

## II. HISTORIC CONTEXT STATEMENT

### A. Torrance and Garden City Movement:

The plan for the original City of Torrance, known as the Olmsted Tract, owes its origins to a movement that began in England in the late 19th Century. Sir Ebenezer Howard published his manifesto "Garden Cities of To-morrow" in 1898 where he describes a utopian city in which man lives harmoniously together with the rest of nature. The London suburbs of Letchworth Garden City and Welwyn Garden City were the first built examples of garden city planning and became a model for urban planners in America. In 1899 Ebenezer founded the Garden City Association to promote his idea for the Garden City "in which all the advantages of the most energetic town life would be secured in perfect combination with all the beauty and delight of the country." His notions about the integration of nature with town planning had profound influence on the design of cities and the modern suburb in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

Examples of Garden City Plans in America include: Forest Hills Gardens, New York (by Fredrick Law Olmsted Jr.); Radburn, New Jersey; Shaker Heights, Ohio; Baldwin Hills Village, in Los Angeles, California and Greenbelt, Maryland.

Fredrick Law Olmsted is considered to be the father of the landscape architecture profession in America. He had two sons that inherited his legacy and firm. They practiced as the Olmsted Brothers of Brookline Massachusetts. Fredrick Law Olmsted Junior was a founding member of The National Planning Institute of America and was its President from 1910 to 1919. During this time Fredrick Law Olmsted Junior created town plans for: Detroit (1905); Utica, (1907); Boulder; New Haven; Pittsburg (1910); and Newport in 1913.

Fredrick Law Olmsted Junior believed the main frame work of a town plan was its transportation system. He first developed this idea in the New York Suburb of Forest Hills Gardens where the central town square is located adjacent to the Forest Hills Gardens Long Island Railway Station. This planning principle is evident in his plan for Torrance with its axial street grid, rotated to take advantage of a view of Mount Baldy. The plan is anchored by a train station at one end and, according to his plan, the City Hall (now Torrance High School) at the other end. Olmsted's recognition of the emerging role of the automobile in transportation is expressed in the Torrance City Plan with vehicular feeder streets radiating outward from the town center and railway depot.

One aspect that makes Torrance an especially important example of the Garden City Movement in America was the collaboration between the Olmsted Brothers and Architect Irving Gill. They became acquainted during the construction of the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the discovery of the new world, in Chicago, Illinois. Fredrick Law Olmsted Junior worked for his father chief landscape architect for the exposition. Irving Gill worked for the Chicago

architectural firm of Adler and Sullivan on the main transportation building for the exposition. The buildings Irving Gill designed for the new City of Torrance were a departure from the popular arts and crafts and classical revival styles of the day. They have given Torrance, among planned garden cities, a truly unique legacy in the evolution of the modern movement in America.

The historic period of significance for the Olmsted Tract spans from 1912 through the pre-World War Two era (1940). Residential and Commercial design in the war years and the post war era changed significantly abandoning a specific stylistic approach in favor of utilitarian minimalist design devoid of character defining detailing.

B. Jared Sidney Torrance, an Urban Design Vision:

Jared Sidney Torrance was born in Gowanda, New York, the son of prosperous wool manufacturers. Torrance graduated from Scheffield Science School at Yale University in 1875. To broaden his life experience he served as a tutor for the children of a wealthy family in the City of Stralsund, Germany prior to starting his business career. From 1876 to 1878 he managed the family business in New York. In 1887 he decided to move the family to Pasadena, California.

Torrance's father was a committed democrat, but he considered himself an independent liberal capitalist. He rose quickly in the Southern California business world becoming the President of Union Oil Company and served on many Corporate Board of Directors.

In 1911 he purchased 3100 acres of land from the Dominguez Family Tract of the Old Dominguez Rancho. Torrance and his business partners wanted to establish their own industrial town because of escalating real estate values in Los Angeles and the growing labor unrest in the city in the aftermath of the bombing of the Los Angeles Times Building. He believed that by building a 'workers paradise' it would be so wonderful labor unrest would vanish.

His stated goals for this new model city of the future would include affordable housing for the workers, with opportunities for recreation, culture, and education. Torrance engaged the firm of The Olmsted Brothers of Brookline Massachusetts, recognized for their work as urban planners to design his model industrial town. Torrance initially rejected the idea of naming his new venture after himself.

