

Los Angeles Department of City Planning

RECOMMENDATION REPORT

CULTURAL HERITAGE COMMISSION

**CASE NO.: CHC-2011-2002-HCM
ENV-2011-2178-CE**

HEARING DATE: October 6, 2011
TIME: 10:00 AM
PLACE: City Hall, Room 1010
200 N. Spring Street
Los Angeles, CA
90012

Location: 1138 E. Lake St. & Other Addresses
Council District: 11
Community Plan Area: Venice
Area Planning Commission: West Los Angeles
Neighborhood Council: Venice
Legal Description: Lots 1-9, 12, 15-25, and 28-41
of Tract 15214

PROJECT: Historic-Cultural Monument Application for
LINCOLN PLACE APARTMENTS

REQUEST: Declare the property a Historic-Cultural Monument

OWNER/APPLICANT: AIMCO Venezia, LLC
26 Executive Park, Suite 125
Irvine, CA 92674

**OWNER'S
REPRESENTATIVE:** Historic Resources Group
12 S. Fair Oaks Avenue, Suite 200
Pasadena, CA 91105

RECOMMENDATION **That the Cultural Heritage Commission:**

1. **Declare** the property a Historic-Cultural Monument per Los Angeles Administrative Code Chapter 9, Division 22, Article 1, Section 22.171.7
2. **Adopt** the report findings.

MICHAEL J. LOGRANDE
Director of Planning

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Ken Bernstein, AICP, Manager
Office of Historic Resources

Lambert M. Giessinger, Preservation Architect
Office of Historic Resources

Prepared by:

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Edgar Garcia, Preservation Planner
Office of Historic Resources

Attachments: Historic-Cultural Monument Application
ZIMAS Report

FINDINGS

1. The property “embodies the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type specimen, inherently valuable for a study of a period style or method of construction” as an example of the Garden City and Modernist Movements in multi-family residential architecture.
2. The property exemplifies the broad cultural, economic, and social history of the nation, state and community for its association with the government’s unprecedented involvement in multi-family affordable housing after World War II.

CRITERIA

The criterion is the Cultural Heritage Ordinance which defines a historical or cultural monument as any site (including significant trees or other plant life located thereon) building or structure of particular historic or cultural significance to the City of Los Angeles, such as historic structures or sites in which the broad cultural, economic, or social history of the nation, State or community is reflected or exemplified, or which are identified with historic personages or with important events in the main currents of national, State or local history or which embody the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type specimen, inherently valuable for a study of a period style or method of construction, or a notable work of a master builder, designer or architect whose individual genius influenced his age.

SUMMARY

Built from 1949-51 and located in the Venice district of Los Angeles, this multi-family, one- and two-story garden apartment complex exhibits character-defining features of the Modern Movement and the urban planning approach known as the Garden City Movement. The complex occupied an approximately 38 acre trapezoidal area just north of Lincoln Boulevard and bounded by Penmar Avenue, Frederick Street and Lake Street. The proposed monument consists of 44 of the original 52 multi-family apartment buildings, totaling 668 of the remaining unaltered units, and 77 ancillary buildings, laundries and garages. Seven of the original building blocks have been demolished and one building containing 28 apartment units was remodeled away from the historic nature of the original buildings. The current application covers approximately 26.84 acres.

Apartment buildings are largely composed of a building module repeated and combined in “U”, “L”, “C”, “Z”, and “I” shapes to yield diversified spatial arrangements, while maintaining architectural unity throughout the complex. The basic building module is a rectangular block of two stories, constructed of wood frame covered in smooth stucco, with a shallow, nearly flat, hipped roof with a broad overhang, large windows, and horizontal wood siding panels employed on façades. Entrances feature large wood windows above to light stairwells, with each façade presenting unique detailing, lending individuality to each apartment block. Other common building typologies seen are one-story bungalows, one-story freestanding laundry buildings, and long, single-loaded one-story parking structures. Apartments are either one- or two-bedrooms and feature large multi-purpose living rooms and a functional arrangement of rooms allowing for light in most rooms. Designs allow a free flow between rooms as well as from indoor to outdoor with patios, balconies, and landscaping. Original interiors include several built-in wooden furnishings. The use of smooth stucco and wood trim is consistent throughout the complex, although the color of the stucco and wood trim varies, as does the detailing of individual buildings. The choice of materials—basic, minimally-ornamental, and pre-fabricated and

standardized, from mullion to module—responds to the design concerns of the Modern Movement.

Within the complex, apartment buildings are set back from curved streets with ample green space and over 350 mature trees. Entrances are oriented inwards, away from the major streets surrounding Lincoln Place, and open space features meandering paths and irregular landscaping for pedestrian circulation, at a remove from automobile circulation. Individual buildings and building groups are organized so as to create semi-enclosed garden courtyards for residents. Co-located laundries and garages further differentiate commercial and automobile space from residential space. The entire complex sits within walking distance of Venice's major commercial district along Lincoln Boulevard.

The monument designation, as proposed, would comprise all of the extant parcels to include the remaining buildings and their associated sites dating from the original construction of the property. It does not include the later remodeled buildings or the vacant lots.

