

January 23, 2024

Honorable Mayor and City Council
City of Long Beach
California

RECOMMENDATION:

Recommendation to review the historic landmark nomination, background materials, findings, and recommendations of the Cultural Heritage Commission, and determine whether to designate the former Fire Station No. 9 at 3917 Long Beach Boulevard as a Long Beach Historic Landmark; and, if appropriate request the City Attorney to prepare an Ordinance and Resolution to designate the exterior of the structure as a historic landmark. (District 5)

DISCUSSION

On June 29, 2023, the Los Cerritos Neighborhood Association filed an application to designate the former Fire Station No. 9 building (City of Long Beach-owned) at 3917 Long Beach Boulevard as a Locally Designated Historic Landmark (Application No. HLM2306-01). On September 26, 2023, the Cultural Heritage Commission (CHC) held a properly noticed public hearing to consider the landmark application (Attachment A). Landmark designations shall be based upon review of each criterion described in Section 2.63.050 of the Long Beach Municipal Code (LBMC). At the time, due to strong considerations both toward landmarking or toward declining or delaying landmarking until the negotiation and sale of the property is completed, City of Long Beach (City) staff did not provide a specific recommendation during the CHC hearing on September 26, 2023. City staff provided the background for the building to assist the CHC in reaching its own conclusions and recommendation to the City Council for the City Council's consideration. At the conclusion of the September public hearing, the CHC voted (5-0) to recommend designation of the exterior of Fire Station No. 9 as a Locally Designated Historic Landmark building by having staff return to the CHC with findings for preserving the exterior and requested City Staff to also return with options for the CHC could consider regarding landmarking and preserving the interior features of the building along with their potential implications.

On November 28, 2023, the CHC held a public hearing based on the recommendation from the previous meeting and considered the options that City Staff prepared relative to landmarking and preserving interior building features (Attachment B). At the conclusion of the November hearing, the CHC recommended, with a majority vote (5-0), that the City Council designate both the exterior and three specific interior features of the City-owned Fire Station No. 9 Building at 3917 Long Beach Boulevard as a Locally Designated Historic Landmark. After much deliberation, the final CHC recommendation includes 1) protection/preservation of the exterior of the structure; 2) protection/preservation of three (3) internal features: reception room fireplace and built-ins, apparatus/engine room wood truss ceiling, and fire hose tower; 3) adaptive reuse and/or photography of remaining features, including: reception room blackboard, original doors, original

lockers, stairway, and vault; and 4) replacement of the missing Works Progress Administration (WPA) plaque on the front elevation.

Pursuant to Section 2.63.060.B of the LBMC, the City Council shall consider the nomination as soon as practical after receiving the CHC's recommendation and shall approve by Ordinance (in whole or in part) or disapprove the nomination. The Ordinance designating a Historic Landmark shall include a description of the particular characteristics that justify the designation; set forth the reasons relative to the designation criteria; and delineate the location and boundaries of the Historic Landmark.

At this time, based on extensive public input and further research, City staff recommends that the City Council concur with the CHC recommendations to landmark the exterior of the building. City staff also recommends that the City Council refine those CHC recommendations to balance the goal of preserving the structure with the goal of adaptively reusing the structure and bringing a desired local-serving business to the location. Historic structures are best preserved when they remain in use, as the National Trust for Historic Preservation explains, "building reuse is an important contributor to the economic and social well-being of your community." To achieve the benefits of adaptive reuse, some flexibility is required in the preservation of the structure, particularly the interior spaces, as detailed in this report. City Staff does not recommend landmarking and preservation restrictions to specific interior features.

Project Site

The subject property is the former Fire Station No. 9 at 3917 Long Beach Boulevard and is identified as Assessor Parcel Number (APN) 7139-013-900. The site is owned by the City and encompasses approximately 5,800 square feet, or 0.13-acre. The project site is improved with the vacant City Fire Station No. 9 building, which served Fire Service Area No. 9. The site is in the Community Commercial Automobile-Oriented Zoning District and has a Neighborhood Serving Center or Corridor – Low General Plan PlaceType Designation. The site is bound by Long Beach Boulevard on the east and North Virginia Road to the west and is regionally accessible from Interstate-710 and Interstate-405. Surrounding land uses consist of commercial buildings to the north, east (across Long Beach Boulevard), and south and single- and multi-family residences to the north, east (across Long Beach Boulevard), south, and west (across North Virginia Road). The property is not located in a designated historic district.

The project site was developed in 1938 as a fire station designed by W. Horace Austin (1881–1942) in the Tudor Revival style as a WPA project for the City. The 5,548-square-foot, rectangular building of one-and-a-half stories in height with a three-story hose tower remains on the project site. The two fire truck bays are located at the rear of the structure with direct access to Virginia Road.

Due to the presence of mold, the building was determined to be uninhabitable by the Long Beach Fire Department (LBFD). The existing fire station at 3917 Long Beach Boulevard remains vacant.