C. Fredrick Law Olmsted Junior, Urban Designer

Fredrick Law Olmsted Junior was born July 24, 1870 in Staten Island, New York. He was the son of Fredrick Law Olmsted Senior the father of Landscape Architectural Design in America. Fredrick Law Olmsted Senior was responsible for the design of Central Park in New York City, an American Masterpiece, and many other important urban parks.

Fredrick Law Olmsted Junior attended Harvard University and graduated in 1894. He immediately joined, along with his brother, The Olmsted Firm in Brookline, Massachusetts. He was a founding member of the American Society of Landscape Architects and later served as its President. He was president of The National Planning Institute of America. His notable projects include: the re-design of The National Mall in Washington D.C.; The Jefferson Memorial; The White House Grounds; The Master Plan

for Cornell University; and The Garden City Plan of Forest Hills Gardens in New York. The Olmsted firm went on to play a major role in the development of the modern suburb with involvement in the layout of 450 subdivisions and 670 communities in America.

He worked with his father on the landscape plans for the Worlds Columbia Exposition in Chicago, Illinois. The Worlds Columbian Exposition was built to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the discovery of the new world by Christopher Columbus. The exposition grounds were destroyed after the fair was closed but left a lasting legacy in America spawning what has become known as the City Beautiful Movement.

Fredrick Law Olmsted Junior completed two notable projects in California, The Garden City Plan of Torrance and a California statewide survey of potential park lands that would become the foundation of the California State Park System.

#### D. Irving Gill, Architect

Irving Gill was born near Syracuse, New York on April 26, 1870. His parents were of Quaker Ancestry. The Quakers were known for their restrained simplicity, particularly in dress and architecture. Irving Gill, foregoing a formal education, moved to the booming city of Chicago at age 20 and eventually landed a job in the prestigious firm of Adler and Sullivan. He worked under the supervision of the firm's chief draftsman, Frank Lloyd Wright, for two years.

He worked directly for Louis Sullivan on The Transportation Building at the Worlds Columbian Exposition, the only building at the exposition not design in a Neo-classical Style. For the next half century The Neo-classical Style would be the dominate style for public buildings in America.

In 1893 Gill moved to San Diego, California, after he developed an immune disorder brought on by exhaustion, at the recommendation of his doctor. Gill recovered form his illness in the balmy climate of Southern California which he called "This fair Italy of ours". Gill quickly established himself as a noted designer of minimally decorated period style single family residences. His work from this period incorporated elements from the emerging Prairie Style he was exposed to during his time in Chicago. He was also influenced by Mission Revival Movement underway in California.

Around 1907 Gill began his departure from the Arts and Crafts and Classical Revival movements. His work began to take on a decidedly modernist vocabulary, eliminating almost all ornament relying rather on planar walls with large square or arched openings. Many of his designs included flat roofs.

By the time Gill was engaged by the Olmsted Brothers to design buildings for the new Garden City of Torrance he had moved beyond residential design. He had completed a number of important public buildings in his new style (which seemed undomestic) to many potential residential home clients. Public commissions included: The Scripps Institute for Oceanography, 1910; Fontana Elementary School, 1913; First Church of Christ Scientist San Diego, 1910; and the La Jolla Women's Club, 1914.

In 1913 Gill was invited by his old colleagues and fellow secessionists (the Olmsted Brothers) to collaborate on the design of the new model industrial City of Torrance south of Los Angeles. The new town was named for its founder Jared Sydney Torrance. Gill in his plain mature style designed a number of buildings for Torrance including: The

Pacific Railway Train Depot; The Torrance Railway Bridge; The El Roi Tan Hotel; The Bank of Torrance; The Rubber Craft Corporation; Torrance Elementary School and Several Commercial Structures on Cabrillo Avenue.

E. Development and Growth of the Olmsted Tract;

In 1912 Jared Sidney Torrance and several business associates formed The Dominguez Land Company. This company acquired land and founded the City of Torrance. The City was officially incorporated as a California Municipality in 1921. The Dominguez Land Company created a unique legacy for Torrance by hiring The Olmsted Brothers to plan the city and Irving Gill to be its first City Architect.

The Dominguez Land Company secured the industrial foundation of the town with sites for the Union Tool Company, Llewellyn Iron Works, and The Pacific Electrical Railway. The Olmsted Tract saw a major boost in its development in the 1920's due to the discovery of a major oil field nearby which brought to the city considerable oil industry investment. During the economic down turn of the Great Depression in the 1930's Torrance continue to prosper because of this solid industrial base. During this period the Olmsted Tract benefited from Depression Era programs such as the Works Progress Administration which funded new civic buildings within the tract.

