



February 6, 2014

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Submitted electronically

Donita Van Horik, Chair
Long Beach Planning Commission
Long Beach Planning Division
333 W. Ocean Boulevard
Long Beach, CA 90802
Attention: Steven Valdez: steven.valdez@longbeach.gov

**Re: Site Plan Review and Conditional Use Permit—5590 E. 7th Street,
Angel Food Donuts Sign**

Dear Long Beach Planning Commissioners:

On behalf of the Los Angeles Conservancy, we submit these comments regarding the oversized donut signage at the former Angel Food Donuts/The Daily Grind at 5590 E. 7th Street. The Conservancy firmly believes the Angel Food Donuts Sign is historic and should be treated as such as part of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). As such, there should be consideration of a preservation alternative that retains and reuses the sign as part of the proposed Dunkin' Donuts project. Given the proposed use and the historic nature of the signage, the reuse and repurposing of the sign not only appears feasible but would also provide a “win-win” opportunity that would serve the business and retain an important community landmark.

I. Significance of Angel Food Donuts Sign at 5590 E. 7th Street

The Angel Food Donuts sign at 5590 E. 7th Street was erected circa 1958 and is one of only a few examples of programmatic architecture or signage remaining in the city of Long Beach. A highly visible feature to motorists traveling along E. 7th Street for over five decades, the oversized donut sign is a classic example of programmatic signage which, like programmatic architecture, is fashioned in the shape of a business's product or identity. Programmatic signs such as giant donuts were intended to stand-out and be highly visible and instantly recognizable to travelling motorists along southern California's major boulevards. They also reflect the evolution of roadside commercial signage during the postwar era, when signs reached incredible dimensions in response to the auto's prominence in society.



Angel Food Donuts opened several locations throughout Long Beach between the 1950s and 60s, each featuring similar signage fashioned into the likeness of a giant donut perched atop single or twin poles for maximum visibility. The signage at 5590 E. 7th Street has one element that sets it apart from the other Angel Food Donuts' locations in Long Beach: a faux glaze of pink frosting. This location last operated as The Daily Grind espresso bar, and the operators left the giant donut signage in place.

Large-scale signage such as giant donuts are an increasingly rare resource type, as many cities including Long Beach have enacted signage ordinances that restrict the size and dimensions of newly constructed signs. In cities across Los Angeles County, several existing, non-conforming signs from the postwar era have been identified as potential historic resources and some have been protected through landmark designation. The Angel Foods Donuts Sign is particularly significant as a rare, intact example of large scale programmatic signage in Long Beach.

II. Angel Food Donuts Sign qualifies as a “historical resource” under CEQA

A key policy under CEQA is the lead agency's duty to “take all action necessary to provide the people of this state with historic environmental qualities and preserve for future generations examples of major periods of California history.”¹ CEQA “requires public agencies to deny approval of a project with significant adverse effects when feasible alternatives or feasible mitigation measures can substantially lessen such effects.”² Courts often refer to the EIR as “the heart” of CEQA because it provides decision makers with an in-depth review of projects with potentially significant environmental impacts and analyzes a range of alternatives that reduce those impacts.”³

The proposed Dunkin' Donuts project requires discretionary approval for a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) by the City of Long Beach. Prior to granting any CUP approval, a preservation alternative that retains and reuses the sign should be considered, as required through CEQA. The Conservancy believes the Angel Food Donuts Sign is historic and should be treated as such. In 2009, the City of Long Beach identified the Angel Food Donuts Sign at 5590 E. 7th Street as part of its Historic Context Statement, stating, “[N]ow valued not only for their implicit humor but also as cultural artifacts, programmatic architecture when encountered should be considered significant, even though it might be altered.”⁴ Stating, [a] Programmatic style building will most likely be significant as an individual resource, it specifically cites two examples in Long Beach: the Coffee Pot Café (955 East Fourth Street) and the Daily Grind (5590 East Seventh Street); otherwise known as the Angel Foods Donuts Sign.

¹ Public Resource Code, Sec. 21001 (b), (c).

² *Sierra Club v. Gilroy City Council* (1990) 222 Cal.App.3d 30, 41, italics added; also see PRC Secs. 21002, 21002.1.

³ *County of Inyo v. Yorty* (1973) 32 Cal.App.3d 795; *Laurel Heights Improvement Association v. Regents of the University of California* (1993) 6 Cal.4th 1112, 1123.

⁴ *Historic Context Statement*, City of Long Beach. Pages 215-216. July 10, 2009.



Despite the references within the City's Historic Context Statement and significance of the Angel Foods Donut Sign, the proposed project for the construction of a new Dunkin' Donuts at 5590 E. 7th Street is classified as categorically exempt from CEQA. Statements within the application claim there are no potential historic resources identified within the project area. This inconsistency and decision by the City to not treat this as a historic resource should be addressed.

III. Reuse of the Angel Food Donuts Sign and examples elsewhere

While the owner of the property and applicant for the CUP has offered to donate the sign to the City of Long Beach whereby it would be placed in storage, the Conservancy does not believe this is an appropriate preservation approach or adequate mitigation for the removal of the donut from public view. Based on our experience with other examples of signs that have been removed, the Angel Food Donuts' Sign is unlikely to ever return again as a sign for the public to enjoy. Further, as a matter of material conservation, the City is not adequately equipped to properly care for, store, or maintain this type of sign on a long-term basis.

