

Landmark Nomination for 3917 Long Beach Boulevard (Former Fire Station No. 9)

City Council Meeting – January 23, 2024

Site/Project History

1938 - Fire Station No. 9 was designed by W. Horace Austin (1881–1942) in the Tudor Revival style as a Works Progress Administration (WPA) project for the City of Long Beach (City).

2000 - First crew member complaint of visible mold in the Fire Station No. 9 building.

2019 - Fire Station No. 9 building determined to be uninhabitable by the Long Beach Fire Department (LBFD) and vacated by fire personnel. Fire personnel initially co-located to Fire Station Nos. 13 and 16, until an interim Fire Station No. 9 established at 2019 East Wardlow Road (outside fire service area 9).

2020 - The City entered escrow for the purchase of a property located at 4101 Long Beach Boulevard.

2021 - Planning Commission (PC) public hearing to consider the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the demolition of the former Fire Station No. 9, located at 3917 Long Beach Boulevard. PC continued the item to a date uncertain until the property placed for sale and adaptive reuse.

Site/Project History (continued)

2022 - The Economic Development Department (Economic Development) published a bid to solicit proposals for purchase of the property for development or adaptive reuse of the vacant fire station building. No offers were made on the property during the required timeframe.

2023 - City Council certifies EIR and associated entitlements to construct a new Fire Station No. 9 at 4101 Long Beach Boulevard.

June 2023 - Los Cerritos Neighborhood Association filed an application to landmark the former Fire Station No. 9 at 3917 Long Beach Boulevard.

July 2023 - Economic Development listed the property on the open market on July 21, 2023, with offers due by August 17, 2023. Multiple offers were received through the listing and are under review by Economic Development.

Landmark Hearing History

September 2023 - Cultural Heritage Commission (CHC) public hearing held on September 26, 2023, to consider the third-party landmark nomination. The CHC voted (5-0) to recommend designation of Fire Station No. 9 by having City staff return to the CHC with findings for preserving the exterior and options the CHC to consider regarding landmarking and preserving the interior features of the building along with their potential implications.

November 2023 - CHC public hearing held on November 28, 2023, to consider the third-party landmark nomination and make a formal recommendation to City Council. 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 specific interior features of the city-owned Fire Station No. 9 Building as a Locally Designated Historic Landmark.

Final CHC Recommendation

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 WPA plaque on the front elevation.

Vicinity Map – Project Location



Address: 3917 Long Beach Boulevard

Parcel Number: 7139-013-900

Lot Size: 5,800 square feet (0.13-acre)

Building Size: 5,548-square-foot

Zoning: Community Automobile-Oriented (CCA)

General Plan PlaceType: Neighborhood Serving Center or Corridor – Low (NSC-L)

