



City of Phoenix

PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE

Staff Report: Z-94-24-3 September 6, 2024

INTRODUCTION

Z-94-24-3 is a request to establish Historic Preservation (HP) overlay zoning for the property located approximately 280 feet north of the northeast corner of 13th Place and Cinnabar Avenue [10023 North 13th Place], known historically as the Thompson Rock Garden or the Sunnyslope Rock Garden. Maps and photos of the subject property are attached.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that rezoning request Z-94-24-3 be approved.

BACKGROUND

The property was first identified through the 1979 *Phoenix Historic Building Survey* conducted by Charles Hall Page which noted, at the time, that while the site was not yet 50 years in age it appeared to be eligible for listing as a unique local example of folk art used in landscaping. The property, now substantially over 50 years in age, is recommended eligible for listing on the Phoenix Historic Property Register under Criterion C, as an exceptional example of a folk art environment. The request for designation was initiated by the current property owner, and designation was initiated by the Historic Preservation Commission on June 17, 2024.

PROPERTY OVERVIEW

Grover Cleveland Thompson purchased this property in 1954, and over two decades, created a folk art environment throughout the exterior of his home. Thompson combined original mosaic pieces, free-form concrete and mortar, statuary, native rock, and cast concrete pieces that used Halloween masks as forms, to create an immersive folk art environment. In addition to the rock garden, Thompson's home is present on this parcel and is included within the boundaries of proposed historic designation. In fact, the home blends seamlessly into the exterior sculptures and contributes to the overall site. The parcel's boundary walls also feature Thompson's designs and are also contributing.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

The eligibility criteria for HP overlay zoning and listing on the PHPR are set forth in Section 807.D of the City of Phoenix Zoning Ordinance. To qualify, a property must demonstrate significance in local, regional, state, or national history, architecture, archaeology, engineering, or culture, according to one or more of the following criteria:

- A. The property is associated with the events that have made a significant contribution to the broad pattern of our history;
- B. The property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past;
- C. The property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, represents the work of a master, possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
- D. The property has yielded or may likely yield information integral to the understanding of our prehistory or history.

In addition to the significance requirement, the property must also be at least 50 years old or have achieved significance within the past 50 years if it is of exceptional importance. The property must also possess sufficient integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association to convey its significance.

SIGNIFICANCE

The Thompson Rock Garden is eligible for historic designation under Criterion C, as a rare local example of a folk art environment. The sculptures possess high artistic value using a distinctive method of construction and materials.

The creator and initial property owner, Grover Cleveland Thompson, was born in 1892. He was a heavy equipment operator in Seattle, Washington, and when he retired, he moved to Arizona, and purchased the subject property in 1954. Thompson and his wife Nancy parked their trailer at the rear of the property and began construction of the home. Thompson did not possess formal training in art, architecture, or construction, but is the builder of the home and sculptures on the site. According to the current owner, Marion Blake, Thompson built the concrete block walls around the exterior of his trailer, allowing construction to be done, while having a contained living space. The trailer was later internally demolished, leaving the concrete block shell of the home Thompson built. The home is a concrete block Ranch-style house, with standing seam metal roofing, wood sided gables, and a covered porch running the length of the façade. The home has steel casement windows, with projecting masonry sills. Not only did Thompson construct his home, but he constructed the entirety of this folk art environment which extends from the front porch of the house. The garden's proximity to the home creates a continuous experience from the home to the garden throughout the parcel. The boundary walls also contribute to the same whimsical sense of place that Thompson created with the rock garden sculptures.

The sculptures within the rock garden are made out of cement, rock, chipped glass, fragments of Fiestaware, and a plethora of other man-made and natural objects. Many of the materials used had been previously discarded. For example, at the time, people had grown concerned about the glaze used in Fiestaware, so a lot of it was thrown out. Despite the loss of fingers on his left hand, Thompson worked on his artistic creations over the course of more than 20 years until his death in 1977. Thompson used

Halloween masks as forms, and cast concrete busts, which he integrated into his artwork. The environment includes a mosaic interpretation of Seattle's Space Needle, representations of Inca villages, towers, carved and cast figures, fountains, free-form masonry shapes, animals, people, houses, and decorative patterns. The entirety of this folk art environment is a unique testament to Thompson's artistic imagination, ingenuity, and homages to places he visited and lived.

The Thompson Rock Garden is one of only two known folk art sites in Phoenix, with the other one being the Louis Lee Rock Garden, located at 4015 East McDonald Drive. The Lee Rock Garden has been recommended eligible in the 2007 *Asian American Historic Property Survey*. As an unusual and rare property type, both significant as a folk art environment and as an expression of Chinese ethnic heritage, the Lee Rock Garden has garnered attention and has been featured in many articles over the decades. The Thompson Rock Garden is considered a well-known unofficial landmark within the Sunnyslope neighborhood, and it has also been featured on numerous websites and in travel guides such as Roadside America, RoadsideArchitecture.com, SPACES, and Phoenix New Times. The garden is also included in Sunnyslope neighborhood programming, such as Art Walks.

