

BANK OF AMERICA – CHINATOWN BRANCH
842-858 North Broadway; 222 West College Street; 833-839 North New High Street
CHC-2021-6155-HCM
ENV-2021-6156-CE

FINDINGS

Bank of America – Chinatown Branch “exemplifies significant contributions to the broad cultural, economic or social history of the nation, state, city or community” for its association with the Chinese American community of Los Angeles as Chinatown’s first major national bank.

Bank of America – Chinatown Branch “embodies the distinctive characteristics of a style, type, period, or method of construction” as an excellent example of the Late Modern architectural style with East Asian Eclectic influences.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Bank of America – Chinatown Branch meets two of the Historic-Cultural Monument criteria.

First, it “exemplifies significant contributions to the broad cultural, economic or social history of the nation, state, city or community” for its association with the Chinese American community of Los Angeles as Chinatown’s first major national bank. The opening of the Bank of America - Chinatown Branch underscored the growth and preeminence of Los Angeles’s Chinese American community after the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. Prior to the 1960s, Los Angeles’s Chinese American community was highly reliant on an informal banking system and was predominantly cash-based, due in part to the difficulty that Chinese Americans faced in securing loans and lines of credit. Of the four early banks that were established in Chinatown between 1962 and 1974, the Bank of America – Chinatown Branch stood out as the only national bank serving the Chinese American community. With over 250 credit cards approved for its Chinese American clients – many for the first time – by 1974, the subject property became the fastest growing branch of the Bank of America in Los Angeles. Today, the Bank of America - Chinatown Branch is only one of two extant post-World War II banks in Chinatown that remains in its original location.

The subject property also “embodies the distinctive characteristics of a style, type, period, or method of construction” as an excellent example of the Late Modern architectural style, with East Asian Eclectic influences. While Bank of America typically designed its branches with uniform features, the Chinatown Branch was considered distinctive in its approach to include modern interpretations of traditional Chinese architecture that would resonate with the bank’s clientele. The subject building features a horizontal orientation, a flat roof, smooth stucco cladding, and unadorned wall surfaces, all of which are reflective of the Late Modern architectural style. It also exhibits characteristics of the East Asian Eclectic architectural style such as jade green tile, carved wooden corner brackets, overhanging beams with upturned ends and metal caps, gold mosaic tile, and Chinese characters on the pilasters.

Despite some alterations, the subject property 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 Bank of America – Chinatown Branch 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-2021-6156-CE was prepared on September 13, 2021.