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March 21, 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:

**STANDARD OIL COMPANY SALES DEPARTMENT BUILDING/ WOMAN'S BUILDING; 1727 NORTH SPRING STREET; CASE NO. CHC-2018-11-HCM, ENV-2018-12-CE**

At its meeting of **March 15, 2018**, the Cultural Heritage Commission took the actions below to include the above-referenced property 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; and
3. **Recommended** that the City Council consider and designate the subject property a Historic-Cultural Monument; and
4. **Adopted** the staff attached report findings as the findings of the Commission.

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

**Vote: 4 – 0**

Etta Armstrong, Commission Executive Assistant I  
Cultural Heritage Commission

**Time for Council to Act** The Commission action will be transmitted to the City Council for consideration. Pursuant to Section 22.171.10 (f) of the Los Angeles Administrative Code, the Council may approve or disapprove in whole or in part an application or initiation for a proposed designation of a Monument. The Council shall act in 90-days of the public hearing held before the Commission. The 90-day time limit may be extended by the Council for good cause for a maximum of 15 days. If the Council does not act on the application or initiation within this 105-days total time limit, the application or initiation to designate a Monument shall be deemed to have been denied. The Council may override a Commission recommendation of denial of Council initiated designation by a minimum of 10-votes.

Enclosures: Findings

**STANDARD OIL COMPANY SALES DEPARTMENT BUILDING/WOMAN'S BUILDING  
FINDINGS**

**(Adopted by the Cultural Heritage Commission on March 15, 2018)**

- The Standard Oil Company Sales Department Building/Woman's Building "reflects the broad cultural, economic, or social history of the nation, state, or community" for its association with the Standard Oil Company of California, an important entity in the early development of the California oil industry, and its later association with the feminist art collective, the Woman's Building, which greatly influenced the development and evolution of the 1970s and 1980s feminist art movement in Los Angeles and nationwide.
- The Standard Oil Company Sales Department Building/Woman's Building "embodies the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural-type specimen, inherently valuable for study of a period, style or method of construction" as an excellent and highly intact example of Beaux Arts architecture applied to an industrial building.
- The Standard Oil Company Sales Department Building/Woman's Building is "a notable work of a master builder, designer, or architect whose individual genius influenced his or her age," as a highly intact and important work by renowned Southern California architect Myron Hunt.

**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, such as historic structures or sites in which the broad cultural, economic, or social history of the nation, State or community is reflected or exemplified, or which are identified with historic personages or with important events in the main currents of national, State or local history or which embody the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type specimen, inherently valuable for a study of a period style or method of construction, or a notable work of a master builder, designer or architect whose individual genius influenced his age.

**SUMMARY**

The 1914 Standard Oil Company Sales Department Building/Woman's Building is a three-story industrial office building located at the corner of North Spring Street and Aurora Street in the northeast section of Chinatown. It was designed in the Beaux Arts architectural style by Southern California master architect Myron Hunt (1868-1952) to house Standard Oil Company's Los Angeles branch sales and accounting department. The company vacated the subject property in 1928. From 1975 to 1991, the subject property was home to the Woman's Building, a prominent and influential feminist art collective. Currently, it is being used as showrooms and artist lofts.

The Standard Oil Company was established by John D. Rockefeller in Ohio in 1870 and by the late 1870s, Standard Oil had become one of the largest companies in the world. The company first established itself in California by opening an office in San Francisco in

1878 and soon after acquired oil-related assets in Southern California. By the mid-1910s, the Standard Oil Company was the largest oil producer in the state, and a decade later, it was the leading gasoline marketer in the western United States. In 1926, the company purchased Pacific Oil Company, which increased its production capacity by nearly 50 percent. The company reorganized its corporate structure and assumed the new name Standard Oil Company of California, now known as the Chevron Corporation.

In the early 1970s, a feminist art movement was started in Los Angeles and nationwide. As part of this movement, artist Judy Chicago, along with other female artists, established an independent school for women artists called the Feminist Studio Workshop (FSW). In 1975, the FSW moved to the subject property, which they named the Woman's Building. The Woman's Building was the first independent feminist cultural institution in the world, committed to providing an outlet for women artists to proclaim their place in art history. For two decades, the FSW and a number of other groups and organizations, most of which were dedicated to feminist causes, occupied all three floors of the subject property. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, FSW and other leading feminist and lesbian art organizations hosted numerous programs and activities, including a full-scale gallery program, hundreds of art exhibitions, screenings of video and film about women and women's issues, lectures by feminist artists, presentations by artists and art historians, as well as cultivated performance art groups and an annual writing series featuring noted feminist authors. Also, beginning in the late 1970s, the Woman's Building made lesbianism and the lesbian art movement a central focus, founding pioneering organizations such as the Natalie Barney Collective and the Great American Lesbian Art Show. Although FSW ended its programming in 1981, the Woman's Building continued to provide a space for feminist art education and expression, and play a crucial role in establishing women artists, and lesbian women in particular, in the mainstream art movement until its closing in 1991.

Irregular in plan, the subject property is constructed of brick with a flat roof and is clad with brick laid in a common bond pattern. The primary southeast-facing elevation and the northeast-facing elevation feature stringcourses above the first and third-story windows. A projecting iron cornice sits atop the parapet. Fenestration consists of single and paired fixed multi-light steel windows with operable awning windows at the center sash as well as single two-over-two light steel windows. All windows have molded cast stone or concrete sills. Second-story windows on the primary façade have stepped arch headers, and third-story windows feature curved segmental arch headers. On the primary elevation a prominent entryway features cast stone ornamentation that encompasses a multi-light arched second-story window. The entrance comprises a pair of recessed partially glazed wood doors reached via two concrete steps. Centered above the entrance is a shield inscribed with the letters "SOC." The northeast elevation features three recessed entrances with single wood doors and a metal fire escape. On the northwest elevation there is a painted ghost sign reading "STANDARD OIL COMPANY."

