

September 4, 2026

**CITY OF SACRAMENTO
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
PRESERVATION DIRECTOR**

300 Richards Blvd, 3rd Floor, Sacramento, CA 95811

Staff recommends the Preservation Director approve the Statement of Nomination and initiate landmark proceedings to list the W. F. Gormley & Sons Funeral Chapel Sign as a historic landmark on the Sacramento Register of Historic and Cultural Resources (M26-019) and make a recommendation to the preservation commission to review an ordinance and make a recommendation to the city council.

Statement of Nomination to Consider Listing the W. F. Gormley & Sons Funeral Chapel Sign on the Sacramento Register of Historic and Cultural Resources as a Historic Landmark (M26-019)

Request: This request includes a historic resource nomination that would list the W. F. Gormley & Sons Funeral Chapel Sign (hereinafter nominated property) as an individual landmark on the Sacramento register of historic and cultural resources (Sacramento register). Staff recommends the Preservation Director approve the statement of nomination and initiate nomination of the resource consistent with the requirements of City Code, § 17.604.220.

Attachments

- 1 Statement of Nomination
- 2 Historic Resource Documentation

Issue/Detail: W.F. Gormley & Sons Funeral Chapel retained the help of the Pacific Neon Company and Ella Cross, an architectural historian, who prepared the historic evaluation for this property, which has been revised by City staff. The historic evaluation concluded that the sign at 2691 Riverside Blvd. appears eligible for listing on the Sacramento Register of Historic and Cultural Resources under Criterion 3 pursuant to Sacramento City Code Section 17.604.210 for its embodiment of a rare surviving type of early neon signage.

Community Outreach: A notice of the public hearing describing the proposed landmark listing was sent to the property owner at 2691 Riverside Blvd. The owner supports nomination. No objections to listing have been received by staff.

Policy Considerations: The city council has found “that significant aspects of the city’s rich and diverse historic resources deserve recognition and preservation to foster an understanding of our heritage, and to promote the public health and safety and the

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economic and general welfare of the people of the city. The preservation and continued use of historic resources are effective tools to sustain and revitalize neighborhoods and business districts within the city, enhance the city's economic, cultural and aesthetic standing, its identity, its livability, marketability and urban character" (Sacramento City Code section 17.604.100.A.). To this end, the city code directs the Preservation Director, to "make preliminary determinations relative to properties' eligibility for listing on the Sacramento register" and to "initiate proceedings to nominate resources for listing on the Sacramento register" (Pursuant to City Code, § 17.604.100.C.2 and 17.604.220).

The nomination of the W. F. Gormley & Sons Funeral Chapel Sign for listing as a landmark on the Sacramento Register is consistent with Sacramento 2040 General Plan goal HCR-2.3, which provides for the identification and preservation of historical and cultural resources. General Plan policy HCR-2.3 states, "The City shall maintain and update the Sacramento Register of Historic and Cultural Resources on a regular basis, including proactively identifying and listing additional unidentified landmarks and historic districts..."

Environmental Considerations: The listing of the W. F. Gormley & Sons Funeral Chapel Sign as a historic landmark on the Sacramento register is exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act pursuant to CEQA Guidelines section 15308. Section 15308 exempts from review actions that are undertaken to assure the maintenance, restoration, enhancement, or protection of the environment where the regulatory process involves procedures for protection of the environment. Listing the property as a historic landmark would ensure that future development on the site would undergo preservation review, as part of the city's site plan and design review process, prior to the granting of any entitlements, thereby preserving the important characteristics of the historic resource, which would be considered part of the environment.

Statement of Nomination: Listing the W. F. Gormley & Sons Funeral Chapel Sign (originally located on the corner of Capitol Avenue & 21st Street) as a historic landmark on the Sacramento register is consistent with the Historic Preservation Chapter (17.604) of the City Code and the goals of the 2040 General Plan. Furthermore, listing the nominated resource on the Sacramento register will help ensure its preservation and encourage rehabilitation consistent with the U.S. Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties.

Listing a historic landmark on the Sacramento register requires the resource to meet the requirements of City Code section 17.604.210, subsection A.1 which states:

- A. Listing on the Sacramento Register-Landmarks. A nominated resource shall be listed on the Sacramento register as a landmark if the city council finds, after holding

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a hearing required by this chapter, that all of the requirements (a-c) set forth below are satisfied:

- a. The nominated resource meets one or more of the following criteria:
 - i. It is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of the history of the city, the region, the state or the nation;
 - ii. It is associated with the lives of persons significant in the city's past;
 - iii. It embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction;
 - iv. It represents the work of an important creative individual or master;
 - v. It possesses high artistic values; or
 - vi. It has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in the prehistory or history of the city, the region, the state or the nation;
- b. The nominated resource has integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship and association. Integrity shall be judged with reference to the particular criterion or criteria specified in subsection A.1.a of this section;
- c. The nominated resource has significant historic or architectural worth, and its designation as a landmark is reasonable, appropriate and necessary to promote, protect and further the goals and purposes of this chapter.



Figure 1: The W. F. Gormley & Sons Funeral Chapel Sign

The W. F. Gormley & Sons Funeral Chapel Sign at 2691 Riverside Blvd. embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction (Sacramento City Code § 17.604.210.A.1.a.iii).

The property appears eligible under Criterion iii as a distinctive example of neon signage, a style introduced in America in the 1930s and popularized in the 1940s. The W. F. Gormley & Sons Funeral Chapel Sign, created in 1931, is characteristic of the earliest emergence of neon signage in America. Therefore, the sign meets criteria for listing in the Sacramento Register of Historic and Cultural Resources under City Code criteria 17.604.210(A)1.a.iii, as the embodiment of distinctive characteristics of neon signage artistry and technology.