INTEGRITY

After Thompson's death in 1977, Marion Blake purchased the property in 1978. Blake, a teacher with a background in Art History, has maintained the folk art environment since that time. This has enabled Thompson's creations to retain exceptional integrity – including location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling and association – which clearly convey the significance of the entire folk art environment. Ms. Blake has repaired pieces, such as some of the windmill blades. She has also added her own touch to the garden adding sunglasses to some of the busts – completely removable.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

Section 807.E states that, when applying the evaluation criteria in Section 807.D, the boundaries of a historic district should be drawn as carefully as possible to ensure that:

1. The district contains documented historic, architectural, archaeological, or natural resources;
2. The district boundaries coincide with documented historic boundaries such as early roadways, canals, subdivision plats or property lines;
3. Other district boundaries coincide with logical physical or manmade features and reflect recognized neighborhood or area boundaries; and
4. Other non-historic resources or vacant land is included where necessary to create appropriate boundaries to assist in meeting the criteria in Section 807.D.

The proposed HP zoning boundary encompasses 0.22 gross acres. It has been drawn to include the subject parcel in its entirety as well as the adjacent portion of the right way, as is customary in rezoning cases. The proposed boundary contains the

documented historic resources and follows parcel lines and street monument lines as much as possible.

CONCLUSION

The rezoning request Z-94-24-3 to establish Historic Preservation (HP) overlay zoning for the subject property should be approved for the following reasons:

1. The property meets the significance, age, and integrity requirements for HP overlay zoning set forth in Section 807.D of the Zoning Ordinance; and
2. The proposed boundaries meet the eligibility criteria outlined in Section 807.E.

Writer

M. Jackson

9/6/24

Team Leader

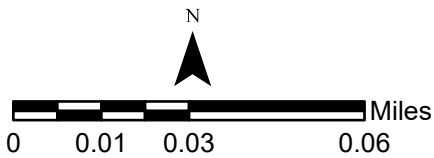
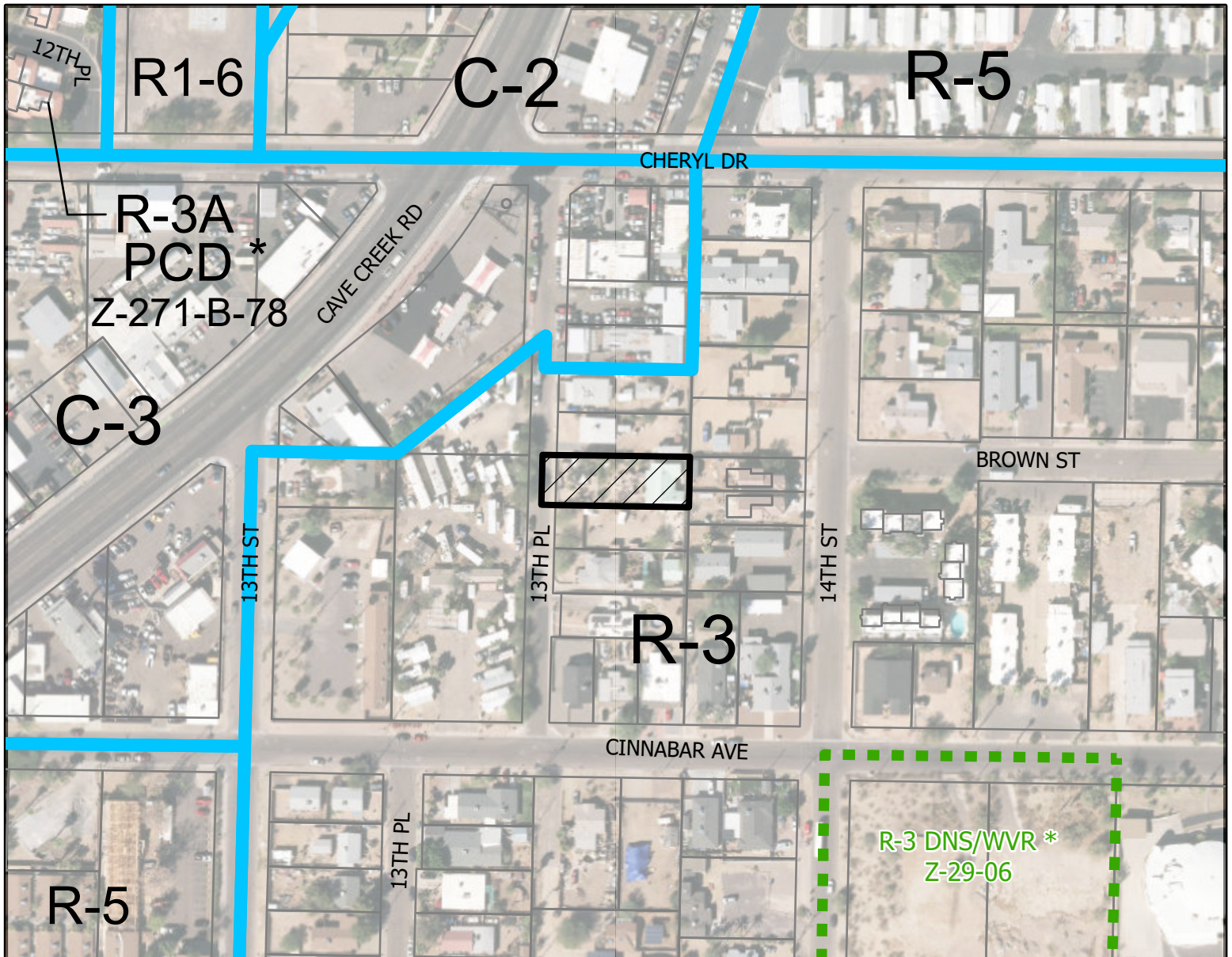
K. Weight

