



*To:* Chris Davidson, Studio Meng Strazzara

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*From:* Chrisanne Beckner, MS, Matt Sneddon, PhD, HRA

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*Subject:* Cultural Resource Assessment of the building at 2939 E Madison St., Seattle, King County, Washington

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*Date:* June 14, 2016

## Introduction

Studio Meng Strazzara plans to redevelop Seattle parcel No. 5016000007 at 2939 East Madison Street (E Madison St), located in the SE ¼ of Section 28, Township 25N, Range 4E.<sup>1</sup> The State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) allows local governments to identify and mitigate the possible environmental impacts of certain projects. The redevelopment of 2939 E Madison St qualifies as such a project and is subject to SEPA review as part of the application for a Master Use Permit. To assist in determining whether the project has the potential to adversely affect historic resources, Studio Meng Strazzara tasked Historical Research Associates, Inc. (HRA) with a preliminary review of the project and any historic resources that may be affected by it, including the previously unsurveyed building at 2939 E Madison St.

This memorandum summarizes the results of three tasks that HRA undertook at the request of Studio Meng Strazzara: 1) screening properties immediately adjacent to the proposed development at 2939 E Madison St for the presence of known historic properties; 2) providing a preliminary evaluation of the eligibility of the building at 2939 E Madison St for the City of Seattle Landmarks Register (SLR); and 3) providing written guidance on whether to pursue a formal determination of eligibility from the Seattle Landmark Board or to forego the formal review and complete the SEPA checklist with this technical memorandum (**without the Recommendations section**) attached as an appendix as defined on page 6 of the Department of Neighborhoods (DON) Client Assistance Memo #3000.

## Historic Property Screening (aboveground only)

HRA reviewed the Washington State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP) and DON databases to screen for historic properties on parcels immediately adjacent to 2939 E Madison St. No known buildings, structures, or objects (BSOs) directly adjacent to the target property were listed in the SLR, the Washington Historic Register (WHR), or the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). Adjacent to the property on the southwest is a remodeled 1914 apartment building; adjacent to the property on the northeast is a recently acquired city park known as 3001 E Madison (Rochester 2001). The closest known

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<sup>1</sup> The building can be found in assessor's records alternately addressed as 2925 E Madison St.

historic resource is Washington Park, determined eligible for listing in the NRHP by DAHP in 2013, located on the north side of Madison St, approximately 185 feet (ft) northeast of the target parcel.

## Building History

During the years 1864–1865, as Euro-American settlement increased in the central core of Seattle, Judge John J. McGilvra cut his own private roadway diagonally through the forested lands that separated downtown Seattle from his new estate, known as Laurel Shade, which sat isolated on the western bank of Lake Washington (Rochester 2001). Today, that road is known as E Madison St. In 1869, Henry Webster, an early Seattle pioneer, acquired 160 acres through which McGilvra’s road passed. His lands included the present parcel no. 5016000007, but it is unclear if Webster ever settled on the land (BLM GLO 2016). In 1880, McGilvra began to divide his property for sale. To entice buyers, he developed Madison Park, and soon after, Seattle residents were driving horses and carriages along E Madison St and spending their weekends on the lake. Soon, McGilvra and others had formed the Madison Street Cable Railway Company to serve buyers and visitors alike (Rochester 2000).

Development increased in what became known as the Central District in the 1880s, and the section around E Madison St soon developed into an attractive middle-class residential neighborhood within commuting distance of downtown Seattle (Veith 2009). The earliest known building on what is now known as 2939 E Madison St appears on maps as a small, single-story residence located in roughly the southernmost corner of parcel no. 5016000007 (Sanborn 1905). A building of similar size appears in the same location in the 1917, 1950, and 1951 editions of the Sanborn map, suggesting that the building was perhaps one of the early single-family residences that characterized the Central District (Sanborn 1917, 1950, 1951). Throughout the twentieth century, Seattle’s Central District became an increasingly popular and inviting neighborhood for the city’s African-American population, even as other neighborhoods used discriminatory housing policies, including deed restrictions, to limit ethnic diversity (Veith 2009).

