

Los Angeles Department of City Planning

RECOMMENDATION REPORT

CULTURAL HERITAGE COMMISSION

CASE NO.: ENV-2009-1065-EIR
HCM NO: 887

HEARING DATE: April 7, 2011
TIME: 10:00 AM
PLACE: City Hall, Room 1010
200 N. Spring Street
Los Angeles, CA
90012

Location: 11973 W. San Vicente Boulevard
Council District: 11
Community Plan Area: Brentwood - Pacific Palisades
Area Planning Commission: West Los Angeles
Neighborhood Council: None
Legal Description: Westgate Acres, M B 7-90/91, Lot 51

REQUEST: Comments on Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) for the Green Hollow Square Project

OWNER: Munger Community Property Revocable Trust
Nancy B. Munger Separate Property Revocable Trust
Barry Family, LLC

RECOMMENDATION **That the Cultural Heritage Commission:**

Provide comments on the DEIR for the Green Hollow Square Project.

MICHAEL J. LOGRANDE
Director of Planning

[SIGNED ORIGINAL IN FILE]

Ken Bernstein, AICP, Manager
Office of Historic Resources

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Lambert M. Giessinger, Preservation Architect
Office of Historic Resources

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Edgar Garcia, Preservation Planner
Office of Historic Resources

BACKGROUND

Built in 1951, the Barry Building (Historic-Cultural Monument #887) is a two-story commercial building exhibiting character-defining features of mid-twentieth century International Style architecture. The flat-roofed rectangular building is organized around a central courtyard and opens to the street under a front façade raised one floor above the sidewalk on small steel pipe columns, in the style of pilotis. Windows are floor to ceiling grid and louver windows on the interior courtyard with smaller steel frame windows on the façade. The raised front façade consists of an unadorned stucco plane with a simple horizontal band of windows treated with operable vertical sunshades. Beneath the southeast corner a small freestanding structure serving as a storefront sits slightly askew to the orthogonal grid of the building. A garden courtyard extends beneath the building. Surrounding the open courtyard on two levels are small office suites, accessed by two curving stairs, located on diagonal corners. The staircases have concrete-filled steel pan treads that cantilever from a central concrete pedestal punctuated with triangular decorative openings. Steel pipes support both the stair and second floor walkway railings, with exposed detailing such as exposed metal plates and bolts serving as decorative elements.

The subject building is a well-preserved example of a mid-twentieth century California variant of International Style modern architecture. It was designed by architect Milton Caughey (1911-1958), winner of four Merit Awards by the Southern California Chapter of the AIA. Two of Caughey's residential designs, the Garred House (1949) and Goss House (1950), were cited in the first edition of David Gebhard and Robert Winter's seminal *Guide to Architecture in Southern California* (1965). First housing Brentwood Books in 1960 and subsequently Dutton's Brentwood Books, the building's ground-floor storefront and courtyard served as a bookstore and café for nearly 50 years and became a gathering place and landmark for the Brentwood community. Dutton's Brentwood Books ceased operation in 2008.

Later alterations to the subject property include a 1993 addition of a small receiving and storage structure at the rear. The screens originally separating the rear patios from the parking lot have been removed, as have a few of the original windows which have been replaced with aluminum windows. The men's bathroom has been remodeled and a low ramp has been added in the courtyard. A large section of the original planting at the center of the courtyard has been paved. These alterations were determined by staff of the Office of Historic Resources to not have compromised the architectural integrity of the subject building.

The subject property is located in front of a median of coral trees on San Vicente Boulevard, a landscape feature designated as Historic-Cultural Monument #148 in 1976.

The Barry Building property was declared Historic-Cultural Monument #887 in 2007, as it successfully met 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) reflects "the broad cultural, economic, or social history of the nation, State or community." As a commercial building designed in the International Style that helped shape the development of the San Vicente commercial corridor in Brentwood, the property qualified for designation as a Historic-Cultural Monument based on these criteria.

The architectural design and layout of the subject building is a distinguished example of mid-20th century modern architecture in Southern California and the influence of Corbusier and the International Style. Its highly original use of a courtyard space with modern design elements

presents an excellent example of International Style architecture in Los Angeles. Although appearing seemingly sparse and modest in design at first glance, closer inspection of the subject building reveals subtle design features and detailing such as curving cantilevered stairs, pilotis-style posts, grid and louver windows, metal railings, slightly angled storefronts, and solid smooth unornamented surfaces. The successful combination of design, scale, landscaping and pedestrian accessibility, often rare with mid-20th century commercial buildings, also contributes to the originality of the Barry Building's architecture.

