

Clinton Manor Courtyard Apartments

5134-5184 W. Clinton Street

CHC-2024-6020-HCM

ENV-2024-6021-CE

FINDINGS

(As amended by the Cultural Heritage Commission at its meeting on December 5, 2024)

- The Clinton Manor Courtyard Apartments “exemplifies significant contributions to the broad cultural, economic or social history of the nation, state, city or community” as representative of early patterns of development of workforce multi-family housing in the Greater Wilshire area.
- The Clinton Manor Courtyard Apartments are “associated with the lives of historic personages important to national, state, city, or local history” as the residence and garage of Ruth and Elliot Handler where they conducted early experimentations with plastics that served as the genesis of the major American toy company Mattel Inc. they would later co-found.
- The Clinton Manor Courtyard Apartments also “embodies the distinctive characteristics of a style, type, period, or method of construction” as an excellent example of a 1940s courtyard apartment complex.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The Clinton Manor Courtyard Apartments meets three of the Historic-Cultural Monument Criteria.

The subject property “exemplifies significant contributions to the broad cultural, economic or social history of the nation, state, city or community” as representative of early patterns of development of workforce multi-family housing in the Greater Wilshire area. By the late 1930s, Los Angeles saw an increase in the demand for housing as the Great Depression and Hollywood success attracted labor to the city. Apartment buildings such as the subject property in Larchmont and properties in other neighborhoods in the Greater Wilshire area provided dense and affordable housing options in close proximity to the Hollywood studios and job opportunities. The subject property and similar developments employed Garden City principles such as an emphasis on open shared space to further attract residents. The subject property housed working- and middle-class residents employed as studio workers, actors, musicians, and other professions that benefitted from the proximity to major studios and connections to neighbors facilitated by shared space. Large multi-family housing developments such as the subject property were built near existing single-family neighborhoods that otherwise housed white-collar workers and studio executives.

The subject property also “is associated with the lives of historic personages important to national, state, city, or local history” as the residence and garage of entrepreneurs Ruth and Elliot Handler where they conducted early experimentations with plastics that served as the genesis of the major American toy company Mattel Inc. they would later co-found.

While residing at the subject property from 1940 until 1942, Ruth and Elliot Handler embarked

upon a decades-long partnership and multiple businesses that started with the creation of the plastics manufacturing company Elliot Handler Plastics which operated out of their kitchen and garage. Initially making housewares for their new home at the subject property and other tenants, Elliot's experimentation with plastic compounds expanded to producing consumer plastic goods for commercial sales under Ruth's marketing vision and sales perseverance. What started as a modest business evolved into the Handlers co-founding the groundbreaking toy company Mattel in 1943 and the creation of the iconic Barbie doll (named after the Handlers' daughter Barbara who was born while they resided at the subject property) in 1959. Although the founding of Mattel is outside of the period of significance, the subject property represents the Handlers' early ingenuity and industriousness that led to the development of one of the world's largest toy manufacturers as well as the imprint the Handlers made on American popular culture.

The subject property also "embodies the distinctive characteristics of a style, type, period, or method of construction" as an excellent example of a 1940s courtyard apartment complex. Designed and built in 1939-1940, the subject property exemplifies the transition of multi-family housing from traditional courtyard site plans of the 1920s and 1930s to plans influenced by the garden city movements in the 1940s.

Stemming from the design of bungalow courts in Southern California, courtyard apartments were first built in the 1910s and continued to evolve in form and style through the 1960s. A significant moment in the evolution of courtyard housing occurred in the 1940s, when government regulations for construction controlled price, size, financing, permits, and materials, and encouraged the building of small houses and apartment houses to fill the substantial need for postwar housing. As can be seen in the subject property, complexes moved away from the traditional O-shaped plan towards E-shaped plans (or a combination thereof), but featured common stairwells and were frequently designed in Minimal Traditional or American Colonial Revival architectural styles like the subject property. Garages were no longer incorporated into the plan for the apartment complex itself but were detached from the building and frequently situated at the rear of the property like at the Clinton Manor Apartments. The courtyard apartment also provided common open space and a connection to the outdoors not found in high-density multi-family housing types. Despite this, the popularity of courtyard housing as a multi-family dwelling type began to wane by the 1960s, giving rise to a new wave of mid-rise and high-rise multi-family residential development, a trend that continues to this day.

The subject property has experienced minimal alterations over the years and retains a high level of 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 Clinton Manor Courtyard Apartments 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 an Historic-Cultural Monument through the application of the standards set forth 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-2024-6021-CE was prepared on November 15, 2024.