



April 30, 2020
Project No. 2532-001
Due Diligence Services for
West LA Civic Center, Los Angeles, CA

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

2.6 2532-001.M01

TO: County of Los Angeles Development Authority

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FROM: Sapphos Environmental, Inc.
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SUBJECT: Due Diligence Services for the West LA Civic Center, Los Angeles, California

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Memorandum for the Record (MFR) recounts the site survey findings and due diligence research completed for the West LA Civic Center, Los Angeles, California. Sapphos Environmental, Inc. (Ms. Kasey Conley and Ms. Carrie Chasteen) was retained by the client to complete due diligence services for the property for the potential redevelopment of the site by the City and County of Los Angeles. Currently, a specific project description for the site is unknown. It is assumed a selected developer(s) will redevelop the site for a mix of housing, with an emphasis on affordable housing, civic uses, and other supporting commercial and retail uses. The developer(s) would be expected to maintain and improve pedestrian connectivity to and within the site and approach proposed upgrades, renovations and/or any potential demolition of the existing buildings and pedestrian plaza in a manner consistent with further historical analysis. Research methods included inspecting building permits from the City of Los Angeles and completing online research using archives and newspaper repositories. Sapphos Environmental, Inc. also completed preliminary background research to inform a timeline of the property's development and use history. A site visit was completed for the subject property on March 10, 2020.

PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS/DESIGNATIONS SUMMARY

The subject property is located in the West Los Angeles Community Plan Area (CPA) of the City. The five buildings, pedestrian plaza, and landscaping within the West LA Civic Center were identified as contributors to the potential West Los Angeles Civic Center Historic District by the 2012 survey completed for the CPA for SurveyLA.¹ The proposed district was assigned the status codes 3S, or “Appears eligible for National Register as an individual property through survey evaluation,” 3CS or “Appears eligible for CR as an individual property through survey evaluation,” and 5S3 or “Appears to be individually eligible for local listing or designation through survey evaluation” in the 2012 survey.² None of the five buildings or the pedestrian plaza were identified as individually eligible by SurveyLA, and solely as contributors to the proposed district. Additionally, the subject property does not appear to have been previously evaluated other than the 2012 survey and there are no pending national, state, or local nominations for the district. The West LA Civic Center is considered a historical resource pursuant to Section 15064.5(a) of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines.

HISTORY/SETTING

The setting surrounding the parcel is multi-family residential and commercial. The West LA Civic Center is located southwest of where Santa Monica Boulevard and Route 405 meet. The area to the south and east is dominated by multi-family residential and the area to the west and north is primarily commercial. The West LA Civic Center was developed as a direct result of the 1949 Master Plan of Branch Administrative Centers. With a rapidly growing and geographically expanding city, the need for locally based governmental institutions was a high priority in the mid-20th century. The plan called for 12 centers and a total of 5 were built. The West LA Civic center was considered one of the “major” complexes built including a community center and library, with an already existing police station. One of the main differences between the major and minor civic centers was the inclusion of a community center. Out of the five civic centers that were built, only the West LA and Van Nuys Centers were considered major centers. The site was chosen in order to create an enclosed complex, differing from previously built linear complexes, with landscape features such as the water feature, low concrete walls, planter beds, and pedestrian-only walkways. The contributing buildings and pedestrian plaza within the complex were constructed between 1956 and 1965 (Figures 1–6, West LA Civic Center).

¹ City of Los Angeles. 15 August 2012. “Historic Districts, Planning Districts and Multi-Property Resources.” Prepared by: Sapphos Environmental, Inc., Pasadena, CA. Available at: https://planning.lacity.org/odocument/b6e5b95b-3191-4764-83b8-0c4995998702/Districts_Final.pdf

² City of Los Angeles. 15 August 2012. “Historic Districts, Planning Districts and Multi-Property Resources.” Prepared by: Sapphos Environmental, Inc., Pasadena, CA. Available at: https://planning.lacity.org/odocument/b6e5b95b-3191-4764-83b8-0c4995998702/Districts_Final.pdf



Figure 1. View of Pedestrian Plaza (view facing northwest), West LA Civic Center
 SOURCE: Sapphos Environmental, Inc., 2020



Figure 2. West LA Court Building Exterior (view facing southwest), West LA Civic Center
 SOURCE: Sapphos Environmental, Inc., 2020



Figure 3. West LA Municipal Building Exterior (view facing southeast), West LA Civic Center
 SOURCE: Sapphos Environmental, Inc., 2020



Figure 4. West LA Civic Center Bandstand (view southeast), West LA Civic Center
 SOURCE: Sapphos Environmental, Inc., 2020



Figure 5. Felicia Mahood Senior Center Exterior (view south), West LA Civic Center
SOURCE: Sapphos Environmental, Inc., 2020



Figure 6. West LA Regional Library Branch Primary Façade (view southeast), West LA Civic Center
SOURCE: Sapphos Environmental, Inc., 2020

CEQA REGULATIONS

Pursuant to Section 15064.5(b) of the CEQA Guidelines, a project with an effect that may cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource is a project that may have a significant effect on the environment. A substantial adverse change means physical demolition, destruction, relocation, or alteration of the resource or its immediate surroundings such that the significance of an historical resource would be materially impaired.

The extant buildings, pedestrian plaza, and landscaping generally retain integrity and have not been substantially materially altered to an extent that the potential historic district no longer conveys historical significance. The district has multiple components that have more flexibility for consideration in the adaptive reuse of this site. The proposals should look to understand how the district can still be respected while achieving the project goals of creating affordable housing and other uses through modest alterations and demolitions that still respect the historic district.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended the successful project team hire a historic consultant who meets the Secretary of the Interior's *Professional Qualification Standards* for History, Architectural History, and/or Historic Architect. This consultant would assist the developer in identifying character-defining features to retain and guide a design process which meets the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the *Treatment of Historic Properties* (Standards) or limits the amount of substantial adverse change to the historical resource. It is also recommended that proposals should look to understand how the district can be maintained while achieving the project goals of creating affordable housing and other uses. It is assumed a selected developer(s) will redevelop the site with a mix of housing, with an emphasis on affordable housing, civic uses, and other supporting commercial and retail uses. The developer(s) would be expected to maintain and improve pedestrian connectivity to and within the site and approach proposed upgrades, renovations and/or any potential demolition of the existing buildings and pedestrian plaza in a manner consistent with further historical analysis.

All proposals must demonstrate full compliance with CEQA and recognize that a full EIR may be warranted. Nonetheless, the County is particularly interested in proposals from developers that would support a streamlined CEQA process. Proposed projects that meet the Standards are considered mitigated to a level of less than significant and may qualify for a Class 31 Categorical Exemption under CEQA and/or other streamlining measures. Furthermore, projects that do not result in a substantial adverse change to a historical resource may qualify for additional CEQA Categorical Exemptions or streamlined review. Projects that do result in a substantial adverse change to the district or contributing features as noted in the above regulations may require further environmental analysis such as a Mitigated Negative Declaration or an Environmental Impact Report.

If there are any questions regarding the contents of this MFR or additional information is required, please contact Ms. Kasey Conley at (626) 683-3547, extension 135 or email at kconley@sapphosenvironmental.com.