A Peer Review and Cultural Resources Study for the Fire Station No. 9 Replacement Project (May 2020) was conducted, which included a peer review of a previous Historical Resource Evaluation Report (September 2019) prepared for the building, identified the fire station as a

historical resource subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and individually eligible for local listing or designation under Criteria A of LBMC section 2.63.050. The analysis included in the 2021 Environmental Impact Report (EIR) prepared for Fire Station No. 9 also examined the reuse of the building as one of the project alternatives. The analysis included in the EIR demonstrates that the reuse of the building would result in the same significant and unavoidable impact because the remediation would result in the removal of the character-defining features resulting in the same historic resource impacts as demolishing the building.

On November 3, 2022, the Economic Development Department (Economic Development) released a Request for Proposal to solicit proposals for purchase of the property for development or adaptive reuse of the vacant fire station building. No proposals were received during the required timeframe. Subsequently, Economic Development listed the property on the open market on July 21, 2023, with offers due by August 17, 2023. The listing documentation acknowledged the filing of this Landmark Nomination application to inform potential buyers of the Landmark Nomination. Multiple offers were received through the listing and were reviewed by Economic Development to be considered by the City Council. On October 17, 2023, the City Council directed City staff to begin negotiations relative to the sale of the property. An offer currently under review includes the proposed adaptive reuse of the fire station building into a bakery.

During this timeframe, on June 29, 2023, the Los Cerritos Neighborhood Association filed an application to designate the former Fire Station No. 9 building at 3917 Long Beach Boulevard as a historic landmark.

Analysis

The fire station building has been altered over time and no building permit records were found. Major exterior alterations were however noted during the field inspection. Some interior spaces retain their original features and finishes, while some spaces have been remodeled.

The Cultural Heritage Ordinance in the LBMC (LBMC Section 2.63.050) includes four criteria for a cultural resource to qualify for a landmark designation:

1. Criterion A: it is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of the City's history;
2. Criterion B: it is associated with the lives of persons important to the City's past;
3. Criterion C: it embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, region, or method of construction or represents the work of a master or possesses high artistic values; and,
4. Criterion D: it has yielded, or has the potential to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

To be eligible for landmark designation, the building must meet at least one of the aforementioned criteria.

The building located at 3917 Long Beach Boulevard is eligible for Long Beach Historic Landmark designation under Criterion A of the landmark designation findings. The building is associated with the City's partnership with the WPA which led to the development of needed civic infrastructure and civic services needed after the 1933 earthquake. It does not qualify under any of the other criteria.

Exterior Features

Notable exterior features of the building include the single-family residential scale and wood details, hose tower, and oversized garage doors. However, there is not a specific feature or set of exterior features that make this structure eligible for landmark designation. Rather, eligibility relates to the structure's association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of the City's history. Based on the CHC motion on November 28, 2023, City staff recommends that the City Council consider the findings for landmarking that were brought before the CHC (see Attachment J within Attachment B) for consideration as to whether to landmark the exterior of the building for its association with the WPA (Criterion A). If the proposed landmark designation is approved, it is recommended that the building be recognized as Former Fire Station No. 9. Additionally, although the CHC recommended that both the exterior and portions of the interior be landmarked, it is City staff's recommendation that preservation restrictions should only apply to the preservation of the exterior of the building. The needed remediation of mold issues may require alterations to both the interior and exterior of the building.

Interior Features

As is appropriate in most local landmark cases, City staff recommends limiting the landmark protections to the exterior building features and does not recommend restrictions to specific interior features. In this case, it is the structure's overall existence in its location that makes it eligible under Criterion A. No specific interior features are central to the eligibility of this potential landmark, and the structure is not eligible under Criterion C, which is the most common criterion used to landmark interior features as it seeks to preserve distinctive characteristics of construction of the work of a master, or high artistic value. In fact, the landmarking of interior features is rare in Long Beach and has only been used for the most unique and notable of structures such as the Villa Riviera, Rancho Los Cerritos, and Rancho Los Alamitos.

CHC Recommendation

On November 28, 2023, the CHC recommended to the City Council the following:

- Protection/preservation of the exterior of the structure;
- Protection/preservation of three (3) internal features: reception room fireplace and built-ins, apparatus/engine room wood truss ceiling, and fire hose tower;
- Adaptive reuse and/or photography of remaining features identified in the landmark application (reception room blackboard, original doors, original lockers, stairway, and vault). If these features cannot be reused, photography and cataloging of the features shall be subject to the Historic American Building Survey (HABS) guidelines provided by the National Park Service (NPS); and,

- Require that a plaque providing the historic context of the landmark be installed on the exterior of the building.

Pursuant to Section 2.63.060.B of LBMC, the City Council shall consider the nomination as soon as practical after receiving the CHC's recommendation and shall approve by Ordinance (in whole or in part) or disapprove the nomination.