Attachments:

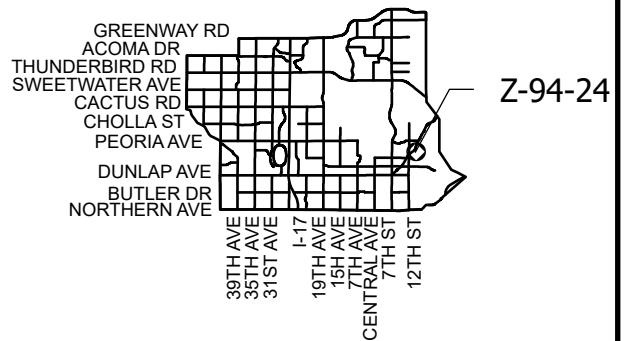
Sketch Maps (2 pages)

Aerial Photo (1 page)

Historic Property Inventory Form with site photos (11 pages)

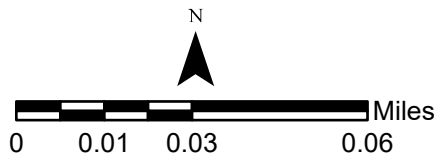
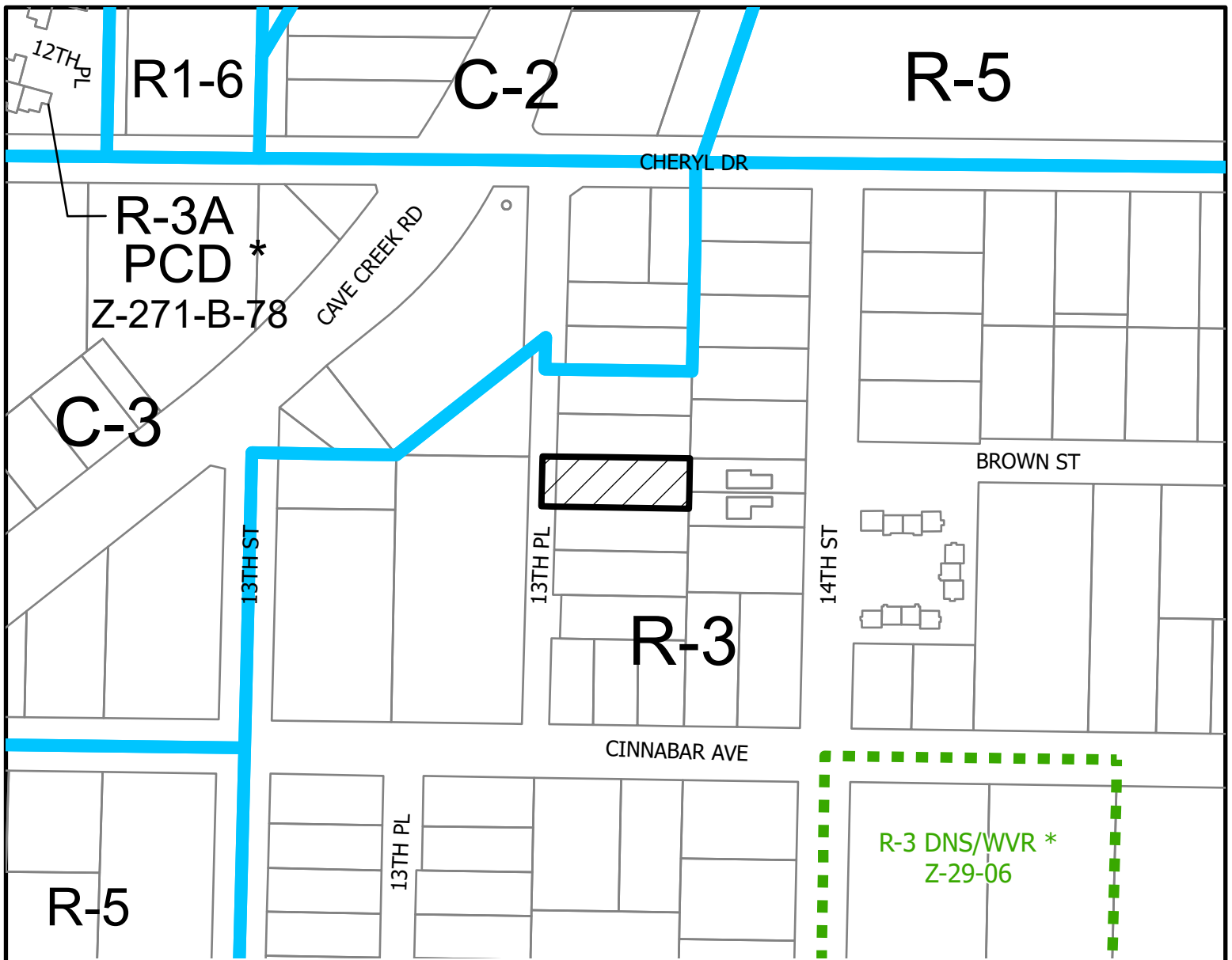