In the 1940's The Olmsted Tract and the City of Torrance were well positioned with their steel, oil and rubber industries to benefit from lucrative government war contracts. By the end of that decade The Olmsted Tract had been fully developed and City of Torrance itself had expanded to many times the size of the original tract.

F. Design Influences in Torrance

1. The Town Plan

The original Olmsted Tract, designed by the Olmsted Brothers in 1914 remains today as it was originally planned and is graced by mature trees that create tranquil shaded residential streets. Construction of commercial and residential structures began in earnest in 1914 but the majority of tract was not built out until 1940. The commercial district at the heart of the plan is defined by an axial landscaped mall anchored by public buildings. At the southwestern terminus is Torrance High School, now listed on the National Register of Historic Places and known to American television audiences as the High School in the show Beverly Hills 90210. The northeast terminus is anchored by Irving Gill's Pacific Railway Depot, although altered from its original design.

The planning principles laid out for Torrance by the Olmsted Brothers created a frame work for a significant representation of early 20<sup>th</sup> Century American residential design. The Olmsted Brothers insisted on the progressive idea of placing all utilities underground or in alley ways to ensure the landscape would develop its intended naturalistic character.

The conceptual plan for Torrance with first development by Fredrick Law Olmsted Jr. in the community of Forest Hills Gardens, a suburb of New York City in 1906. In Forest Hills Gardens the railroad station, located adjacent to a public square, was designed to blend with the surrounding residential architectural.

Two gently curving greenways radiate out from the town square and form the spine of the community. Olmsted first used a mall concept in the suburban residential district of Forest Park, in St Louis in 1887. Westmoreland Place and Portland Place are streets in Forest Park with 50 foot wide landscaped central medians to give the sense that homes are in the country.

2. Landscape Design:

a. The El Prado Mall:

One of the defining projects in the career of Frederick Law Olmsted Junior was his participation of the redesign and revitalization of the National Mall in Washington D.C. which became known as the McMillian Plan. The original 1791 plan for Washington D. C. called for a grand boulevard rather than the National Mall that exists today. The McMillian plan recommended the mall become a lawn lined by rows of elm trees that would serve as a national public gathering space.

Olmsted's plan for Torrance utilized this same linear open space concept along El Prado Boulevard. This was a direct influenced of his involvement in the McMillian Plan. The central location of El Prado Mall provides access to public green space consistent with garden city planning objectives and a formal vision for a civic center not found in typical suburban developments.

b. Residential Streets:

The residential streets in The Olmsted Tract have boulevards planted with a variety of trees including: Camphor; California Pepper; Pink Trumpet, and Eucalyptus. These mature trees often provide a full canopy over the street fulfilling the garden city notion of living in nature.

1. Vehicular Parkways:

Cabrillo Avenue and Torrance Boulevard, the principal vehicular streets, radiate outward from axial El Prado Avenue. Cabrillo Avenue has a central median lined with native California Palms

3. Stylistic Movements Found in Torrance

A number of parallel design movements were underway in America during the period of development of the Olmsted Tract. Examples of each of these stylistic movements are represented in the built environment of Torrance.

a. The Arts and Crafts Movement:

The Arts and Crafts movement was founded by the English artist and critic John Ruskin as a reaction to the negative effects of industrialization on society. No one was more influential in Britain or America than Ruskin whose books: The Stones of Venice, 1860; and The Seven Lamps of Architecture, 1880, celebrated

the work of medieval craftsman and particularly the churches of Venice and northern Italy. The movement was based on the use of handcrafted detailing as a counterpoint to the aesthetic effect of machined details. California developed its own subset of this movement known as the Mission Revival Style drawing its inspiration from the architecture of California's Spanish Colonial Period.

b. Revival Styles:

The revival style movement was a direct result of highly influential world expositions such as the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition. That exposition popularized classical buildings from Greek and Roman cultures. The exposition became known as the White City because of its gleaming classical white buildings set against the gritty industrial landscape of late 19<sup>th</sup> century Chicago. It had a far reaching influence in American architectural design. It spawned what became known as the City Beautiful Movement and city planning efforts throughout the country.

