

MOTION

Section 22.171.10 of the Administrative Code provides that the Council, Cultural Heritage Commission, or Director of Planning may initiate consideration of a proposed site, building, or structure as a Historic-Cultural Monument. After reviewing and investigating any such Council-initiated designation, the Cultural Heritage Commission shall approve or disapprove in whole or in part the proposed inclusion and submit a report upon such action to Council.

Long-time residents of the Oakwood neighborhood of Venice, once one of the few places Blacks were legally allowed to own property close to the beach, have long sought cultural-historic designation for the First Baptist Church on Westminster Avenue. Previous efforts to do so have not included relevant information and documentation, and members of Venice's Black community are requesting a renewed effort at seeking the designation.

Venice's Oakwood community was an early enclave of Black residents. Churches, in particular, played a vital role as sanctuaries and social centers for the Black community during decades of discrimination and disenfranchisement. Founded in 1910, the First Baptist Church was a cornerstone institution that evolved from a modest barnhouse on 5th Street and San Juan Avenue to the building that exists today.

The Church is firmly rooted in the cultural history of the community, associated with prominent, local personages from the Reese and Tabor families. Local heroes like Bishop E.L. Holmes shepherded the growth of this congregation for over 40 years and was heralded as a leader in the community. After Bishop Holmes' passing in 1999, the community honored his memory by dedicating the intersection of Westminster Avenue and 7th Avenue in front of the Church as "Bishop E.L. Holmes Square."

The final iteration of the Church built in 1967 symbolizes the culmination of accomplishment and perseverance of a community threatened by erasure due to displacement and racist land use policies - making it difficult for Black Venetians to maintain a foothold in the community they built. Several interviews have been conducted with former parishioners and long term residents of the community testifying to the vital, intergenerational role this institution has played in their families' lives. As recently as June 7, 2020, hundreds of Angelenos gathered in front of this historic Church to listen to Black voices and fight for civil rights - channeling the location's cultural importance to the Black community in Venice. The First Baptist Church represents the significant contributions made to the local history of Venice and it should be preserved.

I THEREFORE MOVE that the Council initiate consideration of the First Baptist Church, located at 671-685 and 686-688 East Westminster Avenue, Venice, CA 90291 as a City Historic-Cultural Monument under the procedures of Section 22.171.10 of the Administrative Code, and instruct the Planning Department through the Office of Historic Resources to prepare the Historic-Cultural Monument application for review and consideration by the Cultural Heritage Commission.

SEP 15 2020

I FURTHER MOVE that after reviewing the application, the Cultural Heritage Commission submit its report and recommendations to the City Council regarding the inclusion of the First Baptist Church in the City's list of Historic-Cultural Monuments.

PRESENTED BY



MIKE BONIN
Councilmember, 11th District

CO-PRESENTED BY

MARQUEECE HARRIS-DAWSON (verbal)
Councilmember, 8th District

SECONDED BY

PAUL KREKORIAN (verbal)
Councilmember, 2nd District