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February 21, 2020

Los Angeles City Council  
c/o Office of the City Clerk  
City Hall, Room 395  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Attention: PLUM Committee

Dear Honorable Members:

**CHILI BOWL; 12244-12248 WEST PICO BOULEVARD; CASE NO. CHC-2019-6975-HCM, ENV-2019-6976-CE; CD-11**

At its meeting of **February 6, 2020**, the Cultural Heritage Commission took the actions below to include the Chili Bowl in the list of Historic-Cultural Monuments, subject to adoption by the City Council:

1. **Determined** that the proposed designation is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), pursuant to Article 19, Section 15308, Class 8 and Article 19, Section 15331, Class 31 of the State CEQA Guidelines;
2. **Determined** that the property conforms with the definition of a Monument pursuant to Section 22.171.7 of the Los Angeles Administrative Code;
3. **Recommended** that the City Council consider the Chili Bowl for inclusion in the list of Historic-Cultural Monuments; and
4. **Adopted** the attached Findings.

The Commission vote was as follows:

Moved: Milofsky  
Seconded: Kennard  
Ayes: Barron  
Nays: Kanner  
Absent: Buelna

**Vote: 3 – 1**

James K. Williams, Commission Executive Assistant II  
Cultural Heritage Commission

The Cultural Heritage Commission would appreciate your inclusion of the subject property to the list of Historic-Cultural Monuments.

**Time for Council to Act:** The Commission action is hereby transmitted to the City Council for consideration. Pursuant to Section 22.171.10(f) of the Los Angeles Administrative Code, the Council may approve or disapprove in whole or in part an application or initiation for a proposed designation of a Monument. The Council shall act in 90-days of the public hearing held before the Commission on the proposed designation. The City Council may unilaterally extend the 90-day time limit to act for a maximum of 15 days for good cause. With written consent of the owner, the time for the City Council to act may be extended by up to an additional 60 days. If the Council does not act on the application or initiation within this specified time limit, the application or initiation to designate a Monument shall be deemed to have been denied.

Enclosure: Findings

## **FINDINGS**

- The Chili Bowl “embodies the distinctive characteristics of a style, type, period, or method of construction” as an excellent and rare example of programmatic architecture in Los Angeles.

## **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The Chili Bowl meets one of the Historic-Cultural Monument criteria: it “embodies the distinctive characteristics of a style, type, period, or method of construction” as an excellent and rare example of programmatic architecture in Los Angeles.

Programmatic architecture, also referred to as mimetic architecture, was popularized along roadsides throughout the United States beginning in the 1920s during the period when widespread automobile usage began influencing community growth and building design. Its appeal as a form of automobile-influenced roadside architecture lay in its ability to house a business within the form of a giant object that doubled as advertisement or branding. The design of programmatic buildings typically featured two distinct portions: the object portion housing the main interior space fronting the street, and a subordinate portion of vernacular design at the rear that generally housed space for food preparation or other uses by employees. On the interior, there was often a single space for customers.

By the 1920s, Los Angeles caught the nation’s attention with an air of boosterism that reinforced the qualities that set its own collection of programmatic structures apart from the rest of the nation. A number of popular magazines at the time profiled groupings of programmatic buildings found on Los Angeles streets with headings such as “Weird Architecture Helps to Sell Ice Cream” and “Bizarre Eat Shops Built to Lure Trade.” This was the golden era of programmatic architecture and some of Los Angeles’ best examples were profiled before a national audience, if only as architectural oddities. Many of these structures housed businesses with a single location and represented a singular expression of design. However, some businesses, such as the Chili Bowl restaurants, grew to include a chain of locations that replicated their programmatic design. Nevertheless, most of the programmatic/mimetic structures that once dotted the city streets have vanished, and as such, the Chili Bowl is significant as a rare, and early, example of the style within the city of Los Angeles. SurveyLA identified seven extant programmatic/mimetic structures that potentially retain eligibility for historic designation, and there are currently only two Historic-Cultural Monuments representing this architectural style: the Dark Room (1926, HCM #451) and Idle Hour Café (1941, HCM #977).

In addition, the subject property is one of five remaining structures from the once popular Chili Bowl restaurant chain, which originally included eighteen identical structures located throughout Los Angeles County. There is one other extant Chili Bowl structure located in the city of Los Angeles, at 901 West Florence Avenue, but it has been substantially altered and no longer retains integrity.

Despite some exterior and interior alterations, the subject property retains a sufficient level of integrity of materials, design, setting, 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 Chili Bowl 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-2019-6976-CE was prepared on January 13, 2020.