This project's site offers full flexibility for Dunkin' Donuts to build a new store that includes all their desired amenities while maintaining and repurposing the historically significant Angel Food Donuts Sign. Other chains and franchises – including Dunkin' Donuts in other parts of the country -- have successfully done this while repurposing original signs and buildings for new uses. As illustrated by the attached examples, Dunkin' Donuts has reused existing oversized signage that remained from previous businesses. The franchise has also employed oversized programmatic elements as signage in recent years, as evidenced by the example showing a giant coffee cup placed atop a Dunkin' Donuts store roof. Further, corporate representatives and franchise operators of Dunkin' Donuts have worked with local community leaders to design new stores that honor and reflect a community's unique character, rather than insisting on a cookie-cutter design approach in all instances.

The Conservancy can point to other local examples that can serve as a model (images attached). For instance, a similar large-scale sign in South Los Angeles was successfully retained as part of a new commercial development. Like the Angel Food Donuts Sign, this involves a 1950s-era, existing non-conforming sign, located at the northeast corner of Crenshaw Boulevard and Coliseum Street in Los Angeles. A 64,000 square foot retail project, completed in 2006, was constructed on a site that previously contained a Pontiac auto dealership with monumental roadside signage. As part of the project, the developer rehabilitated the historically significant signage, retaining the familiar Pontiac Chief emblem and giant arrow while introducing new neon lettering to advertise for new tenants, Big 5 Sporting Goods and Goodwill. This example illustrates the success achieved by retaining historic signage: the retention of a neighborhood icon important to the local community and the flexibility of adapting signage to meet a new business's needs.



IV. Conclusion

The Conservancy strongly urges you to deny the application for a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) if the Angel Food Donuts Sign is to be removed. If the CUP is approved, please make a condition that the sign remain in-situ and be protected during demolition and construction of the new Dunkin' Donuts building, and incorporated as part of the operation of the new business.

About the Los Angeles Conservancy:

The Los Angeles Conservancy is the largest local historic preservation organization in the United States, with nearly 6,500 members throughout the Los Angeles area. Established in 1978, the Conservancy works to preserve and revitalize the significant architectural and cultural heritage of Los Angeles County through advocacy and education.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at (213) 430-4203 or afine@laconservancy.org should you have any questions and if we can be of assistance.

Sincerely,



Adrian Scott Fine
Director of Advocacy

Attachment(s)



ATTACHMENT(s)



Angel Food Donuts
Sign, 5590 E. 7th
Street, Long Beach,
CA. February 4, 2014
(L.A. Conservancy).





EXAMPLE: Dunkin' Donuts reuse of 1960s building and signage, 48 East Washington Street, Indianapolis, IN.





EXAMPLE: Dunkin' Donuts contemporary use of oversized, programmatic signage (giant coffee cup).



EXAMPLE: Dunkin' Donuts building designed to reflect local community character, North Elm Street, Westfield, MA.





EXAMPLE: Before, Ken Clark Pontiac, Crenshaw Boulevard at Coliseum Street, Los Angeles. 1950s postcard view.



After, 1950s Pontiac signage retained and re-purposed as part of Coliseum Center retail project, 2007 (L.A. Conservancy).



SECTION 10.0
ARCHITECTURAL CHARACTER

oranges, and chili bowls—sprang up along streets and highways in America as a lure for customers cruising by. This style was a direct outgrowth of the spread of automobile travel in America in the 1920s and 1930s and was most notably present in Southern California, where the “golden age” of programmatic buildings occurred between 1925 and 1934.¹³ The roadside buildings in this style often advertised the food item or service being sold inside, whether an ice cream stand in the form of a giant vanilla ice-cream cone or a shoe-repair shop in the form of an oversized boot or simply provided a literal interpretation of a business name (i.e., the Brown Derby restaurant in Los Angeles or the Sphinx Realty office).

Character-defining Features

- Appearance that resembles an object
- Exaggerated, often cartoonish exterior
- Prominent signage on or above the building
- Inexpensive building materials

Registration Requirements

Despite once containing the largest concentration of these unusual architectural expressions of the entrepreneurial spirit, southern California now boasts few extant examples of Programmatic buildings. Now valued not only for their implicit humor but also as cultural artifacts, programmatic architecture when encountered should be considered significant, even though it might be altered. A few examples are still located in Long Beach: the Coffee Pot Cafe (955 East Fourth Street) and the Daily Grind Cafe (5590 East Seventh Street). A Programmatic style building will most likely be significant as an individual resource. NRHP- and CRHR-eligible buildings should retain most of their character-defining features and a high degree of integrity. However, designation under local criteria may accommodate some loss of character-defining features due to scarcity of the type.

10.19 INTERNATIONAL, 1921–1942

The International style was a major worldwide architectural trend of the 1920s and 1930s and reflects the formative decades of Modernism prior to World War II. This style is characterized by its lack of ornamentation and its expression of volume. Supporting the building with a steel skeleton was a structural innovation that allowed the design of buildings that were sheathed in a delicate skin. Ribbons of metal casement windows that met corners are typical of the style, as well as large floor-to-ceiling glass windows and vast expanses of unadorned and plastered walls. The windows were set flush with the exterior wall surface, and the flat roof generally lacked a ledge or eave. Frequently, cantilevered structures, in the form of porches or second stories, extend out over lower stories. In terms of its domestic application, the International style was best known for its concept of stripping away ornamentation in favor of functionality.¹⁴

¹³ Gebhard, David. 1980. “Introduction.” In *California Crazy: Roadside Vernacular Architecture*, by Jim Heiman and Rip Georges. San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books, p. 23.

¹⁴ McAlester, Virginia, and Lee McAlester. 2004. *A Field Guide to American Houses*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf.

Historic Context Statement, City of Long Beach. July 10, 2009. Excerpt citing the Angel Food Donuts Sign at 5590 E. 7th Street.

