



523 West Sixth Street, Suite 826
Los Angeles, CA 90014

213 623 2489 OFFICE
213 623 3909 FAX
laconservancy.org

April 2, 2025

Submitted electronically via
<https://cityclerk.lacity.org/publiccomment/>

Planning and Land Use Management Committee
200 North Spring Street, Room 340
Los Angeles, CA 90012

**Re: 5922-5930 North Buffalo Avenue / William Mellenthin
Birdhouse Apartments - CF-25-0179**

Dear Members of the PLUM Committee,

The Los Angeles Conservancy fully supports the nomination of the William Mellenthin Birdhouse Apartments in the list of Historic-Cultural Monuments, and ask the Committee to recommend to the City Council that it be declared as an HCM. We are pleased that the nomination will go before you for consideration, as it conveys an important element of the San Fernando Valley's history.

In this six-unit courtyard apartment designed by renowned builder and developer William Mellenthin, the typical "American Dream" is a little denser, but no less picturesque. In the postwar period, Mellenthin designed over 3,000 homes across Los Angeles, contributing to its rapid growth. His influence is seen all across the San Fernando Valley where his iconic cupola birdhouse design graced single-family homes across the growing suburbs. In recent years, appreciation for the style has grown. Architecturally intact Mellenthin homes often garner premium values in the housing market.

In the 1950s, Mellenthin began to apply the Traditional Ranch style to multi-family residences. Few remain, however, making the William Mellenthin Birdhouse Apartments an extremely rare building type. The courtyard and landscaping creates a community atmosphere for tenants, some who have lived there for over two decades. They serve as an example



of how builders can create affordable multi-family units while providing dignified living spaces. Through thoughtful design, Mellenthin was able to offer the same American Dream to tenants that he was able to mass-produce for homebuyers. Perhaps most importantly, these six are units are currently rent-stabilized, providing some security for existing tenants.

The Birdhouse Apartments and its inhabitants are facing imminent demolition and displacement due to a redevelopment project proposed at the site. The 5-story, 104 unit building that is slated to replace it has been approved under Executive Directive 1, even though the Historic-Cultural Monument application had already been deemed complete. The Department of City Planning and City Attorney's office contends that HCM status cannot be applied to the ED-1 project.

This is a dangerous loophole that exists, and could lead to the demolition of many eligible resources and RSO units. We hope that the Committee can seek clarification on this issue and make steps to close the loophole. Due to deteriorating market conditions and increasing construction costs, we expect that if these apartments are demolished, the site will sit vacant until it is sold or a new, more marketable project is approved on the site.

Despite the proposed demolition of the complex, we ask that the Committee approve the nomination as a way to honor and enshrine an often overlooked aspect of the San Fernando Valley's history. It is important to note that HCM status could be used beneficially by current or future owners by opening up incentives such as the Mills Act and the State Historical Building Code. The Mills Act is currently going through the policy update and ordinance amendment process that will improve equity and prioritize naturally occurring affordable housing complexes such as the one before you for consideration.

Due to the imposed constraints of ED-1 and the Housing Crisis Act on the designation process, we do not see HCM status as an impediment for development, though some comment letters have mischaracterized this. Designating the William Mellenthin Birdhouse Apartments as an HCM gives the property two options: either to build the ED-1 project or to continue to maintain the current fully-occupied structures as long-term assets. We ask Council District 2 and the whole City Council to help avoid the increasingly more likely outcome – that six RSO units are demolished with no replacement project on the horizon.

The Birdhouse Apartments are certainly worthy of recognition and designation. There are few sites that receive the natural outpouring of support from previous owners, current and previous tenants, community members, and architectural historians. The Cultural Heritage Commission noted and commended these many messages of support in their deliberations, which led to their unanimous vote of approval. We ask that you declare the William Mellenthin Birdhouse



Apartments as an HCM and encourage its preservation as an important Traditional Ranch multi-family complex by a master builder.

About the Los Angeles Conservancy:

The Los Angeles Conservancy is the largest local historic preservation organization in the United States, with nearly 5,000 member households throughout the Los Angeles area. Established in 1978, the Conservancy works to preserve and revitalize the significant architectural and cultural heritage of Los Angeles County through advocacy and education.

Sincerely,



Andrew Salimian
Director of Advocacy

