Formalism include buildings usually set on a podium; smooth wall surfaces; delicate details; a formal landscape that uses pools, fountains and sculpture within a central plaza and the use of traditionally rich materials, such as travertine, marble and granite. New Formalism was not identified as a style in the *San Diego Modernism Historic Context Statement*; however, there are many examples of the style throughout the City, particularly on institutional campuses and within the Downtown community. The HRTR provides additional background on the New Formalist style.

Of the seven aspects of integrity, design, materials, and workmanship are the most critical to the property's ability to convey significance under HRB Criterion C as a resource that embodies the distinctive characteristics of the New Formalist style. The property, which has been modified as detailed in the beginning of the analysis section of this report, has been minimally modified by the addition of antennas and a smoking area. Additionally, the more recent temporary storage structure and portable office building have been constructed in discrete locations and do not impair the building's ability to convey its architectural significance. Therefore, the property does retain integrity to its 1966 period of significance under HRB Criterion C.

Significance Statement: The resource continues to convey the historic significance of the New Formalist style by embodying the historic characteristics associated with the style; including monumental scale, raised platform, fins mimicking classical colonnades, strict symmetry and formality, a flat roof and ornamental concrete. Therefore, staff recommends designation under HRB Criterion C.

CRITERION D - Is representative of a notable work of a master builder, designer, architect, engineer, landscape architect, interior designer, artist or craftsman.

The subject property at 3500 Sports Arena Boulevard was designed by Victor Meyer and built by the Trepte Construction Company. Neither Meyer nor the Trepte Construction Company have been established by the Historical Resources Board as a Master Architect, Designer or Builder, and there is insufficient information to designate them as such at this time. Therefore, staff does not recommend designation under HRB Criterion D. As the property is not significant under Criterion D, an evaluation of integrity as it relates to Criterion D is not relevant or required.

CRITERION E - Is listed or has been determined eligible by the National Park Service for listing on the National Register of Historic Places or is listed or has been determined eligible by the State Historical Preservation Office for listing on the State Register of Historical Resources.

The property at 3500 Sports Arena Boulevard has not been listed on or determined eligible for listing on the State or National Registers. Therefore, the property is not eligible for designation under HRB Criterion E. As the property is not significant under Criterion E, an evaluation of integrity as it relates to Criterion E is not relevant or required.

CRITERION F - Is a finite group of resources related to one another in a clearly distinguishable way or is a geographically definable area or neighborhood containing improvements which have a special character, historical interest or aesthetic value or which represent one or more architectural periods or styles in the history and development of the City.

The property at 3500 Sports Arena Boulevard is not located within a designated historic district. Therefore, the property is not eligible for designation under HRB Criterion F. As the property is not significant under Criterion F, an evaluation of integrity as it relates to Criterion F is not relevant or required.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Designation brings with it the responsibility of maintaining the building in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards. The benefits of designation include the availability of the Mills Act Program for reduced property tax; the use of the more flexible Historical Building Code; flexibility in the application of other regulatory requirements; the use of the Historical Conditional Use Permit which allows flexibility of use; and other programs which vary depending on the specific site conditions and owner objectives. If the property is designated by the HRB, conditions related to restoration or rehabilitation of the resource may be identified by staff during the Mills Act application process, and included in any future Mills Act contract.

CONCLUSION

Based on the information submitted and staff's field check, it is recommended that the San Diego International Sports Arena located at 3500 Sports Arena Boulevard be designated under Criterion A as a special element of the development of the Midway-Pacific Highway Community and the City as a whole, under Criterion B for its association with Robert Breitbard, and under Criterion C as an example of the New Formalist style. The designation excludes the temporary storage container, the temporary office building northeast of the arena and the structures located at 3580, 3570, 3494, 3350, 3250, 3240 and 3220 Sports Arena Boulevard.



