

CITY OF SANTA MONICA
CITY COUNCIL

STATEMENT OF OFFICIAL ACTION

PROJECT

CASE NUMBER: Landmarks Designation Case No. LC-01-LM-001

LOCATION: 1855 Main Street (Civic Auditorium)

APPLICANT: Santa Monica Landmarks Commission

APPELLANT: Council member Herb Katz (01APP-033)

PROPERTY OWNER: City of Santa Monica

CASE PLANNER: Elizabeth Bar-Ei, AICP, Associate Planner

REQUEST: Appeal of the Landmarks Commission's decision to designate the structure at 1855 Main Street (Civic Auditorium) a City Landmark.

CEQA STATUS: The proposed project is categorically exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Class 31, Section 15331 of the State Implementation Guidelines in that the approval of the landmark designation consists of a project limited to the preservation of a historical resource 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.

CITY COUNCIL ACTION

April 9, 2002 Date.

_____ Approved based on the following findings and subject to the conditions below:

X Denied Appeal 01-033. Designation of Landmark Case No. LC-01-LM-004 upheld.

_____ Other.

EFFECTIVE DATE OF ACTION:

April 9, 2002 Designation of Landmark Case No. LC-01-LM-001

FINDINGS

Following a public hearing held on April 9, 2002, the City Council denied the appeal and upheld the Landmarks Commission's approval of LC-01-LM-001 based upon the following findings:

(1) It exemplifies, symbolizes, or manifests elements of the cultural, social, economic, political, or architectural history of the City.

This building was constructed in 1958 in response to the development of the Santa Monica Civic Center. It was the third of three major 20th century Civic Center structures, beginning with the Art Deco style City Hall, designed by Los Angeles architect Donald Parkinson and completed in 1938 and the Los Angeles County Courthouse, which was added in 1951. It remains an excellent example of the International Style (Modern), a style that dominated the architectural face of the globe from the first decade of the 20th century until 1972. It is the only surviving institutional design in the City of Santa Monica. The Santa Monica Civic Auditorium replaced a classically inspired facility that had been located at Lick Pier, known as the Ocean Park Municipal Auditorium. In this way, its construction also served to strengthen the function of the Civic Center as a primary hub of activity. Therefore, this resource satisfies this criterion.

(2) It has aesthetic or artistic interest or value, or other noteworthy interest or value.

The Santa Monica Civic Auditorium is an excellent example of the mid-century International Style, and the only such example of the work of master architect Welton Becket in the City. Furthermore, it is significant for the unique engineering design of its

hydraulic floor, the largest in the nation at the time. This was a landmark use of hydraulic technology for adapting an assembly space to accommodate a vast variety of stage performances, athletic events, and exhibitions. It proved to be the forerunner to the retractable domes and flexible seating of contemporary stadiums (Alan Lieb, 2001). Finally, its acoustical design by world-renowned acoustical engineer, UCLA Chancellor Vern O. Knudsen, was described as, "the most perfect and...(deserving)...a rating higher than that of the Royal Festival Hall in London" (Becket, 2001, and Progressive Architecture, May 1959). Thus, as a truly remarkable resource, the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium meets this criterion.

(3) It is identified with historic personages or with important events in local, state or national history.

The Civic Auditorium is associated with its architect, Welton Becket, as well as its acoustical engineer Vern O. Knudsen, both internationally prominent professionals in the design of major institutions. Becket's work is found throughout the world with notable Commissions in Cairo, Havana, Manila, Honolulu, Tokyo, Boston, Philadelphia, Kansas City and Dallas, and includes numerous civic designs. Vern O. Knudsen, a professor and Chancellor of UCLA, was the world's leading authority on architectural acoustics, and a master designer of acoustically significant facilities. His principles in architectural acoustics became the foundation for the design of contemporary soundstages. Additionally, the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium is associated with countless events and public performances, like no other facility in the City. These performances have represented the diversity for which Santa Monica has become renown. A few prominent examples include an array of musicians from Andre Previn and Dave Brubeck in 1959 to Pete Seeger, Ella Fitzgerald, Tony Bennett, Joan Baez and Bob Dylan in the 1960's, to Elton John, Ray Charles, Arlo Guthrie, the Beach Boys and the Carpenters in the 1970's. The number of performances eventually reached a level of nearly 60 concerts annually in the peak years of the 1970s. The auditorium also hosted several prominent comedians in the early years of their careers, such as Bill Cosby, Jonathan Winters and Bob Hope, as well as a 1967 performance by Beatnik poet Allen Ginsburg. Therefore, this resource meets this criterion.

(4) It embodies distinguishing architectural characteristics valuable to a study of a period, style, method of construction, or the use of indigenous materials or craftsmanship, or is a unique or rare example of an architectural design, detail, or historical type to such a study.

The Civic Auditorium is an excellent example of the mid-century International Style in the City of Santa Monica. The style was a response to the industrialization of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It advocated the use of the "machine", rather than historical precedents for building and product designs, as well as the use of contemporary materials such as steel, concrete and glass for their construction. The Civic Auditorium retains many significant character-defining elements of this style, including, a grand canopy, supported by parabolic pylons, a glass curtain wall, and brise-soleil.

