

Staff Report and Findings of Fact Nomination to the Spokane Register of Historic Places

Briggs Apartments – 225 S Wall Street

FINDINGS OF FACT

- 1. SMC 17D.100.090:** "Generally a building, structure, object, site, or district which is more than fifty years old may be designated an historic landmark or historic district if it has significant character, interest, or value as part of the development, heritage, or cultural characteristics of the city, county, state, or nation."
- Originally built in 1909; the Briggs Apartments meets the age criteria for listing on the Spokane Register of Historic Places.
- 2. SMC 17D.100.090: The property must qualify under one or more categories for the Spokane Register (A, B, C, D, E).**
 - The Briggs Apartments meets the Spokane Register Categories A & C. It is eligible under Category A for its association with the need for housing and the building boom for apartments in the Central Business District of Spokane from 1900-1910. Spokane experienced its greatest period of growth during this time with a tremendous need for housing the massive number of new residents of the city, including a single person, couples, and families.
 - The Briggs Apartments meets Category C for its design by J.C. Poetz and its unfinished state, which tells the story of the apartment boom in Spokane as well as the slowing of the population growth during the decade preceding its construction. Exterior details show how it was to be a much bigger building from the start. These details of a stripped-down Italianate style are located above the cornice on the west, north and at the top of the east and south elevations, along with the keys in the south elevation and the simple side entrance on Wall Street.
 - The building contains 36 apartments which were built as a contrast to the Single Room Occupancy (SRO) hotels that were springing up across downtown. The Briggs contained multi-room apartments with a private bathroom and kitchen for each unit as well as a living and dining room. "Disappearing beds" were built into sideboards and desks (necessitating the step-up design of the bathrooms still extant today) as a place to stowaway the beds during the day. Dumbwaiters were in each apartment as well.
 - Another interesting feature of the Briggs Apartments was that it was the first building in Spokane with a smokeless boiler.
 - Poetz was born in St. Paul, Minnesota on June 23, 1859, learned his trade in the construction of buildings in Minneapolis and St. Paul starting at 18 years old. In 1880, he began training under H. Sackville Trehern in Saint Paul, and then in 1884, he started his own architectural practice in Minneapolis. After 1886, he left Minnesota for Los Angeles, California. Poetz moved to Spokane and formed a partnership with Kirkland Cutter where they designed multiple buildings in Spokane, such as the Exchange National Bank, Rookery Building, and the gold medal award winning Idaho Building at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893. Poetz & Cutter were in partnership until 1894 when they split. Poetz continued to do solo work in architecture in residential and commercial buildings until the early 1920s.
- 3. SMC17D.100.090: "The property must also possess integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, and association."** *From NPS Bulletin 15: "Integrity is the ability of a property to convey its significance...it is not necessary for a property to retain all its historic physical features...the property must retain, however, the essential physical features that enable it to convey its historic identity."*
 - The Briggs Apartments building has retained its location, design, setting and association, and still retains most of its materials and workmanship on the exterior and portions of the interior, such as the stairs in the hallway, along with sideboards and original wood doors in the apartment interiors. As a result, it is eligible for listing on the Spokane Register of Historic Places.

4. Once listed, this property will be eligible to apply for incentives, including:

Special Valuation (property tax abatement), Façade Improvement Grants, Spokane Register historic property plaque, and special code considerations.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

The Briggs Apartments is eligible for listing on the Spokane Register under Category A for its association with Spokane's greatest period of population growth **and Category C** in the area of architecture for its design by J.C. Poetz as a good example of a downtown apartment building.

Preservation Officer Review: Megan Duvall
Nominations Committee: Yes
Landmarks Commission Review: Pending

Report: 2/2/2026
Site Visit: 2/5/2026
Hearing: 2/18/2026

FOR SHLC Meeting:

(slide 1) The 1955 John and Barbara Phillips House at (slide 2) 611 South Montavilla Drive is a (slide 3) remarkable example of Modern residential design and is eligible for listing in the Spokane Register of Historic Places under Category C for its high artistic values and its association with a master architect, Warren Heylman.

(slide 4) The house was commissioned by Jack and Barbara Phillips, a journalist and novelist. Their daughter, Mary Anne Phillips, an artist and architect, later inherited the property and completed a careful renovation and addition in 2020. Following her passing in 2025, ownership passed to her brother, Thomas Phillips.

(slide 5) The home was designed by Warren Cummings Heylman, one of Spokane's most influential architects. Known primarily for his bold commercial and institutional buildings, this residence—his first to be nominated to the Spokane Register—reveals a more understated side of his mid-century work. (slide 6) Built during the post-World War II development of the neighborhood, the Phillips House is one of only four nearby homes Heylman designed, including his own family residence.

(slide 7) The Phillips House is an excellent representation of the Contemporary style, popular in Spokane and across the country during the mid-20th century. An addition was added to the east side of the house at the rear of the carport for a studio, and was done with extreme sensitivity to the original design of the house. (slide 8) What makes this home especially distinctive is the series of projecting fins across the front façade—an expressive design element that highlights the structure's organization and reinforces the visual connection between interior and exterior. (slide 9) It showcases hallmark features of Modern residential design: open floor plans, an emphasis on indoor–outdoor living, generous expanses of glass, and the use of both natural and innovative materials.

(slide 10) The entry opens to a floating stair lined with bookshelves and lit by a paper lantern. (slide 11) The interior of the house includes a kitchen, dining room, living room and den on the first floor. At the center of the house at the end of the entry hall, is the large concrete block chimney which faces north into the main living space. The fireplace sits in front of the concrete wall, within a shallow recessed firepit, and is covered by a large, sloping, copper hood. (slide 12) The dining area and kitchen are on the east side of the house and have typical height ceilings (slide 13) while the living area is double height. This is kind of a fun discovery – a small hatch in the floor of the short hallway to the right

of the entry contains a steep stair down to the utilities. (slide 14) The studio mentioned earlier was added to the main house and entry is through a door off of the rear patio or through the hidden door in the carport and consists of a open space and loft. (slide 15) Upstairs includes three bedrooms and a bath.

(slide 16) The Phillips House is an elegant blend of Modern design, personal history, and the legacy of one of Spokane's master architects. Staff recommends that the John F and Barbara E Phillips House is eligible for listing on the Spokane Register under Category C, architecture.