NORTH MOUNTAIN VILLAGE
COUNCIL DISTRICT: 3

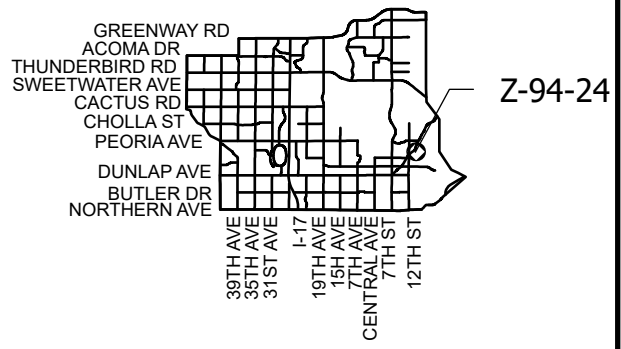


APPLICANT'S NAME: City of Phoenix Historic Preservation Commission		REQUESTED CHANGE:	
APPLICATION NO: Z-94-24		FROM: R-3 (0.22 ac.)	
DATE: 7/09/2024		TO: R-3 HP (0.22 ac.)	
REVISION DATES:			
GROSS AREA INCLUDING 1/2 STREET AND ALLEY DEDICATION IS APPROX. 0.22 Acres		AERIAL PHOTO & QUARTER SEC. NO. QS 28-30	ZONING MAP K-9
MULTIPLES PERMITTED R-3 R-3 HP		CONVENTIONAL OPTION 3 3	
		* UNITS P.R.D OPTION 4 4	

* Maximum Units Allowed with P.R.D. Bonus



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0.22 Acres		ZONING MAP	
		QS 28-30 K-9	
MULTIPLES PERMITTED		CONVENTIONAL OPTION	
R-3		3	
R-3 HP		3	
		* UNITS P.R.D OPTION	
		4	
		4	

* Maximum Units Allowed with P.R.D. Bonus

Please type or print clearly. Fill out each applicable space accurately and with as much information as is known about the property. Use continuation sheets where necessary. Send completed forms to City of Phoenix Historic Preservation Office, 200 W. Washington, 3rd Floor, Phoenix, AZ 85003 for listing on Phoenix Historic Property Register, or Arizona State Historic Preservation Office, 1300 W. Washington, Phoenix, AZ 85007 for listing on Arizona/National Register of Historic Places.

PROPERTY IDENTIFICATION

For properties identified through survey: Site No: Survey Area:

Historic Name(s): (Enter the name(s), if applicable, that best reflects the property's historic importance.)

Thompson Rock Garden

Address: 10023 North 13th Place

City or Town: Phoenix County: Maricopa Tax Parcel No.: 159-30-082

Township: 3N Range: 3E Section: 28 Quarter Section: Q28-30 Acreage: 0.199

Block: Lot(s): 26 Plat (Addition): Nichols Place Year of Plat: 1947

UTM reference: Zone: 12S Easting: 402264.806 Northing: 3715815.968 USGS 7.5' quad map: Sunnyslope Quad

Architect: Not Determined Known Source:

Builder: Grover Cleveland Thompson Not Determined Known Source: Arizona Republic, May 30, 1976.