Staff Recommendation

Building upon the CHC's discussion and recommendation, City staff recommends the City Council refine the recommendation by CHC to landmark the exterior of the building while providing some flexibility for interior features that may be needed in order to successfully adaptively reuse the building. The CHC recommended the protection and preservation of both exterior and interior elements. To honor the intention of CHC's recommendation while providing flexibility for adaptive reuse and needed mold remediation, staff recommends refining requirements for the interior features called out by CHC, to instead be preserved, conditionally as feasible, rather than requiring full protection in place. Under this refined recommendation, an applicant in any adaptive reuse must still attempt to maintain those features, but if it is infeasible to do so, they must instead complete extensive photographic documentation through HABS-like photography *and* must also offer any removed interior features for architectural/historic salvage.

Staff recommends the City Council direct City Attorney to draft a landmark Ordinance that protects the following:

- Protection/preservation of the exterior of the structure;
- Require that a plaque providing the historic context of the landmark be installed on the exterior of the building; and,
- Conditional preservation, as feasible, of the following internal features. If it is determined to be infeasible to preserve the following features as part of the adaptive reuse of the building, the project applicant shall complete a HABS-like photography *and* offer those removed interior features for architectural/historic salvage. The interior features for conditional preservation shall be limited to:
 - Reception room fireplace, blackboard, and built-ins,
 - Apparatus/engine room wood truss ceiling,
 - Fire hose tower;
 - Original doors;
 - Original lockers;
 - Stairway; and,
 - Vault.

Previous environmental studies have noted that the reuse of this structure would have the same impacts as the preservation of the structure because reuse could require such extensive modifications that the integrity of the historic structure would be lost. The interior features

included in the landmark nomination exist throughout the existing building. Considering needed mold remediation and the potential floor plan changes that may be needed to accommodate the adaptive reuse of the building, City staff does not recommend any interior features for landmarking at this time.

Environmental Review

In accordance with Section 15331, Guidelines for Implementation of CEQA, this project was found to be exempt from further environmental review. The Class 31 exemption 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 (1995), Weeks and Grimmer. The action to designate the building as a local landmark would include provisions to preserve existing character defining features that remain on the building.

EIR-04-19 (State Clearinghouse No. 2019110206) prepared for the previous application to demolish the former fire station building was prepared and made available for public review and comment, in accordance with CEQA and the CEQA Guidelines. This analysis included an alternative to adaptively reuse the building, which could result in the demolition of the building due to the extent of remediation needs for the mold issues onsite. If the property and building is sold to a third party, the findings and analysis, including identified mitigation measures can be referenced. The findings made in the EIR analysis require certification by a discretionary body subject to CEQA. These findings will be made by the City Council when the City Attorney returns with the Ordinance for a first reading.

This matter was reviewed by Deputy City Attorney Erin Weesner-McKinley on December 27, 2023 and by Acting Revenue Management Officer Valerie Valentine on December 29, 2023.

TIMING CONSIDERATIONS

City Council action is requested on January 23, 2024, to allow enough time for City Attorney to prepare an Ordinance and Resolution. Furthermore, the property is currently in a disposition process with Economic Development and the requested City Council direction to the City Attorney for the scope of the Ordinance will allow for the prospective buyer to understand the implications of a landmark designation on their proposed adaptive reuse project.

LEVINE ACT

This item is subject to the Levine Act. The Mayor, Councilmembers, and Commissioners who have received a contribution of more than \$250 within 12 months prior from a party, participant, or their representatives involved in this proceeding may do either of the following: (1) disclose the contribution on the record and recuse themselves from this proceeding; OR (2) return the portion of the contribution that exceeds \$250 within 30 days from the time the elected official knew or should have known about the contribution and participate in the proceeding.

All parties, participants, and their representatives must disclose on the record of this proceeding any contribution of more than \$250 made to the Mayor or any Councilmembers within 12 months prior to the date of the proceeding. The Mayor, Councilmembers, and Commissioners are prohibited from accepting, soliciting, or directing a contribution of more than \$250 from a party, participant, or their representatives, during a proceeding and for 12 months following the date a final decision is rendered.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact associated with the recommendation. However, when a landmark is designated, it becomes eligible for the City's Mills Act program. This program provides for potential reduction in property taxes. The fiscal impact of any such participation will be determined at the time the City Council approves any proposed Mills Act contracts for this property. This recommendation has no staffing impact beyond the normal budgeted scope of duties and is consistent with existing City Council priorities. There is no local job impact associated with this recommendation.

SUGGESTED ACTION:

Approve recommendation.

Respectfully submitted,



Christopher Koontz
Director
Community Development

APPROVED:



THOMAS B. MODICA
CITY MANAGER

ATTACHMENTS: A – CULTURAL HERITAGE COMMISSION STAFF REPORT DATED SEPTEMBER 26, 2023
B – CULTURAL HERITAGE COMMISSION STAFF REPORT DATED NOVEMBER 28, 2023