The subject building's use as a book store since 1960, particularly since the opening of Dutton's Brentwood Books in 1984, contributed to the commercial development and social and cultural history of the San Vicente commercial area in Brentwood. As a well-recognized gathering spot and local landmark, the building's relationship between its commercial use as a bookstore and its unique architectural design contributed greatly to the growth and development of San Vicente Blvd as a vibrant commercial corridor.

PROPOSED PROJECT

The proposed Green Hollow Square Project (formerly the Brentwood Town Green Project) calls for the demolition of all of the existing buildings on the site (including the Barry Building), and for the construction of three new two-story commercial buildings (73,300 square feet of commercial uses) and one two-story single-family house. All proposed buildings would be built above a one-level subterranean parking garage.

The proposed project would result in the full demolition of the Barry Building and permanent loss of a designated Historic-Cultural Monument. In addition, the project would require the removal of up to six of the 127 coral trees on the San Vicente Blvd. median that encompass HCM #148 as well a reconfiguration of the median. The DEIR argues that this is not a significant impact on HCM #148 but the cumulative impact is considered to be significant because future projects in the area could also result in removal and replacement of the trees, eventually resulting in the interruption of the median and continuity of trees on this part of San Vicente Blvd.

PROJECT ALTERNATIVES

The DEIR presents five alternatives to the proposed project:

Alternative 1(a): No Project Alternative [No Build scenario].

The project does not take place.

Alternative 1(b): No Project Alternative [Existing Zoning scenario].

All buildings demolished, and the project site built-out to the maximum allowed under the existing zoning (approximately 105,000 sq. ft. of commercial uses).

Alternative 2: Reduced Project Alternative.

All buildings demolished, and the project site developed with approximately 54,975 sq. ft. of commercial uses.

Alternative 3: Same FAR, More Restaurant.

All buildings demolished, and the project site developed with the same square footage originally proposed, but with more devoted to restaurant uses.

Alternative 4: Preservation Alternative.

The Barry Building is retained and rehabilitated, and new commercial spaces developed around it.

Only Alternative 1(a) and Alternative 4 avoid significant and adverse impacts to the Barry Building. The alternative that would generate the least amount of adverse impacts is Alternative 1(a), the No Project alternative. CEQA Guidelines state that if the No Project alternative is the environmentally superior alternative, the EIR shall also identify an environmentally superior alternative among the other alternatives.

Based on the alternatives analysis in the 2011 Draft EIR (VI-65):

“Alternative 4 [Preservation Alternative] is considered to be the environmentally superior alternative, as it would result in impacts similar to those of the proposed project, and would reduce the significant and unavoidable impacts of the project with respect to both historic resources and aesthetics.”

Based on a January 2011 report by Gruen Associates (*Preserving the Barry Building as Part of the Brentwood Town Green Project*) [Appendix M], possible rehabilitation-related modifications to the Barry Building under Alternative 4 include the following:

- Adding elevators and other modifications for disabled access (including some modifications to the exterior walls at corners).
- An overall structural analysis to determine need for structural repair or retrofitting.
- New guardrail systems.
- Modifications to tenant spaces to accommodate new accessible pathways.
- New automatic fire sprinklers and alarm system.

- Modifications or replacement of windows.
- New mechanical HVAC system.
- Mechanical, plumbing, and electrical work.
- New drought tolerant planting in courtyards.

A communication from Galvin Preservation Associates that reviewed these proposed modifications states that this alternative would not significantly alter the Barry Building's character-defining features but that more information is needed in order to determine whether the alterations comply with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation.

Although the DEIR cites Alternative 4 as the environmentally superior alternative, it states this alternative may not meet some stated project objectives to the same extent as the proposed project. It raised concerns regarding architectural integration, pedestrian networks, energy efficiency and environmental sustainability, commercial competitiveness, and economic and financial objectives.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW PROCESS

The City of Los Angeles Department of City Planning is the Lead Agency for the Green Hollow Square proposed project. The applicant is seeking approval of the following discretionary actions: General Plan Amendment; Vesting Zone and Height District Changes; Specific Plan Amendment; Conditional Use Permit; Site Plan Review; Zone Variances; Project Permit Compliance Review; Preliminary and Design Review by the San Vicente Design Review Board; and approval by the Cultural Heritage Commission.

The DEIR is currently being circulated for review and comment by the public and other interested parties, agencies, and organizations. All comments are submitted to the Department of City Planning.

The Cultural Heritage Commission will review and submit comments on the DEIR to the Department of City Planning. The Final EIR will include responses to the CHC's comments.

The Cultural Heritage Commission may later wish to transmit communications and positions concerning the proposed project to other decision-making bodies within the City of Los Angeles. At the building permit stage, the Cultural Heritage Commission will also provide permit review and retain the ability to potentially issue permit stays as specified in the Cultural Heritage Ordinance.