Suzanne Segur
Senior Planner/ HRB Liaison
City Planning Department

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Attachment(s):

1. Draft Resolution
2. Applicant's Historical Report under separate cover

RESOLUTION NUMBER N/A
ADOPTED ON 4/25/2024

WHEREAS, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego held a noticed public hearing on 4/25/2024, to consider the historical designation of the San Diego International Sports Arena (owned by City of San Diego (DREAM), 1200 Third Avenue, Suite 1700, San Diego, CA 92101) located at **3500 Sports Arena Blvd, San Diego, CA 92110**, APN: **441-590-04-00**, further described as in the City of San Diego, County of San Diego, State of California; and

WHEREAS, in arriving at their decision, the Historical Resources Board considered the historical resources report prepared by the applicant, the staff report and recommendation, all other materials submitted prior to and at the public hearing, inspected the subject property and heard public testimony presented at the hearing; and

WHEREAS, the property would be added to the Register of Designated Historical Resources as **Site No. 0**, and

WHEREAS, designated historical resources located within the City of San Diego are regulated by the Municipal Code (Chapter 14, Article 3, Division 2) as such any exterior modifications (or interior if any interior is designated) shall be approved by the City, this includes but is not limited to modifications to any windows or doors, removal or replacement of any exterior surfaces (i.e. paint, stucco, wood siding, brick), any alterations to the roof or roofing material, alterations to any exterior ornamentation and any additions or significant changes to the landscape/ site.

NOW, THEREFORE,

BE IT RESOLVED, the Historical Resources Board based its designation of the San Diego International Sports Arena on the following findings:

(1) The property is historically significant under CRITERION A as a special element of the Midway-Pacific Highway Community and the City's historical, social and economic development and retains integrity to its 1966-1974 period of significance. Specifically, the resource, constructed during the Post WWII period, represents a time of growth throughout San Diego and the movement to expand the City's economic ventures into new industries comparable to other major cities in the country. The International Sports Arena was the most important catalyst in the Midway neighborhood's transformation from WWII housing into a lively entertainment and commercial hub. It was one of the first modern stadiums/arenas in San Diego and served as one of the major sports and entertainment venues in San Diego during the second half of the twentieth century. It was the home of the San Diego Gulls hockey team and San Diego Rockets Basketball team and attracted numerous successful and internationally known performing artists. This finding is further supported by the staff report, the historical research report, and written and oral evidence presented at the designation hearing.

(2) The property is historically significant under CRITERION B for its association with Robert Breitbard, a significant person in the history of San Diego sports, and retains integrity for that association. Specifically, Breitbard was instrumental in acquiring the land and funding for the construction of the International Sports Arena in 1966. From 1966 to 1974 he was the owner of the San Diego Gulls, a Western Hockey League franchise who were the arena's first tenants. Breitbard also founded the San Diego Rockets, a National Basketball Association franchise that played at the arena from 1967 to 1971. His efforts to construct the International Sports Arena and general promotion of sports in San Diego as a member of the Greater San Diego Sports Council and founder of the San Diego Hall of Champions helped to attract major sports franchises to the city. This finding is further supported by the staff report, the historical research report, and written and oral evidence presented at the designation hearing.

(3) The property is historically significant under CRITERION C for its distinctive characteristics through the retention of character defining features of the New Formalist style and retains integrity from its

1966 period of significance. Specifically, the resource features a monumental scale, raised platform, fins mimicking classical colonnades, strict symmetry and formality, a flat roof and ornamental concrete. This finding is further supported by the staff report, the historical research report, and written and oral evidence presented at the designation hearing.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, in light of the foregoing, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego hereby approves the historical designation of the above named property. The designation includes the parcel and exterior of the building as Designated Historical Resource **Site No. 0**.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the designation shall exclude the temporary storage container, the temporary office building northeast of the arena and the structures located at 3580, 3570, 3494, 3350, 3250, 3240 and 3220 Sports Arena Boulevard.