Several influential expositions held in the west spawned the Spanish and Mission Revival Movements in California. In 1915 San Francisco hosted the Panama-Pacific International Exposition and from 1915 -1917 San Diego hosted The Panama-California Exposition in Balboa Park.

c. Art Deco:

Art Deco as a design movement can be found in the works of America's most prominent designers of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century including: Lois Sullivan; Bertram Goodhue (Los Public Library), Frank Lloyd Wright; Irving Gill and Walter Burley Griffin. The movie industry of Southern California also played a major role in popularizing the movement. The 1925 Paris Exposition "des Arts Decoratifs Industriels Modernes" celebrated the style as the avant-garde of the day. Characteristics of the style include: streamline bands; the use of smooth metal; machined surfaces; the interplay between light and dark; and most importantly a partnership between art and engineering. The influence of this movement is reflected in the commercial and public buildings within the Olmsted Tract such as the Post Office.

d. The Modern Movement:

The German Bauhaus, a school created to bring all design disciplines under a single program existed in Germany from 1919 to 1933. It was highly influential in the development of the modern movement. Its founder Walter Gropius initially called for a reform in the artistic process rather than a new style. He advocated that art should be led back to its fundamental and prerequisite in handcraft. The philosophical ideas of the Bauhaus led to a stylistic direction of stripping away decorative ornament and deriving its imagery from functionality. Irving Gill is now recognized as an early pioneer in this stylistic movement that would come to define architectural design in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Walter Gropius fled Germany due to artistic suppression and became the Dean of the Architecture Program at Harvard University influencing a generation of American Designers.

#### 4. Architectural Styles found in Torrance

##### a. Residential Styles Found in Torrance

1. Craftsman: 1895 – 1925

###### Characteristics:

The Craftsman Style was one of the most popular styles in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century based on the Arts and Crafts Movement of the period. A large number of the homes in the Olmsted District used this style. Details include: low pitched roof lines gabled or hip; a front porch beneath an extension of the main roof; exposed rafters or decorative brackets under the eaves; four pane over one or six pane over one double hung windows; handcrafted stone; extensive wood fascia; railing detailing with mixed materials.

2. Mission Revival: 1890 - 1920

###### Characteristics:

This style drew its inspiration from the Spanish Colonial Missions of Southern California. It featured mission shaped (stepped or curve) roof parapets commonly with red tile copings. A porch supported by columns and red clay tile roof covering. Other features include: round arches supported by piers; smooth plastered walls; tile roofs; exposed rafters; towers; curvilinear gables; small balconies.

3. Spanish Colonial Revival: 1915 - 1931

###### Characteristics:

This style replaced the Mission Style after World War I in popularity and drew its inspiration from a broader spectrum of both Old and New World Spanish buildings. The style featured a combination of details from Spanish Baroque, Spanish Colonial, Moorish and Mexican Churrigueresque styles. Details include: smooth plaster walls; low pitched clay tile roofs; small porches or balconies; roman or semi-circular arches; towers; wood casement or tall double hung windows.

4. Monterrey: 1853 - 1955

###### Characteristics:

The Monterrey Style is a revival of Anglo influenced Spanish Colonial Houses of Northern California. They blended Spanish adobe construction with pitched roofs usually with wood shingles. Details include: Low pitched roofs; prominent chimneys; smooth plaster walls; terra cotta or cast stone ornaments; wood casement windows; decorative iron trim; long second floor balconies

5. Neo-Classical Revival: 1893 -1940

Characteristics:

The Neo Classical style makes references to classical Greek and Roman architecture. Details include: porches or porticos supported by classical fluted columns with Doric or ionic column capitals; pediments; horizontal friezes; cornices at the roof line. Ornamentation was highly ordered and consisted of crown moldings, dentils, egg and dart moldings and mutules.

6. Tudor Revival: 1910 - 1940

Characteristics:

The Tudor Style is based on English Medieval Architecture. Details include; steeply pitched roofs (sometimes with simulated thatched roofing); half timbering; herringbone brickwork; tall mullioned windows; high chimneys; cantilevered overhanging first floors above pillared porches; dormer windows. This style usually featured brick masonry walls but a small percentage had stucco walls.

- 7... Prairie Style: 1900 -1920

Characteristics:

The Prairie Style was developed in the American Midwest, by pioneering architects that included Frank Lloyd Wright, Walter Burley Griffin and Irving Gill, as a uniquely American style. Details include: low pitched roofs with deeply overhanging eaves; usually two story with one story wings; façade detailing emphasizing horizontal lines; picture windows; continuous bands of casement windows; massive porches with square support columns.

8. French Eclectic 1915 - 1945

Characteristics

The French Eclectic style draws its inspiration from the farmhouses of the province of Normandy in northwestern France. Details include: hipped roofs without a front facing dominant cross gable; symmetrical façade with a centered entryway; smooth plaster walls; multi paned double hung windows; oval windows; wrought iron detailing.

