

Agenda Report

August 31, 2015

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council
FROM: Planning & Community Development Department
SUBJECT: DESIGNATION OF 600 EAST COLORADO BOULEVARD AS A LANDMARK

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that the City Council:

1. Find that the designation of a historic resource is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA Guidelines §15308: Class 8 - Actions by Regulatory Agencies for Protection of the Environment);
2. Find that the property at 600 E. Colorado Boulevard meets Criterion "C" for designation as a landmark (P.M.C. §17.62.040) because the building is locally significant as a movie theater building in the Art Deco style, designed by architects Walker & Eisen, and retains its integrity;
3. Adopt the attached resolution approving a Declaration of Landmark Designation for 600 E. Colorado Boulevard, Pasadena, California;
4. Authorize the Mayor to execute the attached Declaration of Landmark Designation for 600 E. Colorado Boulevard, Pasadena, California; and
5. Direct the City Clerk to record the declaration with the Los Angeles County Recorder.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:

At its regular meeting of June 16, 2015, the Historic Preservation Commission recommended that the City Council approve the designation of 600 E. Colorado Boulevard as a landmark under Criterion C of PMC §17.62.040.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The United Artists Theater building is one of the best examples of Art Deco architecture in Pasadena and retains its most significant character-defining features. Therefore, the property at 600 E. Colorado Boulevard qualifies for designation as a landmark under Criterion “C” as a locally significant example of Art Deco architecture.

BACKGROUND:

On January 20, 2015, Conquest Capital Partners, a tenant who plans to purchase the property, submitted an application for landmark designation of the property. The staff evaluated the property according to the landmark criteria in Title 17 of the P.M.C. and determined that the structure qualifies for landmark designation. On May 13, 2015, the applicant submitted a complete application to move forward with the nomination. Staff notified the property owner of the application in writing on March 23, 2015; no objection from the property owner to the nomination has been received.

Property Data

- Historical Name: United Artists Theater
- Address: 600 E. Colorado Boulevard, Pasadena, CA 91101
- Location: South side of Colorado Boulevard, between Madison and El Molino Avenues
- Date of Construction: 1931 (documented by building permit)
- Original Architect: Walker & Eisen
- Original / Present Use: Movie theater / Retail sales
- Original / Present Owner: Colorado Madison Syndicate (leased by United Artists of California Film Corporation) / Colorado Group LLP
- Lot size: 10,230 square feet (66 feet wide by 155 feet deep)
- Building size: 10,230 square feet

Setting & Site Description

The site is a rectangular commercial lot in an established commercial neighborhood that is part of the Pasadena Playhouse District. The commercial building occupies the entire lot.

Building Features

The movie theater building, designed by the firm of Walker and Eisen, was built in 1931. The main rectangular volume of the building is set back from the street. A symmetrical composition of progressively vertical sub-volumes, which step up to a central tower, forms the front of the building. These sub-volumes are faced with fluted and peaked pilasters. Flanking the tower are two relief artworks entitled “Unity” and “Artistry;” the name of the designer is not mentioned in news reports from the time. At the street

level, flanking the central entrance are two retail shops with storefronts that have recessed entries with front corners in frameless glass, decorative pilasters and lintels, and a chevron decoration above the transom window. Above each storefront is a small vent outlet with a custom designed decorative black cover. Portions of the original terrazzo entry floor and lighted ceiling can be seen from outside the central storefront. The sides and rear of the building are constructed of undecorated reinforced concrete.

Documented Changes to the Property

The original neon marquee and vertical sign were removed in a 1960 remodel. The ticket booth was removed at an unknown date. A 1997 rehabilitation for Angels School Supply removed the 1960 alterations and installed a black aluminum storefront to enclose the recessed main entry with a gray tile surround. The surround includes a keystone feature and a row of white lighting fixtures. A similar tile treatment was applied to the rear exit. The 1997 rehabilitation also added new decorative metal raceways to which “Angels” and “School Supply” signage in individual letters are attached. Presently, features of the relief artworks are painted in contrasting colors to make them visible; historic photographs suggest that the tower portion of the building was originally unpainted.

Current Conditions, Use, and Proposed Plans

The property, used for retail sales, is in good condition. The applicant is planning to change the use of the main space to commercial office with the addition of square footage at a new mezzanine level and new window openings in the side and rear elevations.