In 1953, H. N. Clifton acquired parcel no. 5016000007 and launched Clifton’s Nursery and Garden Store. Not much is known about Clifton, except that he was born in roughly 1905, was Caucasian, and came from Texas (Ancestry.com 2016). Existing King County Assessor’s records are somewhat vague regarding the construction of Clifton’s nursery. The Assessor’s record notes that Clifton moved “old” existing buildings to the site and constructed an 816-square foot retail building in 1958 (King County GDA 1959).<sup>2</sup> By 1964, Clifton was attempting to expand the square footage of his nursery with a greenhouse. However, Clifton’s neighbors opposed the expansion, and the Board of Adjustment ultimately denied Clifton’s conditional use variance (*Seattle Times* 1964). By 1971, the assessor’s record makes note of “single frame, cheap and improvised greenhouses erected around building” and paraphrases the owner as saying that King County “has allowed him to erect structures without a bldg. permit. Also stated that county does not tax him for these structures by a verbal agreement” (King County GDA 1971). An undated photo that is likely associated with the 1971 assessment shows a complex of buildings to the northeast of the 1958 building (Figure 2).

Although the construction history of Clifton’s original buildings is unclear, in 1979, a new 6,045 square foot warehouse/greenhouse was added to the nursery property southwest of the existing storefront (King County GIS Center 2016). An assessor’s photo from 1980 shows the two abutting buildings in their present configuration (Figure 3). In the early 1980s, Lynn Meyer acquired the property and opened Lynn’s Garden

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<sup>2</sup> One page of the King County Assessor’s record for this parcel claims that a building moved to this location dated to 1946. However, no justification for this date is included, and this date is not repeated elsewhere in the record. Also, Clifton’s building is sometimes defined as 616 square feet in assessor’s records, although this appears to be an error.

Center. An assessor's photo from 1980s shows the store and greenhouse in their present configuration with a projecting shake awning. In 1984, Meyer acquired surrounding unimproved parcels and these were eventually folded into parcel no. 5016000007. In 1988, a partnership by the name of Leap Associates transferred the property to the present owners: Carol Anderson, Harley Broe, Dianne Dellinger, and Judith Gille. The partnership owns, along with Steve Magley, City People's Garden Store and Landscaping at this location (King County GIS Center 2016). After purchasing the property, City People's made significant changes to the existing buildings. They constructed a parapet wall and façade that linked the garden store and greenhouse into what appears to be a single building. Presently, the business consists of a retail store, an attached covered greenhouse, a large yard for outdoor plants, and a parking lot.

The City People's Garden Stores is one of two remaining outlets for City People's Mercantile, which opened its first store on Capitol Hill in 1979. Defined on its website as "the first women-owned hardware/mercantile store in Seattle," City People's Mercantile grew to a total of four stores before closing two locations in 2000 and 2001 (City People's 2016).



Figure 1: 1958 photo of parcel 5016000007. Photo courtesy of the King County Assessor.

View: southwest.



Figure 2: Undated photo of parcel 5016000007. Photo courtesy of the King County Assessor.

View: south.

Notes: photo appears to be associated with 1971 King County assessment.



Figure 3: June 5, 1980, photo of parcel 5016000007. Photo courtesy of the King County Assessor.

View: south.

Notes: Photo appears to show the store and greenhouse in their present configuration.

## Preliminary Evaluation of 2939 E Madison St (Parcel 5016000007) for eligibility to the Seattle Landmark Register

A property may be eligible for the SLR if it meets at least one of the City's six criteria and retains a sufficient degree of historic integrity. The building at 2939 E Madison St is not likely to meet any of the SLR Criteria, as described in more detail below. Although the building has been a nursery since 1958, and owned by a well-known local business since 1988, HRA's research suggests that these associations are not sufficient to qualify the building for SLR listing. Furthermore, the building is of a standard commercial type and is not significant for its architectural character.

### *Seattle Landmarks Criteria*

*A. It is the location of, or is associated in a significant way with, a historic event with a significant effect upon the community, City, state, or nation.*

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Preliminary research indicates that the building is not associated with a specific historic event that had a significant effect upon the community, City, state, or nation. Nurseries are a common retail business type and are often found in association with popular residential neighborhoods. The site is not, for instance, one of Seattle's earliest nurseries, nor is it one of the first businesses along a developing commercial corridor. Therefore, HRA recommends the building is not eligible under Criterion A for its association with a specific historic event.