Construction Date: 1954-1974 Estimated Known Source: JTWROS Deed, March 1, 1954.

STRUCTURAL CONDITION:

Good (Well-maintained; no serious problems apparent)

Fair (Some problems apparent) Describe:

Poor (Major problems; imminent threat) Describe:

Ruin/Uninhabitable

USES/FUNCTIONS

Describe how the property has been used over time, beginning with the original use:

Grover Cleveland Thompson purchased this property in 1954, and over two decades, created a folk-art environment throughout the exterior of his home. Thompson combined original mosaic pieces, free-form concrete and mortar, statuary, native rock, and cast concrete pieces that used Halloween masks as forms, to create an immersive folk-art environment.

SOURCES:

Maricopa County Recorder property records, contemporaneous news articles, Marion Blake.

PHOTO INFORMATION

Date of photo: January 2024

View Direction (looking towards):

North

Attach recent photograph of property to this space. Additional photos may be appended.



SIGNIFICANCE

To be eligible for the Phoenix/Arizona/National Register, a property must represent an important part of the history or architecture of an area.

Note: a property need only be significant under one of the areas below to be eligible.

- A. HISTORIC EVENTS/TRENDS (On a continuation sheet describe how the property is associated either with a significant historic event or with a trend or pattern of events important to the history of the nation, the state, or the local community.)
 - B. PERSONS (On a continuation sheet describe how the property is associated with the life of a person significant in the past.)
 - C. ARCHITECTURE (On a continuation sheet describe how the property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values.) Architecture and Art, 1953-1977.
- Outbuildings: (Describe any other buildings or structures on the property and whether they may be considered historic.)

INTEGRITY

To be eligible for the Phoenix/Arizona/National Register, a property must have integrity; that is, it must be able to convey visually its importance.

Provide detailed information below about the property's integrity. Use continuation sheets if necessary.

- 1. LOCATION Original Site Moved date: _____ Original Site: _____
- 2. DESIGN (Describe alterations from the original design, including dates—known or estimated—when alterations were made) The resources are unaltered and have been carefully maintained: first by the original artist until his death, and they by the next owner of the property, Marion Blake. The individual folk-art resources retain their original artistic integrity.
- 3. SETTING (Describe the natural and/or built environment around the property) The setting is unaltered.

Describe how the setting has changed since the property's period of significance:

- 4. MATERIALS (Describe the materials used in the following elements of the property) Walls (structure): Concrete block. Foundation Concrete Roof: Metal
Windows: Steel Casement
If the windows have been altered, what were they originally?
Wall Sheathing: _____
Art Environment: Concrete, ceramic tile mosaic pieces, glass, earth and stone.
- 5. WORKMANSHIP (Describe the distinctive elements, if any, of craftsmanship or method of construction) Though unskilled, the workmanship of the artist is clearly evident throughout this environment. Accent materials are well embedded in the masonry for strength, yet the exposed edges and sides allow the artist's vision to remain clearly expressed, with creatively defined forms.

NATIONAL REGISTER STATUS (if listed, check the appropriate box)

- Individually listed Contributor Non-contributor to the _____ Historic District
- Date Listed: _____ Determined eligible by keeper of National Register. Date: _____

RECOMMENDATIONS OF ELIGIBILITY (opinion of HPO staff or survey consultant)

- Property is is not eligible individually.
- Property is is not eligible as a contributor to a potential historic district.
- More information needed to evaluate
- If not considered eligible, state reason: _____

FORM COMPLETED BY

Name and Affiliation: Cletus Montoya, City of Phoenix Historic Preservation Planner Date: 6/3/2024
Mailing Address: 200 W Washington St Phoenix, AZ 85003 Phone No.: _____

Name of Property: Grover Cleveland Thompson Rock Garden Continuation Sheet No.: 1Address: 10023 North 13th Place

SIGNIFICANCE

ARCHITECTURE (On a continuation sheet describe how the property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values.) Areas of significance, Architecture and Art, 1953-1977.

Context

Folk-art, as a type of art, began to be studied and categorized over a century ago, when "...artists of the 1920s began seeking the roots of American art in early nonacademic work."¹ Folk-art media can be as varied as traditional formal art objects. "In simplest terms, American folk art consists of painting, sculpture and decoration of various kinds, characterized by an artistic innocence that distinguishes them from works of so-called fine art or the formal decorative arts."² When folk-art is combined with architectural components and the construction of structures, it allows for the creation of a folk-art environment. A folk-art environment is a personal compilation of different artistic components, created to express the vision of the artist. Being monumental in both size and number of artistic components, folk-art environments can include landscape architecture, structures, sculpted forms, mosaics, found item creations, and painted components. Visitors to these environments are immersed in the work of the artist. Art Historian, and landscape architecture specialist, John Beardsley described this type of artistic environment as "*Part architecture, part sculpture, part landscape, visionary environments seem insistently and purposefully to defy the usual categories of artistic practice.*"³ The subject property at 10023 North 13th Place is just such a personal artistic vision.

