



COMMUNITY PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT MEMO REPORT OF FINDINGS FOR CERTIFICATE OF DEMOLITION ELIGIBILITY

12/18/2020, 2020

Address: 123 Speer Boulevard

Legal Description: ARLINGTON HEIGHTS ADD B24 VAC ALY ADJ

Current Building Name: KMGH-TV Studio and Offices

Construction Date: 1969

Source of Information: Denver Assessor's Office; Sanborn Insurance Maps from 1904, 1904 (corrected to 1925), 1929-30, 1929 (corrected to 1937), 1929 (corrected to 1951), 1929 (corrected to 1956), 1929 (corrected to 1958), 1929 (corrected to 1961), 1962 (corrected to 1967); Denver City Directories; Federal Census Records 1900, 1910, 1920, 1930, 1940; Denver householder's Directory and Street Avenue Guide 1924-1950; Denver Post, May 4, 1969

Architectural

Architectural Style: Brutalist

Architect/Builder: Raymond Bowers, Fulmer & Bowers

Source of Information: Denver Post, May 4, 1969

Historical

Original owner: Time-Life Broadcast of Colorado, Inc.

Original use(s): Television and radio studios and offices

Current use(s): Television and radio studios and offices

Historical background:

123 Speer Boulevard was constructed in 1969 as the first purpose built studios and offices for KLZ-TV and KLZ AM-FM of Time-Life Broadcast of Colorado, Inc. KLZ began as a radio station in 1919, receiving its first broadcasting license on March 10th, 1922 under the ownership of the Reynolds Radio Company in Denver. In 1953, under the ownership of the Aladdin Broadcasting, KLZ was expanded to include KLZ-TV7, Channel 7. On November 1st of that year, the TV station signed onto the air from their new TV studios in a renovated Packard/Studebaker dealership located at the intersections of 6th Avenue, Sherman Street, and Speer Boulevard. Shortly thereafter, in 1954, Aladdin Broadcasting sold KLZ Radio and TV to Time-Life, Inc.



Figure 1. The original studio and offices of KLZ Radio and Television, formerly a Packard and Studebaker dealership, demolished in 1969.

In 1968, Time-Life purchased the rest of the block where the KLZ station was located and began construction of a new, purpose-built TV and radio station, known as the KLZ Communications Center. The building was designed by Raymond Bowers of Fulmer & Bowers, an architecture firm based out of Princeton, NJ. While Fulmer & Bowers are not a well-known firm or household name, they are credited with having designed several TV and radio stations throughout the country, including for WTIC in Hartford, CT; WGBH in Boston, MA; WBAL in Baltimore, MD; WTAE in Atlanta, GA; and WHBQ in Memphis, TN. While many of these other stations were designed in the Modern or International Style, The KLZ Communications Center was designed in the Brutalist style with an exposed cast grey concrete structure and pre-cast panels with a crushed Colorado Red Rock aggregate. After construction of the new building was completed in 1969 and operations moved over to the new station in May of that same year, the former building at the southeast corner of the block was demolished to make room for parking and communications equipment that service the station.



Figure 2. The Formalist Style WTIC TV and Radio Station in Hartford, CT designed by Fulmer & Bowers in 1961.

The move by KLZ to construct a new studio and office building was part of a trend in the 1950s and 1960s during which TV and Radio Stations constructed new, high-tech studio buildings to better suite the needs of a modern television broadcast. KLZ's local competitor station KOA-TV moved from its old location in the Charles E. Wells Music Building at 16th and California to their new two-story Formalist Style headquarters at 1044 Lincoln Street in 1959. KLZ, constructing their new station about a decade later, chose the contemporary Brutalist style which better suited their plans for an impressive five story tower in a more prominent location along Speer Boulevard. Brutalism was a style commonly chosen for important public or government buildings in the Post World War II era because of its monumental scale, weighty permanent appearance, and relatively affordable price tag relying largely on bare concrete and repeated elements.

A Denver Post article from May 4th, 1969 covering the opening of the new station notes the \$5 million price tag, and describes the buildings appointments:

“The building encloses about 85,000 square feet of working area, about three times as much as the KLZ stations had in their old quarters next door...

“The first floor of the “tower” is occupied by a spacious lobby of unusual design and décor, plus conference rooms. The second floor is devoted entirely to the operations of the TV and radio news staff...