*B. It is associated in a significant way with the life of a person important in the history of the City, state, or nation.*

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Preliminary research suggests that very little is known about the founder of Clifton's Nursery, Hubert N. Clifton, or Lynn Meyer of Lynn's Garden Center. Both appear to have been local business owners who served a Madison Valley clientele. City People's Mercantile, which continues to function as a well-known business in Seattle, has only been associated with this location since 1988. None of the owners, past or present, are known to be individually significant to the history of the city, state, or nation for their association with this location.

*C. It is associated in a significant way with a significant aspect of the cultural, political, or economic heritage of the community, City, state, or nation.*

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Preliminary research suggests that neither Clifton’s Nursery, Lynn’s Garden Center, nor City People’s Garden Store are associated in a significant way with an important aspect of the cultural, political, or economic heritage of the community, city, state, or nation. Clifton’s Nursery rarely appears in the historic record. When it does, it is referred to as “unsightly” by neighbors who claim that “complaints against its condition have been filed in the past with city departments” (*Seattle Times* 1964). Lynn’s Garden Center is mentioned occasionally in local newspapers, and Lynn Meyer is occasionally quoted for her gardening expertise. However, her store was relatively short-lived and appeared most frequently as the location of Café Botanica, a café launched by former dancer and choreographer Charles Bennett of First Chamber Dance, along with ballerina Alexis Hoff in 1981. The café apparently grew too popular to be housed within the garden center and quickly moved across Madison Avenue (*Beers* 1982).

The owners of City People’s Mercantile have run a successful business in Seattle since 1979. However, they acquired this location relatively recently, in 1988. While the original location, once located on Capitol Hill, may arguably be significant as the site of the city’s first woman-owned hardware store, the nursery at this location cannot qualify for the same association.

HRA recommends the building is not eligible under Criterion C for its association with the cultural, political, or economic heritage of the community, City, state, or nation.

*D. It embodies the distinctive visible characteristics of an architectural style, period, or a method of construction.*

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Figure 4: City People’s Nursery, exterior.

View: east.

Notes: photographed May 2016.



Figure 5: City People's Nursery, entrance.

View: south.

Notes: photographed May 2016.



Figure 6: City People's Nursery, greenhouse interior.

View: southeast.

Notes: photographed May 2016.



Figure 7: City People's Nursery, skylight.

View: southwest.

Notes: photographed May 2016.

The original nursery building at this location was a small, 818-square-foot structure executed in a utilitarian, post-war Modern commercial style with a flat roof and a projecting awning on its primary façade. By 1971, this building was surrounded by a collection of temporary greenhouses that were relocated from another location. In 2016, those greenhouses are no longer extant, and the small, one-part commercial building has been engulfed by additional greenhouses constructed in 1979. The original building, which is wood-framed and roughly square, was constructed with minimal ornamentation, as were many other post World-War II commercial buildings of its type. However, the character of the original building has been entirely obscured.

Alterations to the original building occurred in stages. In 1979, it was joined to a large greenhouse on its west elevation. By 1980, the building incorporated a projecting shade awning. The present owners altered the building further after purchasing it in 1988, adding a parapet wall that reaches across the expanse of the primary façade, giving the storefront, associated offices, and the attached greenhouse the appearance of a single large building (Figures 4–6). The parapet hides a large, central pyramidal skylight that appears to date from the same period (Figure 7). As a consequence of the alterations, the building no longer conveys its modest post-war commercial style and does not appear to date from its period of construction. Furthermore, the building does not represent distinctive methods of construction. Therefore, HRA recommends that the building is not eligible for listing in the SLR under Criterion D.

*E. It is an outstanding work of a designer or builder.*

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Preliminary research has not identified a designer or builder for the building or for subsequent alterations. The modest character of the original building suggests that it was not the outstanding work of a specific designer or builder. HRA recommends that the building does not qualify for listing in the SLR under Criterion E.

*F. Because of its prominence of spatial location, contrasts of siting, age, or scale, it is an easily identifiable visual feature of its neighborhood or the city and contributes to the distinctive identity of such neighborhood or the City.*

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**Spatial Location/Siting:** Situated atop a bluff at the northeastern edge of a triangular block facing Madison St, the building appears with other buildings of its type along a busy arterial roadway that connects neighborhoods and communities to the east with downtown to the west (Figure 8). The Washington Park Arboretum and the park known as 3001 E Madison St provide landscaped barriers between the building at 2939 E Madison St and residential and commercial buildings further east. To the west, the City People’s building abuts a mixed-use commercial strip that features a combination of multi-story apartment buildings and small- and medium-sized business blocks. At a single story, it is shorter than many of its neighbors to the west, but includes a wide façade, a characteristic it shares with other buildings along E Madison St that date from the 1980s. The building is not visible to residences in the valley to the south as it is hidden from view by dense trees and brush.

