

DEPARTMENT OF  
CITY PLANNING  
200 N. SPRING STREET, ROOM 272  
LOS ANGELES, CA 90012-4801

CULTURAL HERITAGE COMMISSION

RICHARD BARRON  
PRESIDENT

GAIL KENNARD  
VICE PRESIDENT

PILAR BUELNA  
DIANE KANNER  
BARRY MILOFSKY

ROCKY WILES  
COMMISSION OFFICE MANAGER  
(213) 978-1300

CITY OF LOS ANGELES  
CALIFORNIA



ERIC GARCETTI  
MAYOR

EXECUTIVE OFFICES

VINCENT P. BERTONI, AICP

DIRECTOR

(213) 978-1271

KEVIN J. KELLER, AICP

EXECUTIVE OFFICER

(213) 978-1272

LISA M. WEBBER, AICP

DEPUTY DIRECTOR

(213) 978-1274

<http://planning.lacity.org>

November 27, 2018

Los Angeles City Council  
c/o Office of the City Clerk  
City Hall, Room 395  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Attention: PLUM Committee

Dear Honorable Members:

**THE COMEDY UNION; 5040 WEST PICO BOULEVARD; CHC-2018-5097-HCM; ENV-2018-5098-CE**

At its meeting of **November 15, 2018**, the Cultural Heritage Commission took the actions below to include The Comedy Union in the list of Historic-Cultural Monuments, subject to adoption by the City Council:

1. **Determined** that the proposed designation is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), pursuant to Article 19, Section 15308, Class 8 and Article 19, Section 15331, Class 31 of the State CEQA Guidelines;
2. **Determined** that the property conforms with the definition of a Monument pursuant to Section 22.171.7 of the Los Angeles Administrative Code;
3. **Recommended** that the City Council consider The Comedy Union for inclusion in the list of Historic-Cultural Monuments; and
4. **Adopted** the attached findings as the findings of the Commission.

The Commission vote was as follows:

Moved: Kanner  
Seconded: Kennard  
Ayes: Barron, Milofsky  
Absent: Buelna

**Vote: 4 – 0**

Etta Armstrong, Commission Executive Assistant I  
Cultural Heritage Commission

## FINDINGS

- The Comedy Union “embodies the distinctive characteristics of a style, type, period, or method of construction” as an excellent example of Art Deco commercial architecture in Los Angeles.

## CRITERIA

The criterion is the Cultural Heritage Ordinance which defines a historical or cultural monument as any site (including significant trees or other plant life located thereon), building or structure of particular historic or cultural significance to the City of Los Angeles if it meets at least one of the following criteria:

1. Is identified with important events of national, state, or local history, or exemplifies significant contributions to the broad cultural, economic or social history of the nation, state, city or community;
2. Is associated with the lives of historic personages important to national, state, city, or local history; or
3. Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a style, type, period, or method of construction; or represents a notable work of a master designer, builder, or architect whose individual genius influenced his or her age.

## SUMMARY

The Comedy Union is a one-story commercial building located at 5040 West Pico Boulevard between Sycamore Avenue and Orange Drive in the Mid-City neighborhood of Los Angeles. Designed in the Art Deco architectural style, the subject property was constructed in 1930 as an office building. Soon after its construction it assumed what would be its longtime use, as a medical-dental office, and in 1991, it was converted to a performance venue. Since the early 2000s, the subject property has been occupied by the Comedy Union, a stand-up comedy club.

Irregular in plan, the subject property is of wood and brick construction with smooth stucco cladding on the primary facade and has a concrete foundation. The building has a flat roof with a parapet, which is slightly stepped along the cornice line and ornamented with neon tube lighting. The primary, north-facing elevation is asymmetrically configured into three bays that step back from the sidewalk. It features irregularly spaced fluted pilasters of varying widths that are topped by capitals with a raked wave motif. The center bay comprises a stepped rectangular tower that rises past the roof parapet and is ornamented with cast plaster sunbursts and crowned by a gold-painted point. The building’s primary entrance is located at the base of the tower and consists of a wide, single metal door with an oversized aluminum tube handle. A fabric canopy supported by metal bars is affixed to the tower directly above the entrance. At the center of the tower, above the primary entrance, is a pierced concrete screen with a stepped geometric pattern. The primary elevation contains only two windows, which are slightly recessed into the façade and comprise of four-over-four double-hung steel windows with wire glass four-lite fixed or hopper windows above. The south-facing façade features single and paired multi-lite windows, and a single entrance door accessed from the surface parking lot. There is a small interior courtyard and a gated vehicular alley that are not visible from the public right-of-way.