The sign at 2691 Riverside Blvd. has integrity of location, design, setting, materials, feeling, workmanship, and association.

The W. F. Gormley & Sons Funeral Chapel retains a high degree of historic integrity. Although it has been removed from its original location at Capitol Avenue & 21st Street, the sign appears to have undergone limited alterations since its period of significance. The essential physical features that define the sign's character, including its paper scroll design, irregular shape, text font, and neon piping remains intact and identifiable. As such, its feeling and association remain unaltered. Even in a different location, the sign retains the characteristics to convey its significance.

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The W. F. Gormley & Sons Funeral Chapel sign has significant historic or architectural worth, and its designation as a landmark is reasonable, appropriate and necessary to promote, protect and further the goals and purposes of this chapter.

The W. F. Gormley & Sons Funeral Chapel sign has significant historic and architectural worth. It has been well-maintained and retains a high level of integrity regarding its design, setting, materials, workmanship, and association. The sign is a significant representation of early neon signage in Sacramento.

Evaluation of the W.F. Gormley & Sons Funeral Chapel “Parking Area” sign.

Description: The neon sign dates from 1931, as per City of Sacramento building permit records. It is scroll shaped and slightly undulating in its outline. It has white enamel scroll end details at the left and right sides, emphasizing that it is supposed to look like an unfurled scroll. It is made of sheet metal enameled in porcelain. It is double sided, and from top to bottom each side contains three lines of text: “Parking Area”, “W.F. Gormley & Sons” and “Funeral Chapel”. The body of the sign is enameled in a warm brown. The first line of text: “Parking Area” is enameled in white with white neon lighting. It is written in a monotype serif font, with each letter being the same height. The text on this line is the smallest of the three lines. The second line of text: “W. F. Gormley & Sons” is in a much larger font. The “W.F.” is written in a serif font while the rest of the line is written in a cursive font, reminiscent of handwriting. The third line of text: “Funeral Chapel” is in a middle-sized monotype serif font. The second and third lines of text are enameled in golden yellow with golden yellow neon to match. The sign was restored, most recently, by Pacific Neon in 2018. It is in impeccable condition and was restored using traditional techniques, including hand fabricated bent glass tubes and phosphorescent powder tube coatings. In order to protect the delicate, sealed tubes of glass containing electrified neon and argon gasses, a clear shield of polycarbonate was placed over each side of the sign. The sign is mounted on two steel poles with concrete footings. It is placed at the Capitol Avenue entrance to the W.F. Gormley & Sons surface parking lot and is clearly visible from 21st Street as well.

Sacramento Register Evaluation: The 1931 neon sign for the W.F. Gormley & Sons Funeral Chapel parking area appears to be eligible for inclusion on the Sacramento Register of Historic and Cultural Resources under criteria ii and iii for its association with W.F. Gormley and for its inherent characteristics as an early neon commercial sign.

Criterion ii argument - Located at 2015 Capitol Avenue, the W. F. Gormley & Sons Funeral Chapel is the third location of this legacy Sacramento business. It was established in 1897 by Irish immigrant William F. Gormley at 916 J Street (extant). W.F. Gormley’s wife, Minnie Elizabeth, was the niece of Sacramento’s Bishop Patrick Manogue who built the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament. At the turn of the century, Gormley built the first Sacramento County Morgue at 8th street between I and J (demolished) and was elected County Coroner in addition to his private practice as a funeral director. He served as Coroner from 1902-1914. In 1901 he purchased an old mansion at 720 H Street (demolished) and moved his business there. In 1914 he was elected Sacramento County Sheriff and served until 1918. W.F. Gormley purchased three adjoining lots on M street in 1924. The westernmost lot (today’s 2005 Capitol Ave.) already contained a two-story home, still extant today. It became the home of his son Manogue. The other two lots became the funeral chapel and

its parking area. In March of 1925 the funeral chapel was completed at 2015 M Street, later Capitol Avenue, at the cost of \$45,000. At this time the name of the business was changed to W.F. Gormley & Sons, as his sons Manogue and Thomas joined him. Later his daughter Mary also joined the family business. He passed the business on to his children and today, the fourth and fifth generation of the Gormley family are still funeral directors, helping Sacramento families to grieve and bury their loved ones. For these reasons it is reasonable and appropriate that the W.F. Gormley Funeral Chapel Parking Area sign be added to the Sacramento Register of Historic and Cultural Landmarks under criteria ii, for its association with W.F. Gormley, a figure significant in the city's past.

Criterion iii argument – Neon signs were introduced from France to America in 1923, when two signs for an automobile dealership in Los Angeles were imported. Although hard to imagine today, neon signs were viewed in the late 20's early 30's as a miraculous technology, often called "Liquid Fire". They were extremely popular with the public. The French patent holder for neon technology held a monopoly to it until 1932. After 1932, the neon sign market in America exploded and suddenly there were thousands of manufacturers all around the country. The W.F. Gormley sign, created during the earliest period of American commercial neon signs is a rare survivor. For this reason, it is reasonable and appropriate that the W.F. Gormley Funeral Chapel Parking Area sign be added to the Sacramento Register of Historic and Cultural Landmarks under criteria iii, for its association with the earliest period of neon signs in America.

W.F. Gormley & Sons will continue to serve Sacramento from its fourth location on Riverside Boulevard. The business is owned and operated today by the fourth and fifth generations of the Gormley family. The family has shown a longstanding commitment to keeping this historic sign in excellent condition. Allowing its relocation to the business's new site and its continued use as a street sign helps to preserve local Sacramento business history and allows the Gormley family to continue to use this iconic sign as part of their business identity.

Prepared by Ella Cross, Architectural Historian.