Property Owner: City of Long Beach

Applicant: Los Cerritos Neighborhood Association



Background

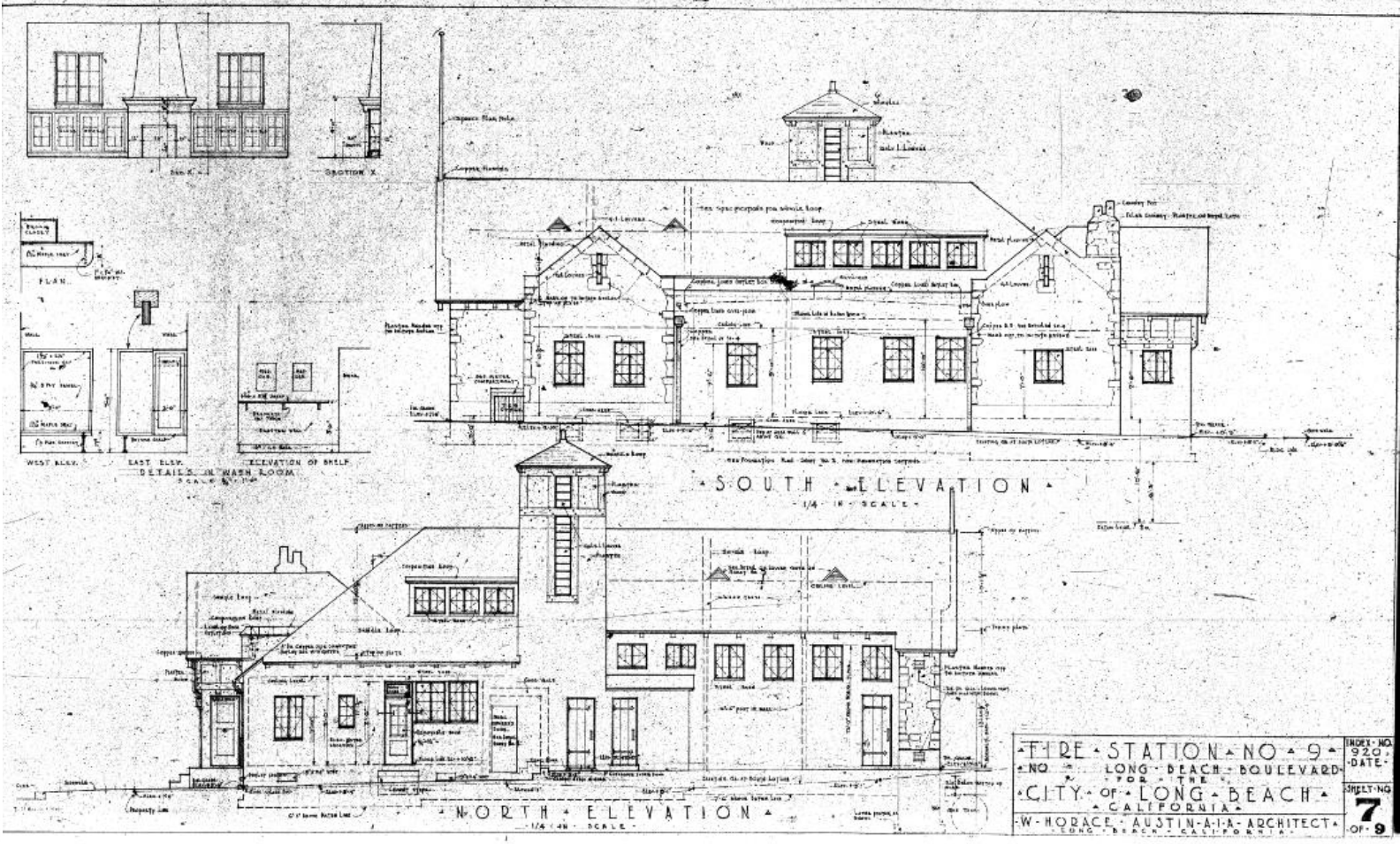
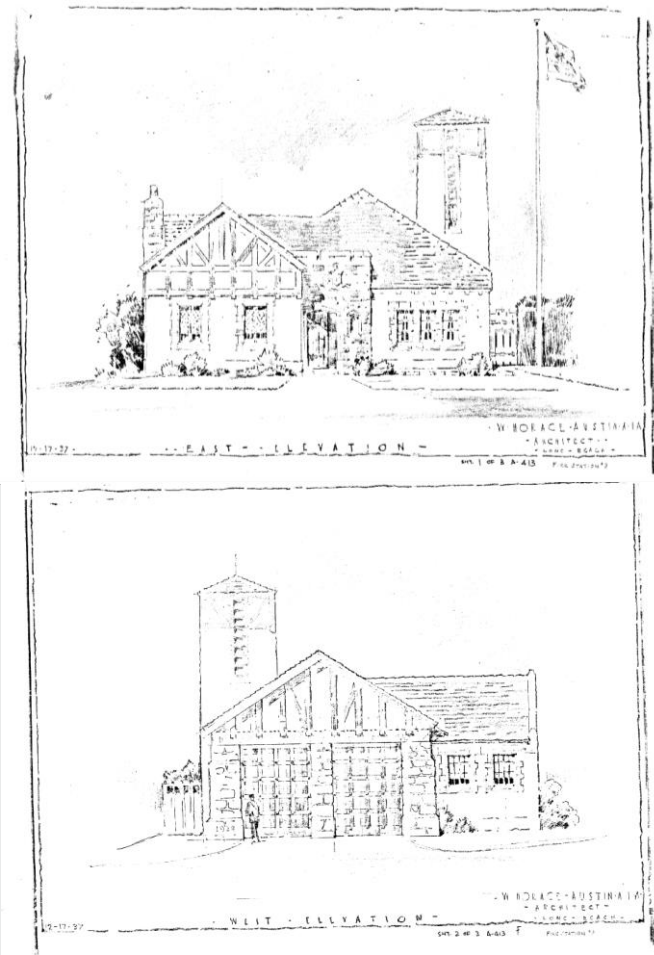
- An EIR was prepared as part of the Fire Station No. 9 Replacement Project at 3917 Long Beach Boulevard.
- The EIR included a Peer Review and Cultural Resources Study for the Fire Station No. 9 Replacement Project (May 2020), which included a peer review of a previous Historical Resource Evaluation Report (HRER) (September 2019) prepared for the building that 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.
- The analysis was completed by consultant staff qualified pursuant to Secretary of the Interior Professional Qualifications Standards (PQS) for Architectural History, History, and Archaeology and utilized the State of California Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) 523 form.
- The same analysis also acknowledged that although the property is eligible for designation, the scope of required property improvements to make the building safe for use is unknown, but likely to require extensive exterior modifications due to which the integrity of the historic structure could be lost.
- To date, the PC has not taken action on the request to certify the EIR.