The Civic Auditorium also retains a number of significant interior features that are integral to the overall concept of the Civic Auditorium's architecture. Conceived as a space for a variety of activities, Welton Beckett designed the Civic Auditorium for functionality and flexibility. Some intact features that are part of the public space include the original adjustable auditorium main hall hydraulic floor, touted as revolutionary for its time, the innovative acoustical design and the soundproof sliding doors to the east conference rooms. Additionally, although some alterations have been made, interior elements such as the wood paneling in the lobby, the auditorium entry doors, the volume and configuration of the lobby (both the first and second floors including the height and semi-circular shape of the lobby, the upper lobby's shape being reflective of the lower lobby, and the columns), all contributing to the overall light, open and modernistic feeling), the volume and configuration of the auditorium main hall, the metal acoustical panels and wall sconces in the auditorium main hall, and the two floating staircases in the lobby, all attributes of the building's integral design, remain intact and continue to be valuable to a study of this unique architectural style and method of construction.

The Civic Auditorium also includes some character-defining features in the backstage area that are not part of the public space, and thus not part of the landmark designation. These include the orchestra pit hydraulic lift mechanism, stage area and proscenium opening, stage rigging and historic signage along the east wall at the rear of the stage.

As a resource that still retains a comprehensive integrity of its original architectural design, the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium satisfies this criterion.

(5) It is a significant or a representative example of the work or product of a notable builder, designer, or architect.

The Civic Auditorium is the only surviving institutional design of master architect and Santa Monica resident Welton Becket in the City of Santa Monica. Becket is significant not only as a leading local designer, but, internationally. His work is found throughout the world with notable commissions in Cairo, Havana, Manila, Honolulu, Tokyo, Boston, Philadelphia, Kansas City, and Dallas, and includes numerous civic designs.

The Santa Monica Civic Auditorium is also significant for its association with internationally renowned acoustical engineer Vern O. Knudsen. Knudsen, a professor and Chancellor of UCLA, was the world's leading authority on architectural acoustics, and a master designer of acoustically significant facilities. An ardent researcher and author on architectural acoustics, Knudsen wrote two seminal books and over one hundred articles, which appeared in scientific and technical journals. As a consultant he was responsible for the acoustical design of over five hundred structures. His principles in architectural acoustics became the

foundation for the design of contemporary soundstages. The systems developed for the Civic Auditorium by Knudsen are still highly functional and have required minimal

maintenance over the last 43 years. Therefore, the Civic Auditorium meets this designation criterion.

(6) It has a unique location, a singular physical characteristic, or is an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community or the City.

The Santa Monica Civic Auditorium has a unique location within the Civic Center, at the bend of Main Street. Its grand scale, and unique design with futuristic pylons, commands attention as one travels south along Main Street. Pigmy Date Palm trees frame the north entry to the building. The Civic Auditorium is also a familiar and integral part of the Civic Center complex. The Civic Auditorium is, thus, an important visual monument in the City of Santa Monica. Therefore, the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium satisfies this criterion.

ADDITIONAL DESIGNATION INFORMATION

As determined by the Landmarks Commission, the designation of the Civic Auditorium includes the exterior of the building, the remaining original pygmy palm trees as a secondary feature, and the following interior elements located in public areas of the resource:

- Configuration of lobby spaces (first and second floors) and auditorium entry doors (height and semi-circular shape of lobby, upper lobby shape reflective of lower lobby, and columns contributing to the overall light, open and modernistic feeling);
- Wood paneling along south wall of first floor lobby;
- Two original lobby staircases;
- Volume and configuration of auditorium main hall space;
- Adjustable auditorium main hall floor with hydraulic lift mechanism;
- Metal acoustical panels and wall sconces in auditorium main hall;
- Soundproof sliding doors to conference room (adjacent to the east elevation).

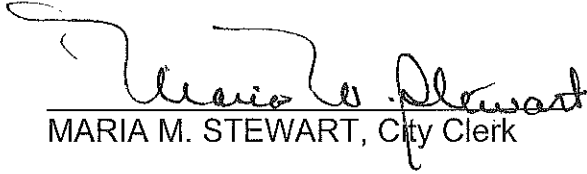
VOTE

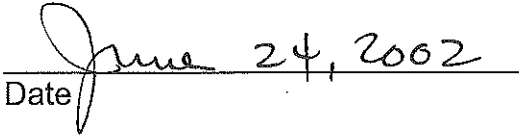
Ayes: Bloom, Genser, Holbrook, McKeown, O'Connor, and Mayor Feinstein
Nays: Katz
Abstain: None
Absent: None

NOTICE

If this is a final decision not subject to further appeal under the City of Santa Monica Comprehensive and Zoning Ordinance, the time within which judicial review of this decision must be sought is governed by Code of Civil Procedures Section 1094.6, which provision has been adopted by the City pursuant to Municipal Code Section 1.16.010.

I hereby certify that this Statement of Official Action accurately reflects the final determination of the City Council of the City of Santa Monica.


MARIA M. STEWART, City Clerk


Date

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