The creation of Lincoln Place Apartments responded to significant developments in national housing needs and the planning of Los Angeles. The end of World War II and the creation of the G.I. Bill precipitated a widespread housing shortage in the United States, with few private companies creating rental apartments for low- to moderate-income families. The Santa Monica Bay area felt this pinch acutely as the location of Douglas Aircraft's plant in 1940 and the opening of Los Angeles Airport in 1947 increased housing demand on the Westside. To address the housing shortage, the Federal Housing Authority (FHA) created a mortgage insurance program, whose low cost of lending and liberal valuation of land would encourage developers to meet this housing need. Developers Philip Yousem and Samuel Bialac leveraged the development of Lincoln Place Apartments with an FHA mortgage, which demanded value for its investments in quality architectural design: architectural unity, simple plans of desirable proportions and logical arrangements, with views from most rooms, and designs employing mass, scale and proportion for effect, and minimized ornamentation were expectations of the FHA and are reflected in Lincoln Place Apartment's design. Extensive inclusion of garages in the plan reflected the growth of car culture in the post-war era; this was actively balanced by the concurrently-planned development of an adjacent 24-acre recreation space and 7-acre shopping center, creating a self-contained community. Contemporary publications lauded the family-oriented design and easy access to stores and playgrounds. The Lincoln Place Apartments were credited with spawning the commercial development of nearby areas, contributing to the development of Lincoln Boulevard as a major commercial center on the Westside.

The architecture firm of Wharton & Vaughn Associates designed the Lincoln Place Apartments, with Ralph Vaughn as lead designer on the project. Initially Heth Wharton had been recognized as the architect of the project—likely owing to Vaughn's lack of an architectural license until later in his career—but recent evidence suggests that Vaughn was responsible for Lincoln Place's design. Ralph Vaughn (1907-2000) was an African-American architect, the son of prominent Washington D.C. architect, Roscoe Vaughn, and trained in architecture at the University of Illinois alongside William Pereira and Charles Luckmann. Upon graduating in 1932, he began teaching at Howard University, where he was mentored by Professors Albert I. Cassell and Hilyard Robinson, both steeped in public housing and Garden City planning movement in Europe and the United States. Working under Robinson, Vaughn was chief draftsman for Washington D.C.'s Langston Terrace garden apartments, on the National Register of Historic Places. Before World War II, Vaughn worked under Paul Williams, and during the war, worked as a Hollywood set designer under famed artistic director, Cedric Gibbons. There he met Heth Wharton, an architect known for his liberal views, who shared with Vaughn an interest in

Lincoln Place Apartments

CHC-2011-2002-HCM

Page 4 of 5

developing affordable, quality architecture for the everyday American. Wharton & Vaughn Associates designed major affordable housing developments Chase Knolls Garden Apartments in Sherman Oaks (HCM #683) and North Hollywood Manor, in addition to Lincoln Place Apartments, and other buildings. Developers selected Vaughn for Lincoln Place after recognizing his skill as an eminent designer of large housing developments in the area, despite receiving death threats for hiring an African-American. Later, Vaughn worked on many buildings in Southern California and beyond, and received architectural awards for his designs of Beth Am Synagogue and his own home in the West Adams District of Los Angeles.

Aside from minor interior alterations, Lincoln Place Apartments remained intact until 2001. At that time, the previous owner demolished seven perimeter buildings. An eighth building, 973 Elkhart Place in the southwest corner of the complex, was significantly altered, its unique façade details removed, other portions added, and its yard enclosed, interrupting the open landscaping plan of Lincoln Place Apartments. Interior renovations to the one building removed original tile, demolished walls and repurposed rooms, altering the spatial relationships within apartments. No additions have been built where the demolished apartment blocks once stood; however, the present owner has expressed interest in developing compatible apartment blocks on these lots.

Lincoln Place Apartments was previously taken under consideration for listing as a Historic-Cultural Monument in 2000. At the time, the Cultural Heritage Commission ruled that the complex did not have sufficient architectural significance to warrant designation. Reapplicants have pointed to the previous dearth of knowledge about the design and lack of appreciation for mid-century FHA housing, coupled with the misidentification of the architect, as detracting from its first HCM application. The property was determined eligible for the California Register of Historic Resources in 2004.

CRITERIA

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DISCUSSION

Lincoln Place Apartments successfully meets two of the specified Historic-Cultural Monument criteria: 1) "embodies the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type specimen, inherently valuable for a study of a period style or method of construction, and 2) is associated with the development of the community following World War II. As a large scale residential apartment complex built under the Federal Housing Administration guidelines and designed in the Garden City and Modernist movement styles, the property qualifies for designation as a Historic-Cultural Monument based on these criteria. The subject building appears to be also significant as an early example of work by architects who would proceed to design other large scale garden apartment complexes.

BACKGROUND

At its meeting of September 1, 2011, the Cultural Heritage Commission voted to take the application under consideration. On September 15, 2011, the Cultural Heritage Commission toured the subject property.

CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT (“CEQA”) REVIEW

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 Lincoln Place Apartments property as a 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 irreplaceable historic structures. The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards of 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 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.