Project Scope

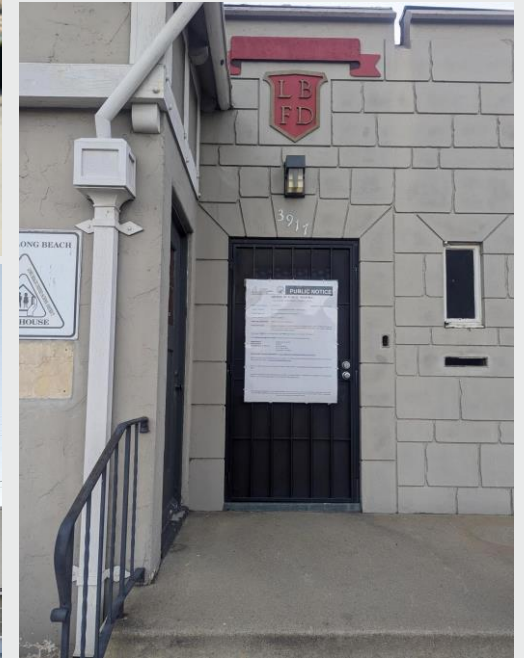


- Third-Party Application for Landmark Designation of the Former Fire Station No. 9 building at 3917 Long Beach Boulevard.
- The submitted nomination requests the exterior of the building be protected along with the following interior elements:
 - Reception room with fireplace, built-ins, and blackboard
 - Original doors
 - Original lockers
 - Stairway
 - Apparatus/engine room wood truss ceiling
 - Fire hose tower
 - Vault

Historic Plans



Site Photographs



Site Photographs (continued)



Figure 9: Former reception room, looking south (GPA, 2019)

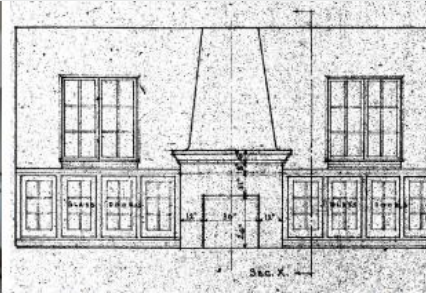


Figure 10: Drawing of fireplace mantel and built-ins in reception room (W. Horace Austin, Sheet 7)



Figure 11: Locker room built-in lockers, looking south (GPA, 2019)

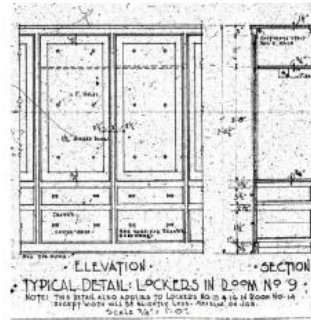


Figure 12: Drawing of built-in lockers in locker room (W. Horace Austin, Sheet 3)



Figure 13: Wash rooms, looking north (GPA, 2019)

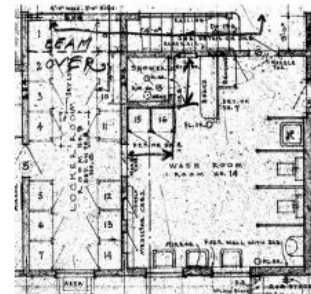


Figure 14: Drawing of wash room floor plan (W. Horace Austin, Sheet 8)

