

CAPITOL RECORDS TOWER

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Photo by Adrian Scott Fine/L.A. Conservancy.

As you may have seen in the news, new development is slated near Hollywood's iconic Capitol Records Tower (Welton Becket and Associates, 1956).

The tower's owners, developers Millennium Partners and Argent Ventures, recently announced plans for the Millennium Hollywood Project, a mixed-use complex with residential units and hotel, office, restaurant, and retail space. It would rise on both the east and west sides of the 1700 block of North Vine Street, incorporating the landmarked Capitol Records Tower. Tenant EMI Music would continue to use the building as office space and recording studios.

The environmental review process for the project began in May 2011 with the release of a Notice of Preparation (NOP) of an environmental impact report (EIR). In the next step in the process, the owners will prepare a draft EIR to identify the environmental effects of the project and study alternatives to reduce significant negative impacts.

In 2006, the Conservancy's Modern Committee successfully nominated the Capitol Records Tower as a City of Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument (HCM); it was designated as HCM #857. As a result, the EIR will treat the building as a historic resource and evaluate the project's potential impacts on it. The Conservancy commented on the NOP, and the public will have the chance to comment on the draft EIR when it becomes available.

The Conservancy's Position

[LAC Comments on Notice of Preparation \(PDF\)](#)



Postcard of the Capitol Records Tower. From L.A. Conservancy archives.

The Conservancy appreciates that this project does not propose to demolish or significantly alter the Capitol Records Tower. Yet the project does include new construction directly adjacent to it, which could potentially cause adverse impacts to the landmark.

The Conservancy's comments on the NOP sought to ensure compatible, complementary infill construction around the tower. Specifically, new construction can and should be designed in accordance with the [*Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties*](#). Following these nationally accepted preservation standards will help ensure an appropriate scale and massing for new construction that protects the integrity of the Capitol Records Tower and its setting.

Specifically, our comment letter requested that the EIR evaluate aesthetic impacts of the project, and its relationship to other entitled and proposed projects in the immediate vicinity, to ensure that new construction does not overwhelm the Capitol Records Tower or obstruct important views of the tower from certain vantage points in Hollywood. We also asked that the EIR evaluate the project's structural and acoustical impacts to the building's historic underground recording studios and reverberation chambers.



Photo by Adrian Scott Fine/L.A. Conservancy.

Our comments underscored the fact that if the proposed project adversely impacts the character-defining features of the Capitol Records Tower, the EIR must consider preservation alternatives and appropriate mitigation measures.

The Conservancy also noted our concern about the twenty-five-year development term requested in the project application. We believe that this period is exceedingly long and could limit the consideration of more appropriate opportunities in the future as the economic climate and demand for certain uses change.

About the Capitol Records Tower



Photo from L.A. Conservancy archives.

The world's first circular office tower, the Capitol Records Tower was completed in 1956 and became an instantly recognizable icon of modern architecture. The iconic building also advanced a new corporate identity for Capitol Records, the first major record label on the West Coast. Singer Johnny Mercer founded the label in 1942 with music store owner Glenn Wallichs and Buddy DeSylva, a songwriter and producer at Paramount Pictures.

Located at 1750 North Vine Street near the legendary intersection of Hollywood and Vine, the thirteen-story Capitol Records Tower was the first height-limit office building constructed in Hollywood after World War II.

The tower was designed by the prominent Los Angeles firm of Welton Becket and Associates, with architect Louis Naidorf serving as project designer. Contrary to popular belief, the building's design did not intentionally resemble a stack of records. Its unique shape primarily sought unabashed cost-efficiency, with the reduced area of the exterior walls saving on both construction and air-conditioning. Naidorf didn't even know who the client was when he proposed his circular design.



Photo by Adrian Scott Fine/L.A. Conservancy.

The Capitol Records Tower featured the most advanced technical amenities of its time, including an automated elevator system. Yet the most striking innovation lay in the three recording studios underneath the tower, the first ever designed for high-fidelity recording. The underground reverberation chambers, located below the parking lot east of the structure, were designed with help from guitar pioneer Les Paul and have remained in high demand ever since. The recording studios at Capitol Records have hosted legendary recording sessions by such artists as Frank Sinatra, Nat “King” Cole, The Beatles, and The Beach Boys.