In spite of its wide façade, the building blends well with others of its age and type and is not distinct for its location or siting.

**Age:** The existing building complex was constructed and enlarged between 1958 and 1988, which makes it a relatively late addition to the Central District. The area around E Madison St was a popular residential neighborhood for African-American families by the turn of the twentieth century (Henry 2001). According to historian Mary Henry, “black-owned and –operated businesses that flourished along East Madison during the early 1900s included barber shops and restaurants, a fuel yard, a drug store, a hotel, and a theater. Churches (First African Methodist Episcopal, Mount Zion Baptist Church) and cultural organizations were also established on and near East Madison Street” (Henry 2001). The neighborhood has witnessed significant infill development in recent decades. While the blocks immediately northeast of 2939 E Madison St are generally wooded park properties, the blocks directly to the southwest of the building are part of a mixed district of multi-family residential and commercial buildings dating from as early as 1905 (2801 E Madison St), with new additions dating from as late as 2008 (2900 E Madison St) (King County GIS Center 2016).

Sanborn maps show that the E Madison St corridor was originally residential in character, dominated by single-story dwellings with a small number of apartment buildings (Sanborn 1905, 1917). The area appears to have undergone a change in character primarily in the 1980s, when a large number of new buildings were constructed within a few blocks of 2939 E Madison St (King County GIS Center 2016). This building, with upgrades that date from the same period, blends well with the age of surround development.

**Scale:** As noted above, the City People’s Garden Store is a single story tall, which makes it modest in height compared to some of the two- to four-story commercial and residential buildings that characterize development along E Madison St. Although it is somewhat shorter than its neighbors, its wide façade gives the building additional presence and allows it to blend with the scale of neighboring development.

In spite of its location along a busy thoroughfare amongst other commercial and residential buildings, the City People’s Garden Store is not particularly distinct either for its location, its age, or its scale. The building is at the end of a strip of commercial and multi-family development with which it blends; it’s a modest example of a midcentury building, and one that was constructed of modest materials and a simple, unadorned façade, as were many buildings of its type and age. More significantly, it was remodeled to resemble a 1980s strip commercial building, which makes it appear contemporary with other buildings from that period, many of which can be found within two blocks of 2939 E Madison St. Therefore, HRA recommends that the building is not eligible under Criterion F as an identifiable, visual feature of the Madison Valley commercial district along E Madison St.