Born in 1892, Grover Cleveland Thompson was a heavy equipment operator in Seattle, Washington, when he retired and moved to Arizona, and purchased the subject property in 1954. Thompson and his wife Nancy parked their trailer at the rear of the property and began construction. According to Marion Blake, Thompson built the cement block walls around the exterior of his trailer, allowing construction to be done, while having a contained living space. The trailer was later internally demolished, leaving the cement block shell of the home Thompson built. The home is a cement block ranch house, with standing seam metal roofing, wood sided gables, and a covered porch running the length of the façade. The home has steel casement windows, with projecting masonry sills. Thompson did not possess formal training in art, architecture, nor construction. Nevertheless, Thompson not only built his home, but the entirety of this folk-art environment out of cement, rock, chipped glass, fragments of Fiesta ware, and a plethora of other man-made and natural objects. Despite the loss of fingers on his left hand, Thompson worked on his artistic creations over the course of more than 20 years until his death in 1977. "*I started this thing with a lot of ideas. I got up and had a day's work done before breakfast. I built everything I could think of.*"⁴ Thompson used Halloween masks as forms, and cast concrete busts, which he integrated into his artwork. The environment includes a whimsical recreation of the Space Needle, representations of Inca villages, towers, carved and cast figures, fountains, free-form masonry shapes, animals, people, houses, and mosaics. The entirety of this folk-art environment is a unique testament to Thompson's artistic imagination and ingenuity. Located in the parcel's front yard, the Thompson Rock Garden was built to engage passersby and be viewed in its entirety.

Significance

The property was first identified through the 1979 *Phoenix Historic Building Survey* conducted by Charles Hall Page which noted, at the time, that while the site was not yet 50 years in age it appeared to be eligible for listing as a unique local example of folk art used in landscaping. The property, now substantially over 50 years in age, is recommended eligible for listing on the Phoenix Historic Property Register under Criterion C, as an exceptional example of a Folk-Art Environment.

Integrity

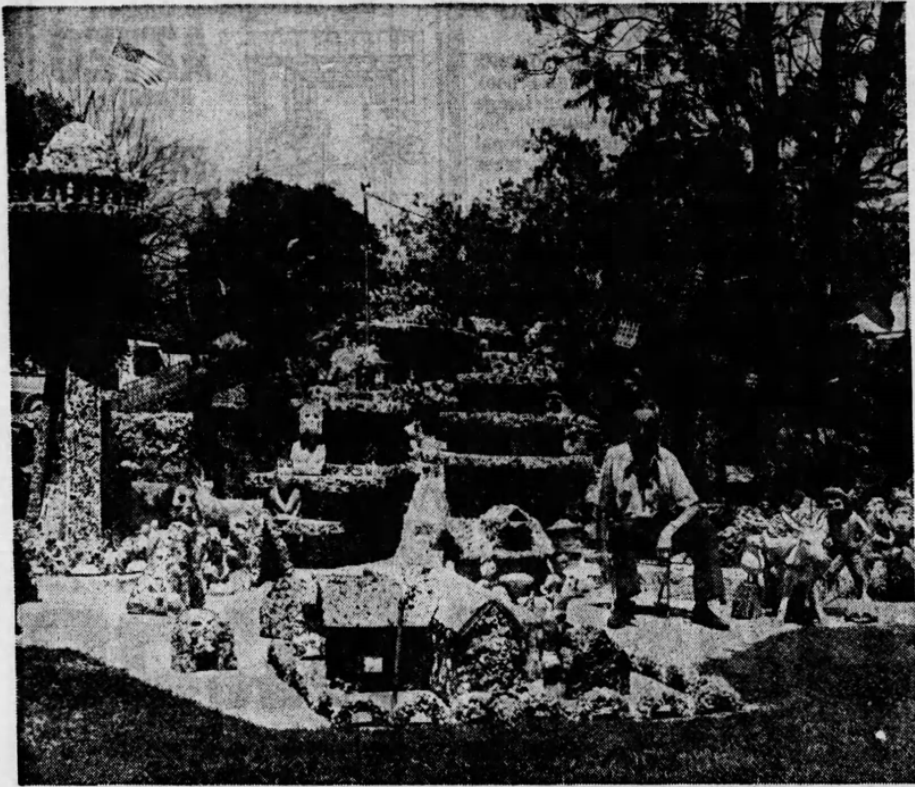
After Thompson's death in 1977, Marion Blake purchased the property in 1978. Blake, a teacher with a background in Art History, has maintained the folk-art environment since that time. This has enabled Thompson's creations to retain exceptional integrity – including location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling and association – which clearly convey the significance of the entire Folk-art environment.