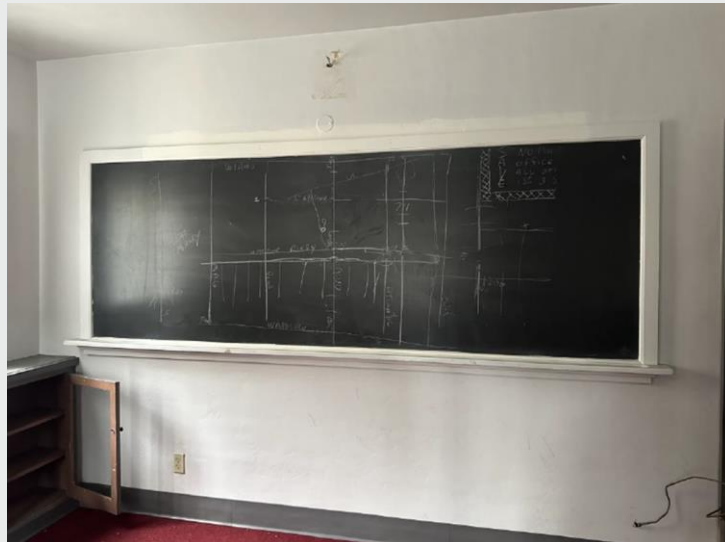


Figure 16: 3917 Apparatus room, looking northwest, date unknown. (courtesy, Station No. 9)

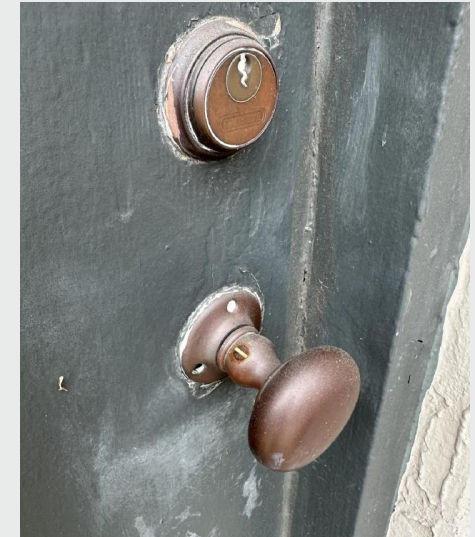


Figure 15: Apparatus room, looking east (GPA, 2019)

