

## **WATTS HAPPENING CULTURAL CENTER**

1827 East 103<sup>rd</sup> Street

**CHC-2021-2238-HCM**

**ENV-2021-2239-CE**

### **FINDINGS**

- The Watts Happening Cultural Center “exemplifies significant contributions to the broad cultural, economic or social history of the nation, state, city or community” as a community center for predominantly local Black artists, writers, musicians, filmmakers, and poets that played an important role in the community after the Watts uprising of 1965.

### **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The Watts Happening Cultural Center meets one of the Historic-Cultural Monument criteria: it “exemplifies significant contributions to the broad cultural, economic or social history of the nation, state, city or community” as a community center for predominantly local Black artists, writers, musicians, filmmakers, and poets that played an important role in the community after the Watts uprising of 1965.

Following the Watts Riots, Watts became one of the first communities to benefit from new social welfare legislation in an anti-poverty agenda known as the War on Poverty under President Lyndon Johnson. At this time, there was an influx of government and private grants for arts programming in Black neighborhoods like those housed at the subject property. The Black Arts Movement gained significant momentum with artists accelerating their efforts to create spaces to exhibit and perform their works. Black arts organizations such as the Mafundi Institute offered programs that taught social and artistic skills, while the Watts Happening Cultural Center was a safe space for self-expression that fostered a sense of community identity and pride. In addition, during a tumultuous period, the subject property provided Watts youth and other community members with an outlet to express collective trauma, and to utilize art as a form of healing and rebuilding. The Watts Happening Cultural Center was one of the prominent cultural centers in Los Angeles from 1970 to 1975 and was among only a few cultural centers of its kind in Black neighborhoods in the United States at the time. Today, the subject property is a rare remnant of cultural expression that evolved in the aftermath of the 1965 Watts uprising.

The applicant argues that the subject property also “is associated with the lives of historic personages important to national, state, city, or local history” for its connection with prominent Hollywood celebrities and influential Black activists and artists who either were directly involved in the creation of the Mafundi Institute, advocates for the organization, or participated in arts programming at the subject property. In addition, the applicant states the property is significant under this criterion as a commission of notable Black architects and community activists, Arthur Silvers and Robert Kennard. However, staff are unable to make this finding. There were many notable artistic and entertainment industry personalities that passed through the Center’s doors, including dancer and actress Marge Champion, as well as the Watts Prophets, a group of musicians and poets that combined elements of jazz music and spoken word performance, creating a unique sound that gave them a considerable local following. Nevertheless, the subject property does not appear to be identified with the productive period of any one particular artist or group. Furthermore, both Robert Kennard and Arthur Silvers were local architects and neither rise to the level of being historic personages.

Despite interior and exterior alterations, the subject property retains a high level of integrity of location, design, setting, materials, 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 Watts Happening Cultural Center 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 City of Los Angeles has determined based on the whole of the administrative record, that substantial evidence supports that the Project is exempt from CEQA pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section Article 19, Section 15308, Class 8 and Class 31, and none of the exceptions to a categorical exemption pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2 applies. The project was found to be exempt based on the following:

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-2021-2239-CE was prepared on May 21, 2021.