¹Jean Lipman and Alice Winchester, *Flowering of American Folk Art, 1776-1876* (New York: Viking, 1974), 10.

²Ibid., 9.

³John Beardsley, *Gardens of Revelation*. (New York: Abbeville Press, 1995), 7,8.

⁴ Arizona Republic, May 30, 1976, K-6.



Grover Thompson built this wonderland of cement, rock and chipped glass

Arizona Republic photograph, May 30, 1976.



Tom Story/The Arizona Republic

Sculpture garden grows wild in yard

'Outsider art' lauded as 'fantastic'

By Kathleen Ingley
The Arizona Republic

The Seattle Space Needle glittered in the Arizona sunshine Wednesday.

Studded with bits of broken pottery and glass, the 10-foot concrete replica of the famous landmark overlooks an astonishing and whimsical sculpture garden in Sunnyslope.

The display includes windmills, foot-high buildings, pueblo-style rock dwellings, a fountain topped with china swans, an Indian family cast in concrete, concrete squirrels, a gorilla fighting a snake and Popeye.

Seated at a small picnic table, one concrete figure held a helium-filled balloon Wednesday with a special message: "Happy Birthday, Grover."

Born 101 years ago on Jan. 1, the late Grover Cleveland Thompson probably would have chuckled at that addition to the massive work of folk art he built in his front yard at 10023 N. 13th Place. It certainly amused

Valley residents who took advantage of a rare chance to visit the garden Wednesday.

Marveling at how Thompson managed to assemble the replica of the Space Needle, Phoenix resident Bill Lynch said, "It's fantastic."

"I think it's worth preserving forever. It shows one man's desire to create something of his own."

His friend, Joe Hartle, pointed to a piece of glass on which claims for a product could still be read: "Aid to your scalp."

Marion Blake, who has owned the property for 12 years, never met Thompson.

But she feels a close connection. When she lived in New York, Blake once made sculptures with bits of broken pottery she found. When she took some pieces to store at the nearby home of her parents, who wintered in the Valley, "My father said, 'There's a place in Phoenix with a whole yard of this.'"

— See **SCULPTURE**, page B2



A visitor to Grover Cleveland Thompson's art garden (above) photographs part of a sculpture. Marion Blake, (left) who owns the Sunnyslope property and folk artwork by Thompson, shows off the detailed sculptures Wednesday. Although she never met Thompson, Blake says she feels connected to him because she used to make artwork from bits of broken pottery.

ROCK

From Page 1

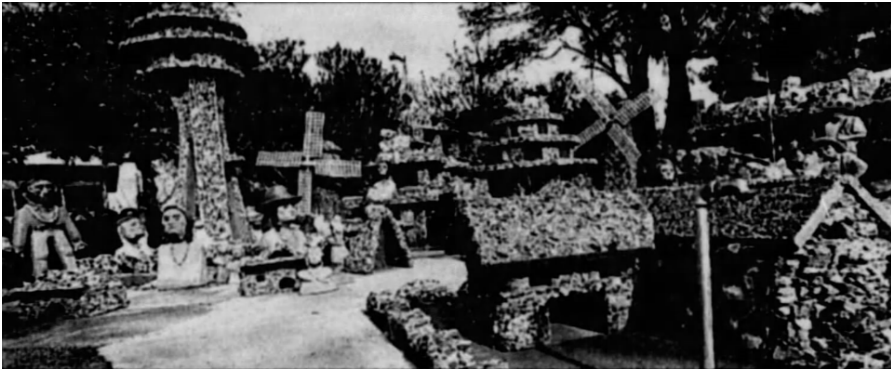
on his sculpture garden. Considered an eccentric, Thompson is remembered in almost a folklorish manner among older Sunnyslope residents who knew him.

Blake, a graduate of New York University's art history program, divides her time between teaching hearing-impaired children for the

Phoenix Union High School District and serving as curator of the rock garden.

The next scheduled public viewing of the garden will be from 6:30 to 10:30 p.m. July 12. It also will mark the garden's first nighttime public viewing since Blake became curator.

Arizona Republic article, January 2, 1992.



Arizona Republic photograph, March 4, 1992.



Front yard of subject property, January 2024.



Front yard of subject property, January 2024.



Front yard of subject property, January 2024.



Front yard of subject property, January 2024.



North and west façades of home, January 2024.



West façade of home and front yard artwork, January 2024.



West façade of home and front yard artwork, January 2024.



