TO: HONORABLE CITY COUNCIL

FROM: CITY MANAGER

DEPARTMENT: PLANNING AND COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT

DATE: MAY 20, 2002

SUBJECT: 900 HIGH STREET: RECOMMENDATION FROM THE HISTORIC RESOURCES BOARD AT THE REQUEST OF THE OWNERS, THE SANTANA FAMILY, TO DESIGNATE A BUILDING DESIGNED BY BIRGE CLARK TO THE CITY OF PALO ALTO'S HISTORIC INVENTORY IN 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 honor the owner's request to designate the building located at 900 High Street as a significant building in Category 2 based on its finding that the building meets the definition of a Category 2 building and all six local criteria for historic designation as set forth in Chapter 16.49.

BACKGROUND
This postwar modernist building was designed by Birge Clark and Walter Stromquist in 1946. It was constructed by the well-known local builder, Wells P. Goodenough, who had collaborated with Birge Clark since the beginning of Clark's career in the early 1920's.

The building, as originally built for the Palo Alto Nash Company, was depicted in a drawing by Clark and Stromquist that appeared in an advertisement in the Palo Alto Times in 1946 (see Attachment D). A comparison of the drawing with the existing building shows that the original massing of the building remains unchanged, and that the distinctive modernist fenestration design is generally intact. The report by Dames & Moore noted the most significant alteration of the building to date: the addition of four aluminum entry doors on the glass walls of the showroom in 1960. The only substantial change that has apparently occurred since the Dames & Moore report is the replacement of the large garage door on Channing Avenue with aluminum framed fenestration.
However, this change did not alter the basic architecture of the building and is consequently reversible.

The historic character-defining features of the building include the overall form composed of two contrasting parts (the sales and service structure at the rear and the glass showroom at the front), the projecting stucco string course that unites the two parts, the wood bow-truss roof of the rear portion, the flaring roof of the showroom, the modernist pattern of the showroom fenestration, the distinctive aluminum window dividers displaying raised ridges down the center, the steel sash on the north and south elevations, the two garage openings, and the extensive industrial sash at the rear of the building.

**DISCUSSION**

The finding by the HRB that the building meets the definition of a Category 2 historical structure is consistent with the evaluation of the City’s historic survey consultant, Dames & Moore, that the building retains its basic integrity, and appears eligible for the National Register of Historic Places at the local level of significance under Criterion C (Design/Construction) as "a characteristic example of an important building type, an automobile showroom and sales building, most examples of which have been remodeled, designed by the important Palo Alto architect, Birge Clark" (see Attachments A and B). The building is also eligible for the National Register under Criterion A (Event) as a representative of the rapidly expanding automobile business of the postwar period. Staff recommends that Attachments A and B to this report be adopted by the City Council as the basis of the designation.

Regulatory consequences to this property if the Council chooses to accept the Board’s recommendation include:

- Upon designation in Category 2, demolition of the building at 900 High Street, and located in the downtown CD zone, would be prohibited unless certain conditions were met as set forth in PAMC 16.49.060.

- Upon designation in Category 2, the Architectural Review Board review of proposed alterations or additions to the building would be required to include referral to the Historic Resources Board for recommendations, as provided in PAMC 16.49.050 (1)(A).

- Upon designation in Category 2, the building would be subject to maintenance regulations for historic structures as set forth in PAMC 16.49.080 and the enforcement provisions set forth in 16.49.090.

**HISTORIC RESOURCES BOARD REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATION**

The HRB, at its meeting on April 17, 2002, reviewed the application for the historic designation of the building at 900 High Street (see Attachment E). The applicant, Steve Pierce, representing the property owners, informed the Board that the purpose of the designation application is to qualify the building for the City's Transfer of Development
Rights program. The HRB unanimously voted (6-0-0-1, Mario absent) to support the staff recommendation for designation of 900 High Street as a Category 2 historic building and to forward the Board's recommendation to the City Council. The Board's recommendation was based on consideration of the definitions of the Historic Categories and the criteria for designation found in Palo Alto Municipal Code Chapter 16.49, and on consideration of the Dames & Moore historic survey evaluation of the building.

ATTACHMENTS
Attachment A: Historic Resources Board staff report of April 17, 2002
Attachment C: Current Photograph of the Building at 900 High Street.
Attachment E: Verbatim Minutes of the HRB Meeting of April 17, 2002.

PREPARED BY: ________________________________
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DEPARTMENT HEAD REVIEW: _________________________________________
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