Myron A. Hunt was born in 1868 in Sunderland, Massachusetts. He received an architecture degree at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and later went to Europe to study early Renaissance architecture. Upon returning to the United States, Hunt worked as a draftsman for Hartwell & Richardson in Boston, and in 1896, he moved to Chicago to work with the architectural firm of Shepley, Rutan & Coolidge. Hunt started a practice in Los Angeles in 1903, then formed a partnership with Elmer Grey, with whom he designed many grand homes, including the residence of Henry Huntington, the Pasadena Valley Hunt Club, and an early campus plan at the Throop Polytechnic Institute (now the California Institute of Technology). After parting with Grey in 1911, Hunt set up his own practice in Pasadena and then later, in 1920, he formed a partnership with Harold Chambers. Hunt officially retired in 1947, but continued to work as a consultant until his death at the age of 83 in May 1952. Throughout his 40-plus-year career in Southern California, Hunt designed over 400 buildings, including schools, banks, hospitals, libraries, hotels, and private residences. Some of Hunt's work comprises the Wattles Mansion (1907, HCM #579), the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles (1919-1921, demolished), the Huntington Library in San Marino (1920), the Rose Bowl in Pasadena (1922), and the Pasadena Public Library (1927).

Based on building permits, it appears that the building has undergone minimal alterations that include the replacement of the original cast stone cornice with galvanized iron in 1920; the addition of a fire escape to the northeast elevation in 1921; replacement of original brick sills and lintels on the northwest and southwest elevations with concrete and the replacement of two doors on the northeast façade in 1938; and the installation of tension and shear anchors on all elevations for seismic strengthening in 1985. On the interior, a small area in the center of the building was floored over in 1938. Other alterations, occurring at unknown dates, include the boarding up of the transom on the primary southeast entrance; the painting of the brick cladding on the first story of the southeast and northeast elevations; the replacement of two windows on the second and third stories of northeast elevation with French doors; and the addition of window and door security bars.

The subject property was identified in the Cornfield Arroyo Seco Specific Plan Area Historic Resources Survey, June 2011 as eligible for historic designation at national, state, and local levels.

### **DISCUSSION**

The Standard Oil Company Sales Department Building/Woman's Building successfully meets three of the Historic-Cultural Monument criteria.

The property "reflects the broad cultural, economic, or social history of the nation, state, or community" for its association with the Standard Oil Company of California, an important entity in the early development of the California oil industry, and its later association with the feminist art collective, the Woman's Building, which greatly influenced the development and evolution of the 1970s and 1980s feminist art movement in Los Angeles and nationwide. After the dissolution of John D. Rockefeller's Standard Oil

Company in 1911, the Standard Oil Company of California became an independent company. By the mid-1910s, when the company occupied the subject property, it was the largest oil producer in the state, and a decade later, it was the leading gasoline marketer in the western United States. The importance placed on the building by the growing company is reflected in the hiring of renowned Southern California architect Myron Hunt and the inclusion of the most modern lighting and forced air heating systems of the time.

Over nearly two decades that they occupied the subject property, the Woman's Building provided a space for feminist art education and expression, and played a critical role in establishing women artists in the mainstream art movement. The collective also laid the groundwork for greater inclusivity to be realized in the feminist art movement today. The Woman's Building became a center for social and political action for many disenfranchised groups. For lesbian women, it provided an all-encompassing social network, offering open houses and social events, including all-women dances and a lesbian fashion show. The Woman's Building also increased sponsorship of writing workshops, art installations, and other events featuring the work of women of color.

The Standard Oil Company Sales Department Building/Woman's Building also "embodies the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural-type specimen, inherently valuable for study of a period, style, or method of construction" as an excellent and highly intact example of Beaux Arts architecture applied to an industrial building. The subject property embodies Beaux Arts' distinguishing characteristics through its classical ornamentation, such as cast stone headers, molded lintels, and stringcourses, and a prominent entryway embellished with a shield, capitals, brackets, and a decorative window crown. Given that the Beaux Arts architectural style is primarily applied to large estates, institutional properties, and large-scale commercial buildings, the subject property is a relatively rare example.

Furthermore, the Standard Oil Company Sales Department Building/Woman's Building is "a notable work of a master builder, designer, or architect whose individual genius influenced his or her age," as a highly intact and important work by renowned Southern California architect Myron Hunt. Among the first formally trained architects from the eastern United States to permanently reside in California, Hunt designed hundreds of private residences, commercial properties, and institutional buildings.

Hunt designed the Standard Oil building in the Beaux Arts style, a rather ornate architectural idiom for such a modest, industrial use. However modest compared to most of his other works, the building sits conspicuously among a block of largely unremarkable early 1900s industrial buildings.

The subject property appears to be highly intact and retains a high level of integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

**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 Standard Oil Company Sales Department Building/Woman’s Building as a 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-2018-12-CE was prepared on February 27, 2018.

**BACKGROUND**

On January 18, 2018, the Cultural Heritage Commission voted to take the property under consideration. On February 22, 2018, a subcommittee of the Commission consisting of Commissioners Barron and Kanner, accompanied by staff from the Office of Historic Resources, visited the property and viewed the exterior as the current owner refused entry to the interior.