9. Colonial Revival: 1880 – 1955

Characteristics:

This style was based on American Colonial architecture including Georgian and Adam prototypes. Details include: accentuated front door normally with a pediment; porches or porticos with classical column and column capitals; double hung multi-paned windows usually with shutters; clap board horizontal siding.

10. Minimal/Builder 1935 – 1950

*There are a small percentage of homes in the Olmsted Tract built during World War II and the post war era that do not possess the stylistic or design characteristics found in the formative years of the district. For the purpose of this survey these structures have been considered to belong to the modern era and non-contributing to the historic character of the district.*

Characteristics:

This style was developed as a response to the economic reality of The Great Depression which reflects the form of traditional eclectic styles but lacks any decorative detailing. Details include: low roof pitches with at least one front facing gable; minimal eaves; casement or picture windows.

11. Modernistic 1920 -1960

(Irving Gill began to develop this approach prior to it becoming a recognized style)

Characteristics:

The Modern Style utilized a smooth stucco surface, flat or almost flat roof, an emphasis on horizontal lines, and facades that were asymmetrical.

b. Commercial and Public Building Styles

1. Mission Revival: 1890 - 1920

Characteristics:

This style drew its inspiration from the Spanish Colonial Missions of Southern California. It featured mission shaped (stepped or curve) roof parapets commonly with red tile copings. Other features include: round arches supported by piers; smooth plastered walls; tile roofs; exposed rafters; towers; curvilinear gables.

2. Spanish Colonial Revival 1915 -1931

This style replaced the Mission Style after World War I in popularity and drew its inspiration from a broader spectrum of both Old and New World Spanish Buildings. The style featured a combination of details from Spanish Baroque, Spanish Colonial, Moorish and Mexican Churrigueresque styles. Details include: smooth plaster walls; low pitched clay tile roofs; circular or semi-circular arches; towers; casement or tall double hung windows.

3. Art Deco: 1920 -1940

Characteristics:

Ornamentation based on mathematical geometric shapes such as trapezoids, Zigzagged, streamlined and jumbled shapes. Ornamentation was also based on abstract and crystalline forms found in Cubism and Futurism as well as ancient art forms from Babylon, Assyria, Egypt and Aztec Mexico.

4. Commercial Modern:

This style had a minimal of detail, flat roof lines, and large plate glass storefronts and punched window openings at the second floor. A variety of material was used such as smooth stucco and brick.

In 1979 The City of Torrance completed a city wide inventory of historic resources. The inventory was completed by J Roger Hatheway and John Chase for the City of Torrance Planning Department utilizing the State of California Department of Parks and Recreation Historic Resources Inventory Sheet which identified each property by address, its date of construction, its style and a brief description, The inventory is organized by street and identifies 84 structures, within the Olmsted Tract, that are of historic significance to the City of Torrance. The properties date from 1912, the founding of the city, through the pre-war era (1940). This list of resources encompasses a broad range of styles that were prevalent during this period. Predominate styles represented in that survey include: Craftsman; Spanish Colonial Revival; Mission Revival; Art Deco; Modern.

Bibliography:

Bergdoll, Barry; Dickerman, Leah; Bauhaus 1919 -1933; The Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York; 2010

Blumenson, John J.; Identifying American Architecture, A Pictorial Guide to Styles; W.W. Norton Company, New York, New York, 1977

Bolotin, Norman; Laing, Christine; The World's Columbian Exposition, The Chicago World's Fair of 1893; The University of Illinois Press; Chicago, Illinois

Capitman, Barbara; Kinerk, Michael D.; Wilhem, Dennis W.; Rediscovering Art Deco, USA; Viking Studio books, New York, New York; 1994

Chase, John; Hatheway, Roger; Torrance Historical Resources Survey, 1979

Garvin, Alexander; The American City, What Works What Doesn't; The McGraw Hill Companies, 2002

Hines, Thomas S.; Irving Gill and the Architecture of Reform; The Monacelli Press; New York, New York; 2003

McAlester, Lee and Virginia; A Field Guide to American Homes; Random House, New York, New York; 1984

McCoy, Esther; Five California Architects; Reinhold Book Corporation, 1960

Miller, Sara Cedar; Central Park, An American Masterpiece; Henry N. Abrams, Inc; New York New York; 2003

Rand, Marvin; Irving J. Gill Architect, 1870 - 1936; Gibbs Smith Publisher, Salt Lake City Utah, 2006