

FAIRFAX THEATER BUILDING
7901-7909 W. Beverly Boulevard
CHC-2021-3836-HCM
ENV-2021-3838-CE

FINDINGS

(As amended by the Cultural Heritage Commission on August 5, 2021)

- The Fairfax Theater Building “exemplifies significant contributions to the broad cultural, economic or social history of the nation, state, city or community” as an excellent example of a 1930s neighborhood movie theater with associated commercial storefronts, designed in the Art Deco style. The subject property is also significant for its association with the development of Fairfax Avenue as a major commercial center of Los Angeles’s Jewish community.
- The Fairfax Theater Building “embodies the distinctive characteristics of a style, type, period, or method of construction” as a noteworthy and intact example of an Art Deco style neighborhood theater.

DISCUSSION

The Fairfax Theater Building meets two of the Historic-Cultural Monument criteria.

The subject property “exemplifies significant contributions to the broad cultural, economic or social history of the nation, state, city or community” as an excellent example of a 1930s neighborhood movie theater with associated commercial storefronts, designed in the Art Deco style. The subject property is also significant for its association with the development of Fairfax Avenue as a major commercial center of Los Angeles’s Jewish community.

The business of motion picture distribution and exhibition encouraged the development of the neighborhood theater. Movie palaces Downtown were considered first-run theaters, while the neighborhood theaters exhibited a film once its drawing power had decreased. Two distinct forms of the neighborhood theater developed during the 1920s and 1930s. One was to imitate the Downtown movie palace in its presence on the street by featuring enlarged scale and ornate detailing. The other form was the incorporation of the theater into a standard business block, often prominently located in the commercial core of a community, as exhibited by the subject property. As seen at the subject property, the entrance was typically a recessed portal in place of a storefront, surrounded by storefronts on either side and office space above. The lobby filled the space otherwise occupied by a store, and the large auditorium sat behind the office block. Only the sign and the marquee differentiated the building from those around it. Intact examples of neighborhood theaters such as the subject property, which operated as a theater for 80 years, are becoming increasingly rare.

In addition, the subject property was one of the first commercial buildings to be constructed along Fairfax Avenue and over the years has housed many Jewish businesses as well as served as a gathering place for the local Jewry. The residential areas surrounding the subject property were associated with the Jewish community as early as the 1920s and 1930s, and Jewish businesses

on Fairfax Avenue became most established after World War II. City directories listed dozens of businesses along Fairfax Avenue that catered to Jewish customers, including kosher butchers, delis, bakeries, markets, bookstores, and clothing stores, many of which were located within the subject property's 13 storefronts. Further, the Fairfax Theater hosted High Holy Day services from 1947 to 1977 for the Orthodox Jewish synagogue, Etz Jacob, and over 40 special events, community meetings, fundraisers, boy scout parties, concerts, and film festivals. Fairfax Avenue, between Beverly Boulevard and Rosewood Avenue, was identified as a Planning District in SurveyLA for its association with the Jewish community and its cohesive low-scale commercial properties, but it was not found to be eligible for designation due to a lack of integrity. The subject property is one of the only remaining, intact commercial buildings on Fairfax Avenue associated with this 20th century neighborhood history.

Furthermore, the Fairfax Theater Building "embodies the distinctive characteristics of a style, type, period, or method of construction" as a noteworthy and intact example of an Art Deco style neighborhood theater. The subject property 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 sloped parapets are all reflective of the style. Other distinguishing features include the central stepped tower and fluted pilasters.

Although most of the historic fabric on the interior of the subject property has been removed and the theater is in substandard condition, the exterior retains a high level of integrity of location, setting, materials, design, 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 Fairfax Theater Building 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-2021-3838-CE was prepared on July 12, 2021.