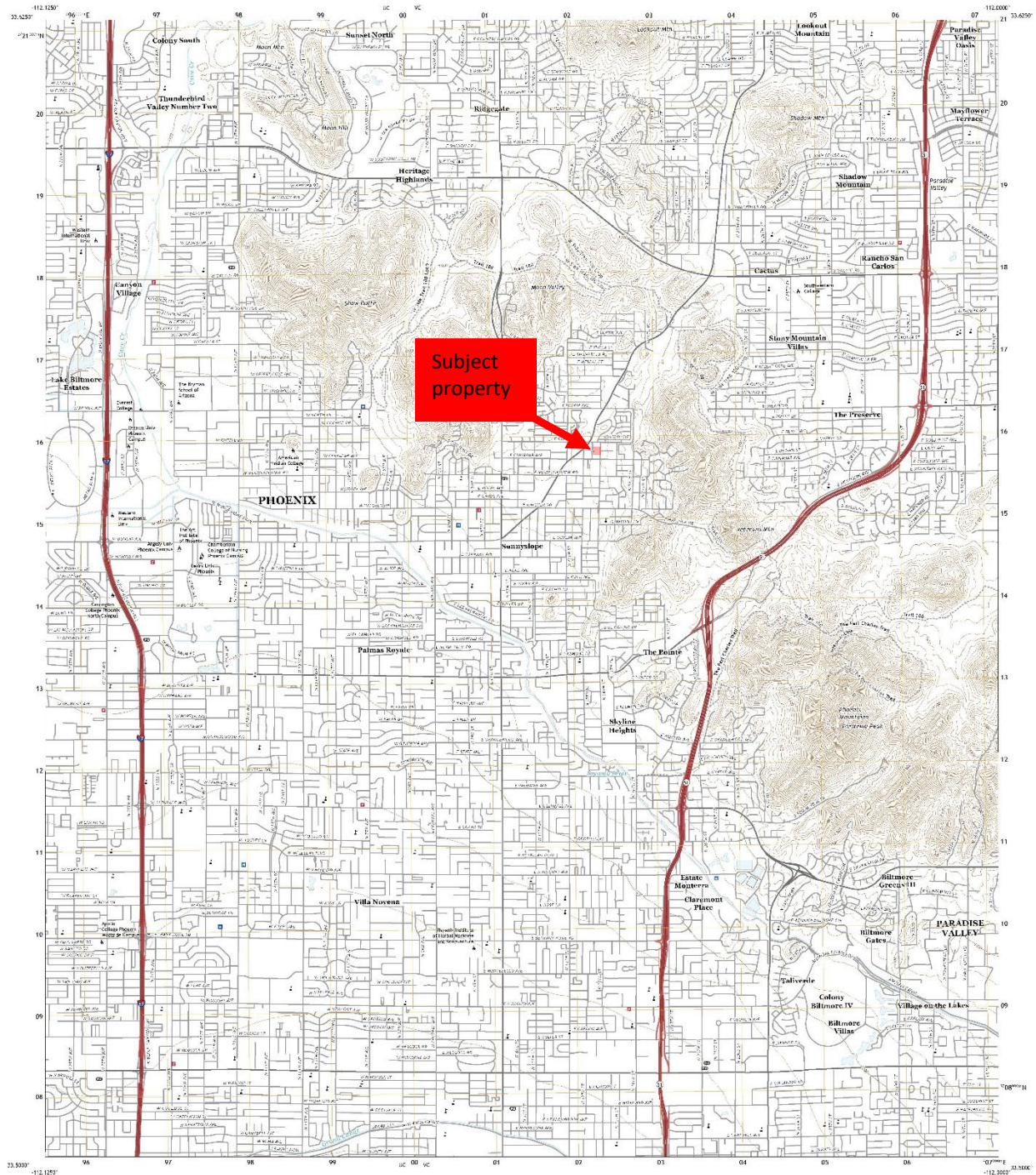
West façade of home and front yard artwork, January 2024.



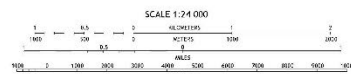
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY



SUNNYSLOPE QUADRANGLE
ARIZONA - MARICOPA COUNTY
7.5-MINUTE SERIES



Produced by the United States Geological Survey
North American Datum of 1983 (NAD83)
Vertical Datum: National Mean Sea Level (MSSL)
Horizontal Datum: North American Datum of 1983 (NAD83)
Projection: Universal Transverse Mercator (UTM)
Zone: 12N
Datum: NAD83
Units: Meters
Scale: 1:24,000
Date: 2018
Author: USGS
Editor: USGS
Reviewer: USGS
Publisher: USGS
Distributor: USGS
Sales Office: USGS
Contact: USGS
Phone: USGS
Fax: USGS
Email: USGS
Web: USGS



1	2	3
4	5	6
7	8	9

ROAD CLASSIFICATION	
Interstate	US Route
State Route	Local Road
County Road	Other Road
Trail	Other Road

SUNNYSLOPE, AZ
2018

