

NEW BETHEL BAPTIST CHURCH

503 - 505 E. Brooks Avenue

CHC-2022-8904-HCM

ENV-2022-8905-CE

FINDINGS

- The New Bethel Baptist Church “exemplifies significant contributions to the broad cultural, economic or social history of the nation, state, city or community” as an important site associated with the African American community in the Oakwood neighborhood of Venice from the mid-20th century to the present.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The New Bethel Baptist Church meets one of the Historic-Cultural Monument criteria: “exemplifies significant contributions to the broad cultural, economic or social history of the nation, state, city or community” as an important site associated with the African American community in the Oakwood neighborhood of Venice from the mid-20th century to the present.

The New Bethel Baptist Church has persevered as a cornerstone in the Venice community of Oakwood for over 65 years. The establishment of the church in 1952, and subsequent purchase of the subject property in 1957, coincided with a pivotal moment of African American migration to the Oakwood neighborhood. While African Americans have resided in Venice since the early 1900s, from 1940-1950, the Black population in Oakwood tripled, from 346 to 1,157. Much of this influx was a result of World War II and the increased need for defense workers at Hughes Aircraft in Culver City and McDonnell Douglass in Santa Monica, as well as the displacement of African American and Latino residents of Santa Monica following the construction of the Santa Monica Freeway. Over the years of physical and demographic changes in Oakwood, the New Bethel Baptist Church represented an anchor of stability for long-term residents, as well as a gathering place for friends and families who had left the neighborhood.

Since it first occupied the subject property, the New Bethel Baptist Church congregation has been a historic fixture in the Oakwood community, centering its services around spiritual counseling and the self-development of local residents. The church’s main building, in addition to the auxiliary unit, has served as a community center where residents could gather, worship, socialize, and advocate for shared goals for the neighborhood. In addition, through the hosting of fellowship activities such as weekly church service, Sunday school community picnics, and Christmas, Easter, and Black History Month programming, the congregation has assisted in the cultivation of vibrant social and cultural life of African Americans residing in Venice.

In his book, *The Black Church: This is Our Story, This is Our Song*, renowned historian of African American history and culture, Henry Louis Gates Jr. argues, “no pillar of the African American community has been more central to its history, identity, and social justice vision than the Black church.” Today, New Bethel Baptist Church continues to be a focal point in the Oakwood community, and amidst the dwindling numbers of African American residents in Venice, the subject property is one of the last remaining active religious institutions and individually significant resources associated with the African American community in Oakwood.

Despite interior and exterior alterations, the subject property retains sufficient 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 New Bethel Baptist Church 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 outlined 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-2022-8905-CE was prepared on March 10, 2023.