

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF VENICE
671-685 East Westminster Avenue and 686-688 East Westminster Avenue
CHC-2020-4034-HCM
ENV-2020-4050-CE

FINDINGS

(As amended by the Cultural Heritage Commission on June 3, 2021)

- The First Baptist Church of Venice “exemplifies significant contributions to the broad cultural, economic or social history of the nation, state, city or community” as an important site associated with the African American community in the Oakwood neighborhood of Venice.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The First Baptist Church of Venice, inclusive of the lots located at 671-685 East Westminster Avenue and 686-688 East Westminster Avenue, meets one of the Historic-Cultural Monument criteria.

The lots at 686-688 Westminster Avenue were the location of a 1927 building occupied by the First Baptist Church of Venice congregation until 1967. That building was relocated in 1972 and the lots served as surface parking for the 1967 church. Although the 1927 church building is no longer present, the lots are also significant within the context of its association with the social and cultural history of African Americans in Venice that extends over 100 years. Both the 1927 and 1967 church buildings served as a community center where residents could gather, worship, socialize, and advocate for shared goals for the neighborhood, and reflect the history of the African American congregation. In addition, the subject property represents the financial investment of African American parishioners in Oakwood. The two structures were built with the financing and hands-on participation of congregants and were the only African American church edifices in Venice purpose-built for a particular religious institution.

As the third home of the First Baptist Church of Venice, an institution rooted in the early development of Venice, the 1967 building was constructed during Oakwood’s period as a predominantly African American enclave. At the time, many residents were struggling with poverty, unemployment, and poor housing conditions, and there was a great need for community advocacy in Oakwood. At its peak in the 1960s and 1970s, the First Baptist Church had over 600 congregants, and the church’s multi-generational congregation included families whose church membership began as early as 1910.

The 1967 church was a center of community togetherness for African American residents of Oakwood during times of neighborhood change beginning in the 1960s. It represented a site of neighborhood activism, where Bishop E.L. Holmes developed support programs for families affected by gang and police violence, organized peaceful demonstrations, and allowed local groups to organize. Over the years of physical and demographic changes in Oakwood, the First Baptist Church of Venice represented an anchor of stability for long-term residents, as well as a gathering place for friends and families who had left the neighborhood. Today, the 1967 church is one of the last remaining individually significant resources associated with the African American community in Oakwood.

Despite interior and exterior alterations, the 1967 church retains sufficient 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 First Baptist Church of Venice 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 a 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-2020-4050-CE was prepared on April 13, 2021.