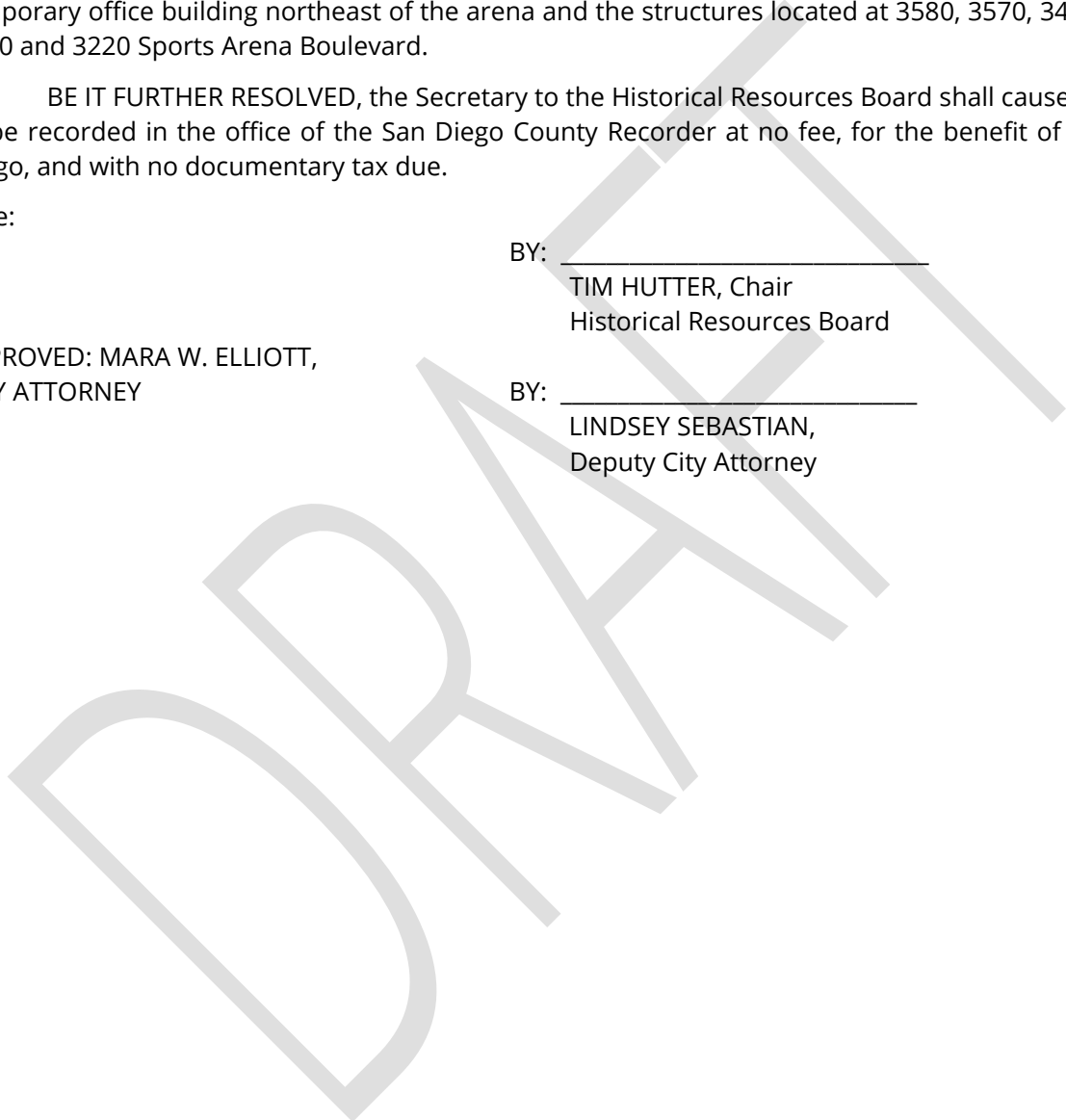
BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the Secretary to the Historical Resources Board shall cause this resolution to be recorded in the office of the San Diego County Recorder at no fee, for the benefit of the City of San Diego, and with no documentary tax due.

Vote:

BY: _____
TIM HUTTER, Chair
Historical Resources Board

APPROVED: MARA W. ELLIOTT,
CITY ATTORNEY

BY: _____
LINDSEY SEBASTIAN,
Deputy City Attorney



RECORDING REQUESTED BY
CITY OF SAN DIEGO
DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DEPARTMENT

WHEN RECORDED MAIL TO

HISTORICAL RESOURCES BOARD
ATTN: HRB SECRETARY
1222 FIRST AVENUE, MS 501
SAN DIEGO, CA 92101

SPACE ABOVE THIS LINE FOR RECORDER'S USE

RESOLUTION NUMBER **N/A**

HISTORICAL DESIGNATION OF PROPERTY ON

3500 Sports Arena Blvd, San Diego, CA 92110

ASSESSOR PARCEL NUMBER **441-590-04-00**

HISTORICAL RESOURCES BOARD NUMBER **0**