Art Deco

Art Deco is a modern architectural style that was popular for commercial, institutional, and large residential buildings from the mid-1920s through the 1930s. Character-defining features include an emphasis on verticality, smooth wall surfaces, angular lines, metal windows (often fixed sash and casement), and ornamentation such as zigzags, chevrons, and other stylized and geometric motifs. With origins in France, the style was popularized by the Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs, held in Paris in 1925 (from which the style was later named), but had waned in popularity by the end of the 1930s. Many building facades along Colorado Boulevard that were remodeled in the 1920s are designed in this style; this one of a few buildings in Pasadena that was originally wholly designed in this style. Other notable examples include the Penn Oil Building at 35 N. De Lacey Avenue (Bennett & Haskell, 1930), the Thomas Warner Building at 477 E. Colorado Boulevard (Marston & Maybury, 1927), the bungalow court at 754 S. Marengo Avenue (1931) and St. Luke’s Medical Center at 2632 E. Washington Boulevard (Gene Verge, Sr., 1933). Streamline Moderne is a related style which is exemplified in Bullock’s Pasadena at 415 S. Lake Avenue (Wurdeman &

Becket, 1947) and the Royal Laundry Drive-Up Building at 443 S. Raymond Avenue (1939).

ANALYSIS:

The property at 600 E. Colorado Boulevard is eligible for designation under Criterion C, (PMC §17.62.040.C.2), which states:

[The property] embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, architectural style, period, or method of construction, or represents the work of an architect, designer, engineer, or builder whose work is of significance to the City or, to the region or possesses artistic values of significance to the City or to the region.

Under this criterion, the theater building is significant as one of the best examples in Pasadena of Art Deco architecture. The building has a high level of architectural integrity (its ability to demonstrate why it is significant) through its location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, association, and feeling, as follows:

- Location: The building is in its original location.
- Setting: The commercial neighborhood is more dense, but similar to its 1931 character.
- Design: The theater building retains its most significant design characteristics: the emphasis on verticality in the stepped tower of progressively vertical sub-volumes, and the exterior decorative treatments with geometric, angular lines.
- Materials: The building retains original materials used in its construction, notably the smooth wall surfaces, pilasters and decorative elements surrounding the two original storefronts, and the storefront windows.
- Workmanship: The building's workmanship is evident in the design of the decorative treatments of the tower element and storefronts, the relief artworks, vent covers, and terrazzo entry floor.
- Association: The building is associated with the era of ornate movie palaces and Art Deco design.
- Feeling: The building expresses the characteristics of monumental, geometric, and decorative Art Deco design.

Although within the boundaries of the Pasadena Playhouse Historic District, the property is non-contributing due to the fact that when the district was nominated for the National Register in 1993, it reflected the 1960 remodel prior to its rehabilitation in 1997.

COUNCIL POLICY CONSIDERATION:

The General Plan – Objective 6: Promote preservation of historically and architecturally significant buildings and revitalization of traditional neighborhoods and commercial areas.

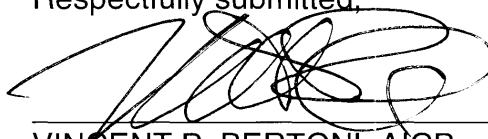
ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

Class 8 exemptions 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 the protection of the environment.

FISCAL IMPACT:

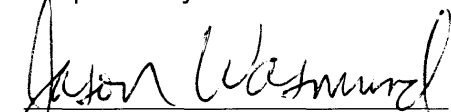
In some instances, owners of designated historic properties may apply to the City for a Historic Property Contract (Mills Act), which allows an alternative and often lower property tax assessment. The City Council reviewed the projected loss of property tax revenue from this program in 2002 when it adopted the local Mills Act ordinance. As a result of this program, the reduced property tax amount which comes out of the City's local share amount from the State, is a small fraction of the City's overall property tax revenue.

Respectfully submitted,



VINCENT P. BERTONI, AICP
Director of Planning & Community
Development Department

Prepared by:



Jason Wasmund
Assistant Planner

Concurred by:



Leon E. White
Principal Planner

Approved by:



MICHAEL J. BECK
City Manager

Attachments: (4)

- Attachment A – Vicinity Map
- Attachment B – Application Materials
- Attachment C – Photographs
- Attachment D – Effects of Landmark Designation