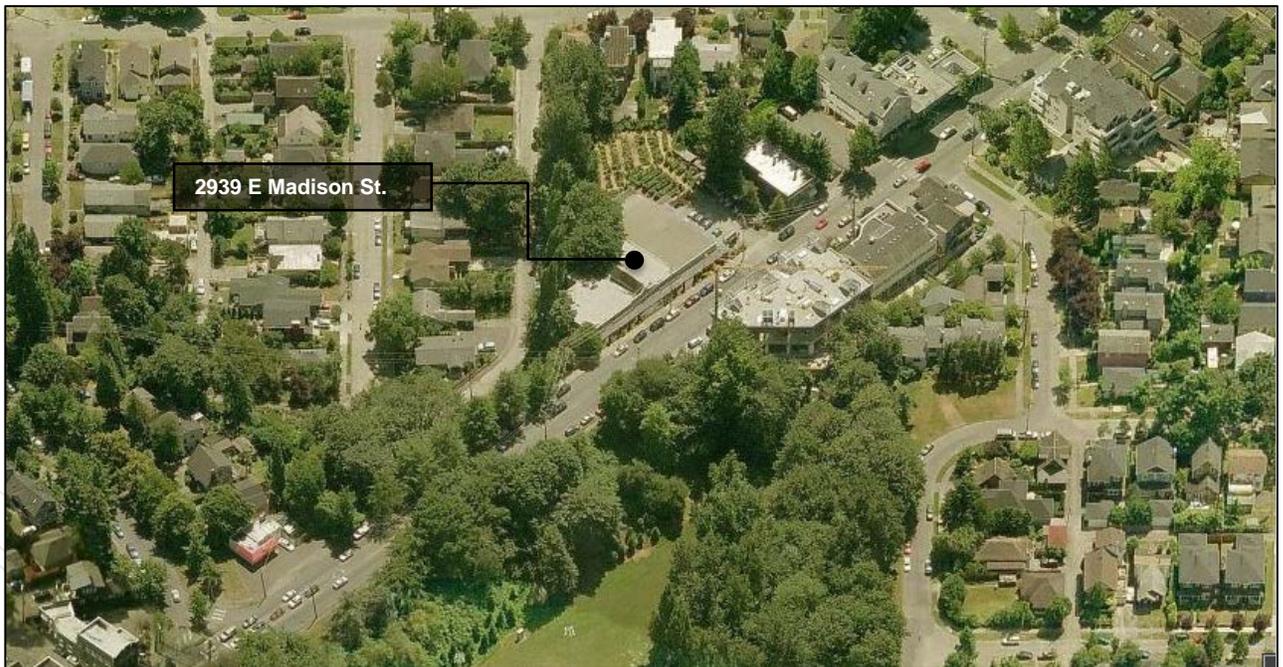


Figure 8. Birds-eye-view (Bing.com 2016).

### ***Historic Integrity***

In addition to meeting at least one of the standards discussed above, the building must also possess integrity, or the ability to convey its significance. Because the City of Seattle does not specifically define

integrity, the seven aspects of integrity as outlined by the National Park Service are used here to assess integrity.

#### 1) *Location*

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The building retains its integrity of location, as it remains at its original site on its original parcel.

#### 2) *Design*

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The building's integrity of design is diminished due to visible alterations that appear to lift the building out of the mid-century and place it in the 1980s, an era when skylights, wide facades, and parapets were commonly found on commercial buildings. Although the building does retain its single story height, it no longer retains its modest square massing or a visible differentiation between the store and the surrounding greenhouse. The building no longer retains its sheltering eaves, which have been replaced with a parapet wall. It no longer retains its original nine-foot height, as the ceiling was raised to accommodate a light well and a large skylight. Its original fenestration, which included small windows, has been altered by the addition of large, vinyl-framed display windows. In essence, the original building is invisible behind the alterations that have created a consistent façade for the combined store and greenhouse.

#### 3) *Setting*

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Despite growth and neighborhood infill, the building maintains its integrity of setting, as it still resides amongst the park landscapes to the northeast and the multi-family residential buildings—some of which date from the early years of the twentieth century—and the commercial buildings that have proliferating to the southeast, defined this section of E Madison St as the commercial corridor for Madison Valley.

#### 4) *Materials*

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The building's integrity of materials is diminished by the numerous alterations that have redefined the building's character since its construction. The original wood-framed building, which had a concrete floor and was clad in what the King County assessor referred to as "insulated type sheathing," has been clad in horizontal boards (King County GDA 1959). Windows, which were not detailed in the assessor's record but were likely framed in wood or aluminum, have since been replaced with vinyl-framed windows. The original ceiling material has been removed to make room for the skylight. It's possible, however, that the concrete floors, which were detailed in the assessor's record, are original to the building.

#### 5) *Workmanship*

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The building's integrity of workmanship is diminished through the numerous aforementioned exterior and interior alterations, including the addition of a new façade.

#### 6) *Feeling*

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The building no longer retains the feeling of a small neighborhood garden store. With its increased footprint and its consistent façade, the building more closely resembles a late-twentieth century strip commercial block.

## 7) *Association*

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The building's integrity of association remains intact as the building retains its historic use and its historic associations with the commercial character of E Madison St, although it is no longer associated with the original business owner.

## **Conclusion**

The 2939 E Madison St building does not appear to be eligible for the SLR under any of the Seattle Landmarks Criteria. Although it is owned by a popular local business, that business is associated with other locations of clearer historical value. Furthermore, the building's early character, which may have expressed its history as a modest nursery serving the Madison Valley community, has been obscured by late twentieth-century alterations that greatly diminished the historic character of the building.

HRA recommends that the building at 2939 E Madison St does not meet any of the criteria for inclusion on the SLR and does not retain historic integrity.

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