Interior Photos - Reception Room



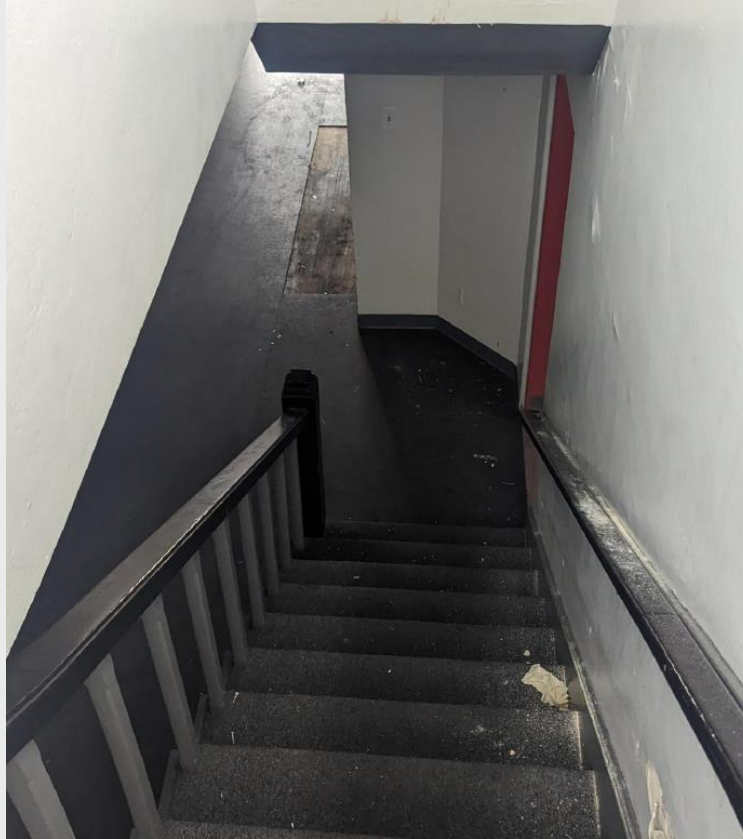
Interior Photos - Original Doors



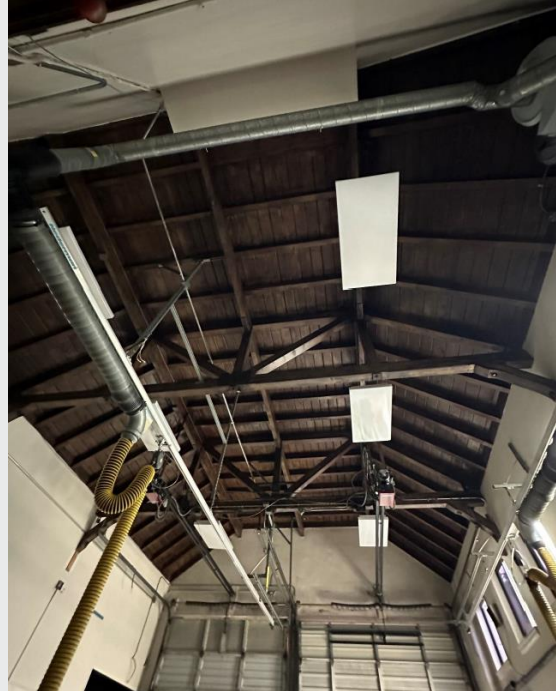
Interior Photos - Original Lockers



Interior Photos - Stairway



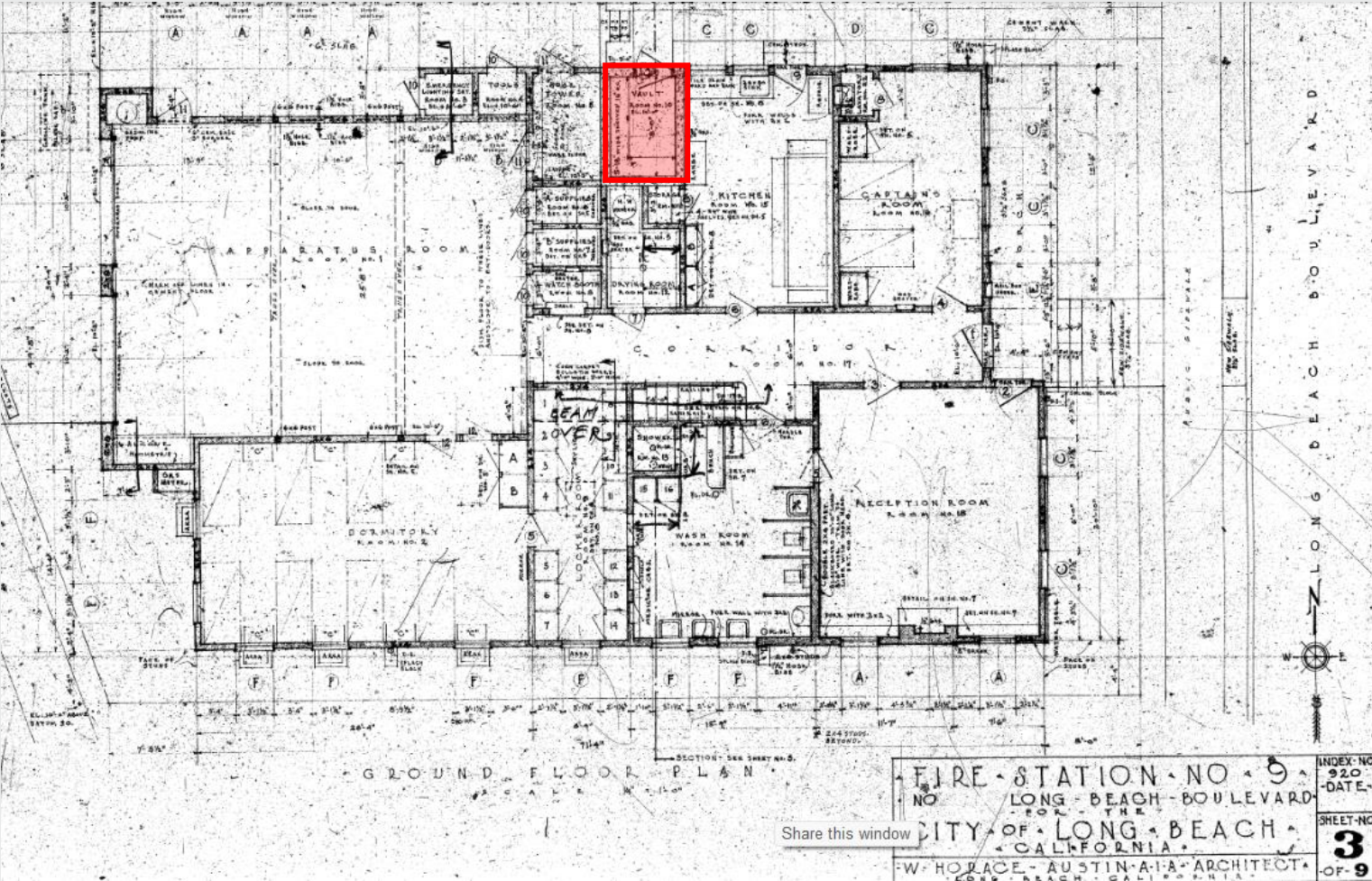
Interior Photos - Wood Truss Ceiling



Interior Photos - Fire Hose Tower



Interior Photos - Vault



Application Request

- Designate the former Fire Station No. 9 building located at 3917 Long Beach Boulevard as a Historic Landmark.
- Local Landmark Designation Criterion
 - The Cultural Heritage Ordinance includes four potential Criterion for landmark designation:
 - **Significant under Criterion A - Associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of the City's history;**
 - Not Significant under Criterion B - Associated with the lives of persons important to the City's past;
 - Not Significant under Criterion C - 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,
 - Not Significant under Criterion D - Or has yielded, or has the potential to yield, information important in prehistory or history.
 - In order to be eligible for landmark designation, the building must meet at least one of the aforementioned Criterion.

Criterion A

- Analysis under Criterion A is provided regarding association with two contexts: 1) Civic and Governmental Infrastructure and 2) the WPA:
 - **Civic and Governmental Infrastructure.** The property was constructed in 1938 as the second Fire Station No. 9. The first had been demolished as a result of the 1933 Long Beach earthquake. The new Fire Station No. 9 was constructed in the Los Cerritos and Bixby Knolls neighborhoods at a time when the City had a lack of permanent fire stations as a result of the 1933 earthquake. To be eligible under Criterion A within the context of Civic and Government Infrastructure, the fire station would need to be particularly important in fire station history, such as the first fire station constructed in Long Beach. Therefore, the property does not appear to be significant under Criterion A within the context of Civic and Government Infrastructure.
 - **The WPA.** Throughout the 1910s and 1920s, Long Beach fire stations had been constructed using revenue generated by the City. However, with almost half of the city's fire stations demolished in the aftermath of the 1933 Long Beach earthquake and lack of city coffers during the Great Depression, the City of Long Beach appealed to the federal government for help. Relief was found in the WPA, which supported the development of civic, recreational, and educational facilities. According to