“The fourth floor is devoted to operations of the AM and FM radio stations. Housed there are two transistorized control rooms, studios, production areas, and a record library which contains nearly 100,000 musical selections on singles and in albums...

“The decorations and furnishings on each floor are “keyed” to a different color. The exterior of the building is crushed Colorado Red Rock.

“The architect was Raymond Boers of Filmer and Bowers, Princeton N.J., and the builder was the N. G. Petry Construction Co. of Denver.

“Construction and installation of the complicated electronic equipment – there are about 28 miles of just one kind of wiring in the building – were largely completed two months ago...”

The article went on to note that the station would offer tours of the newly completed edifice over the coming weeks.



Figure 3. President and General Manager of KLZ-TV-AM-FM, Hugh B. Terry (left) and his assistant pose in front of the newly completed Communications Center at 125 Speer Boulevard in 1969.

In 1972, KLZ was sold by Time-Life to McGraw Hill Broadcasting, at which point the station became KMGH-TV, the call sign by which it is known today. While under the ownership of McGraw Hill Broadcasting, KMGH became the first major market television station in the world to broadcast a fully automate newscast on July 15th, 2002. Using a computer system called ParkerVision, a single operator was able to control the cameras, audio, graphics, recording, and playback for a live broadcast, filling the roles of seven technicians.

In 2011, Scripps Media, Inc. acquired KMGH-TV and the studio building at 123 Speer Boulevard. Scripps Media, Inc. remains the owner today.

Source of Information: Denver Assessor’s Office; Sanborn Insurance Maps from 1904, 1904 (corrected to 1925), 1929-30, 1929 (corrected to 1937), 1929 (corrected to 1951), 1929 (corrected to 1956), 1929 (corrected to 1958), 1929 (corrected to 1961), 1962 (corrected to 1967); Denver City Directories; Federal Census Records 1900, 1910, 1920, 1930, 1940; Denver householder’s Directory and Street Avenue Guide 1924-1950; Denver building permits 1915-1955.

Designation Eligibility Assessment

Landmark Designation Criteria:

A structure or district may be designated for preservation if, due to its significance, it meets the criteria listed in subsections (1), (2), and (3) below

(1) The structure or district maintains its integrity;

(2) The structure or district is more than 30 years old, or is of exceptional importance; and

(3) The structure or district meets at least 3 of the following 10 criteria:

- It has a direct association with a significant historic event or with the historical development of the city, state, or nation;
- It has direct and substantial association with a recognized person or group of persons who had influence on society;
- It embodies the distinctive visible characteristics of an architectural style or type;
- It is a significant example of the work of a recognized architect or master builder;
- It contains elements of design, engineering, materials, craftsmanship, or artistic merit which represent a significant innovation or technical achievement;
- It represents an established and familiar feature of the neighborhood, community or contemporary city, due to its prominent location or physical characteristics;
- It promotes understanding and appreciation of the urban environment by means of distinctive physical characteristics or rarity;
- It represents an era of culture or heritage that allows an understanding of how the site was used by past generations;
- It is a physical attribute of a neighborhood, community, or the city that is a source of pride or cultural understanding;
- It is associated with social movements, institutions, or patterns of growth or change that contributed significantly to the culture of the neighborhood, community, city, state, or nation.

Integrity: If a structure maintains its integrity, it may be designated for preservation.

Has integrity

Does not have integrity

Does the structure have potential for designation?

- Has potential for designation
- Does not have potential for designation

123 Speer Boulevard has potential for designation as it has *direct association with a significant historic event or with the historical development of the city, state, or nation*. For over fifty years, the building has been home to the KLZ/KMGH local news station, and for over sixty-five years, this site has been home to the station. Throughout that history, Channel 7 news has expanded from an outgrowth of an existing radio station into a one of the main venues by which Denverites and residents of the Denver Metro area acquire their news, morning and night. The studio building itself represents this change, flaunting the preeminence of television as a news source in the second half of the 20th century. In 1969, KLZ upgraded from a rehabilitated auto dealership to a purpose-built studio building containing the latest broadcast technologies and designed by expert architects in TV studio design.