The subject property has undergone multiple alterations over the years that include the removal of a portion of the parapet wall in 1968; modifications related to earthquake compliance in 1988; the addition of a freestanding pole sign at the primary façade in 1991; and the replacement of the primary door, infill and replacement of original windows with wood-framed vitrines, and the addition of a fabric entry canopy, mechanical box, and security window bars to the primary façade, all at unknown dates.

SurveyLA, the citywide historic resources survey, identified the subject property as individually eligible for listing under national, state, and local designation programs as an excellent example of Art Deco commercial architecture in the area.

## DISCUSSION

The Comedy Union meets one of the Historic-Cultural Monument criteria.

The subject property “embodies the distinctive characteristics of a style, type, period, or method of construction” as an excellent example of Art Deco commercial architecture in Los Angeles. The Comedy Union reflects the execution of the Art Deco architectural style at the height of its popularity. Though the Art Deco style was often favored in the design of larger buildings, such as towers or skyscrapers, it was also used to make smaller buildings appear taller and more extravagant. The building’s smooth stucco walls, emphasized verticality, and flat roof with stepped and flat parapets are all reflective of the style. Other distinguishing features include the pierced concrete panels, central tower with a stepped cap, fluted pilasters, and decorative geometric motifs. Despite interior and exterior alterations, the subject property retains sufficient integrity of location, design, setting, workmanship, feeling, and association to convey its significance.

## CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT (“CEQA”) FINDINGS

State of California CEQA Guidelines, Article 19, Section 15308, Class 8 “*consists of actions taken by regulatory agencies, as authorized by state or local ordinance, to assure the maintenance, restoration, enhancement, or protection of the environment where the regulatory process involves procedures for protection of the environment.*”

State of California CEQA Guidelines Article 19, Section 15331, Class 31 “*consists of projects limited to maintenance, repair, stabilization, rehabilitation, restoration, preservation, conservation or reconstruction of historical resources in a manner consistent with the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitating, Restoring, and Reconstructing Historic buildings.*”

The designation of the Comedy Union as an Historic-Cultural Monument in accordance with Chapter 9, Article 1, of The City of Los Angeles Administrative Code (“LAAC”) will ensure that future construction activities involving the subject property are regulated in accordance with Section 22.171.14 of the LAAC. The purpose of the designation is to prevent significant impacts to a Historic-Cultural Monument through the application of the standards set forth in the LAAC. Without the regulation imposed by way of the pending designation, the historic significance and integrity of the subject property could be lost through incompatible alterations and new construction and the demolition of an irreplaceable historic site/open space. The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation are expressly incorporated into the LAAC and provide

standards concerning the historically appropriate construction activities which will ensure the continued preservation of the subject property.

The use of Categorical Exemption Class 8 in connection with the proposed designation is consistent with the goals of maintaining, restoring, enhancing, and protecting the environment through the imposition of regulations designed to prevent the degradation of Historic-Cultural Monuments.

The use of Categorical Exemption Class 31 in connection with the proposed designation is consistent with the goals relating to the preservation, rehabilitation, restoration and reconstruction of historic buildings and sites in a manner consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties.

Categorical Exemption ENV-2018-5098-CE was prepared on October 26, 2018.

## **BACKGROUND**

On September 20, 2018, the Cultural Heritage Commission voted to take the property under consideration. On October 25, 2018, a subcommittee of the Commission consisting of Commissioners Kennard and Kanner visited the property, accompanied by staff from the Office of Historic Resources.