information available today, two fire stations were constructed by the WPA program in Long Beach: Fire Station No. 9 and Fire Station No. 7. Though extant and still in use, Fire Station No. 7 has been substantially altered from its 1940 appearance. Fire Station No. 9 appears to be significant under Criterion A in the area of Institutional Development as it represents the partnership between the City and WPA created to rebuild and add public services after the 1933 earthquake.

Considerations and Staff Recommendation

- If the designation is approved, it is recommended that the building be recognized as Former Fire Station No. 9.
- Building upon the CHC's discussion and recommendation, City staff recommends the City Council refine the recommendation by CHC in order to landmark the exterior of the building while providing some flexibility for interior features.
- Flexibility may be needed in order to successfully adaptively reuse the building.
 - The needed remediation of mold issues may require alterations to both the interior and exterior of the building.
 - The adaptive reuse of this structure could require such extensive exterior modifications that the integrity of the historic structure would be lost.
- 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.

Rationale for Staff Recommendation

- Adaptive reuse is a key tool in historic preservation, recognized by the Secretary of the Interior, advocacy organizations, state and local authorities, and practitioners as critical to historic preservation.
- By definition, adaptive reuse involves using historic buildings differently than their original use. Even if a use is the “same” business operations are different than they were 50+ years ago.
- The goal of historic preservation is to preserve key contributing features in a building, to rehabilitate the building toward its original glory, but it is not to prevent all change or restrain future uses.
- The supporting studies for the building never found historic value with the interior features.
- City staff is trying to balance all of these factors with the recommendation of the CHC and opinions expressed by the public.

Noticing And Public Comment

- No public notices are required under the Long Beach Municipal Code. Two posters were placed on-site and all previous commenters on the PC and CHC hearings were included in the noticing as interested parties.
- As of January 11, 2024, no public comments have been received in response to noticing.

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)



Thank you

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