The KMGH-TV Station is also potentially significant as it *embodies the distinctive visible characteristics of an architectural style or type*. Brutalist buildings are often characterized by their monumental scale and blocky masses, contrasting planes and geometric volumes that highlight the engineering potential of an exposed concrete structure, modular building units in minimalistic materials, and the expression of function at the exterior. 123 Speer Boulevard's Brutalist style is clearly evidenced in its dramatic massing, detailing and materiality, and in its organization around the interior program.

The building is comprised of three main masses: the imposing five-story octagonal office tower, five-story stair or utility tower, and two-story studio. The primary mass is the office tower, which is formed by the dramatic juxtaposition of a heavy octagonal volume cantilevering off of a taller, narrower core. The complex shape of the office tower is itself then contrasted with the simpler, vertically oriented stair tower in the middle of the whole composition, and the low mass of the studio building which spreads over the northern end of the parcel right to the sidewalk. The interplay of these masses creates a bold open front along Speer boulevard that narrows and then drops towards the rear of the site as the number of windows diminishes as well.

The buildings materiality expands on the drama of the massing through a contrast between the exposed grey concrete structure and crushed Colorado Red Rock panels. The exposed concrete structure is limited to the office tower, where the cantilevered octagonal mass is the most structurally tenuous piece of the design. The stout piers visible at ground level highlight the smaller footprint of the square core, while beams and columns balloon outward and upward as if straining to keep the expanding red walls contained. Between the grey beams, the modular panels of crushed Red Rock alternate between solid walls and expanses of deeply inset window surrounds that make the whole structure appear heavier as it precariously sits on its small footprint.

The three masses are arranged around the functions of the building, with the tall office tower and its large number of windows containing the public spaces and offices of administrative employees. The upper floors of the tower also contain the radio station where questions of lighting relate more to occupant comfort than production value. The stair tower contains notably fewer windows speaking to its more utilitarian purpose, while the expansive and squat studio

has no windows at all, hinting at the dark, controlled environment of the sound stage within. The utilitarian stair tower ties the two ends of the building together. Through its complex and dramatic massing including deep cantilevers, exposed concrete structure, modular materials, and expression of its interior program through the placement and design of its exterior masses the KMGH-TV Station clearly embodies the visible characteristics of the Brutalist Style.

As well, 123 Speer Boulevard has potential for designation *due to its prominent location or physical characteristics, and representation of an established and familiar feature of the neighborhood, community, or contemporary city.* Located along the major thoroughfare of Speer Boulevard, the KMGH-TV station has an incredibly prominent location within the city. On a daily basis, thousands of Denverites drive past the distinctive octagonal tower with its contrasting exterior of light concrete and pale Red Rock, and the striking overhang of the tower's octagonal mass. Additionally, the large screens at the four corners of the building, cycling through advertisements of daily programming, community events, and the weather have served as an eye-catching reminder of the importance of a local new station to the community. No doubt countless commuters, after passing by the prominent building would return home to view programs broadcast from the tower on a nightly basis.

Finally, the Channel 7 Station is potentially significant because it *promotes understanding and appreciation of the urban environment by means of distinctive physical characteristics or rarity.* In addition to being a good example of Brutalist architecture, 123 Speer Boulevard is also a rare example of the style within the City and County of Denver, and one that clearly reflects its Colorado setting. Very few examples of this style are to be found around the city, and even fewer with this building's characteristic exposed cast-in-place concrete structure, dramatic overhang, and distinctive geometric design. And while the use of grey concrete is typical of many Brutalist buildings, the use of colored concrete, here achieved through the addition of a locally sourced aggregate, is less common in Brutalist architecture. However, it accurately reflects the typical softening or adaption of national styles to better suit the character of Denver or to address the availability of materials. In this case, the use of the Red Rock makes an aesthetic statement using local materials, reflecting the hues of the front range landscape.

123 Speer Boulevard also retains a high degree of integrity. The building has experienced few alterations to the exterior providing excellent integrity of design, materials, and workmanship. The building remains in its original location and therefore retains integrity of location. While changes in the surrounding city fabric through demolitions and new construction have altered its setting, the building's relationship to Speer Boulevard remains intact, maintaining integrity of setting. As well, because the form of the building remains as it was at the time of construction and the building has only ever been occupied by the Channel 7 Station, the building retains integrity of association with its historical significance and integrity of feeling.