

Los Angeles Department of City Planning

RECOMMENDATION REPORT

CULTURAL HERITAGE COMMISSION

**CASE NO.: CHC-2011-1890-HCM
ENV- 2011-1891-CE**

DATE: September 15, 2011
TIME: 10:00 AM
PLACE: City Hall, Room 1010
200 N. Spring Street
Los Angeles, CA
90012

Location: 211 W. 59th Street
5892 S. Brentwood Street
Council District: 9
Community Plan Area: Southeast Los Angeles
Area Planning Commission: South Los Angeles
Neighborhood Council: Community and
Neighbors for Ninth District Unity
Legal Description: Lot 49 of Tract Palm and
Moneta Avenue Tract

PROJECT: Historic-Cultural Monument Application for
EVENING STAR MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH

REQUEST: Declare the property a Historic-Cultural Monument

OWNER: Evening Star Missionary
Evening Star Missionary Baptist Church
211 W. 59th Street
Los Angeles, CA 90003

APPLICANT: City of Los Angeles

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

[SIGNED ORIGINAL IN FILE]

Ken Bernstein, AICP, Manager
Office of Historic Resources

[SIGNED ORIGINAL IN FILE]

Lambert M. Giessinger, Preservation Architect
Office of Historic Resources

Prepared by:
[SIGNED ORIGINAL IN FILE]

Edgar Garcia, Preservation Planner
Office of Historic Resources

Attachments: ZIMAS Report

FINDINGS

The building reflects “the broad cultural, economic, or social history of the nation, State or community” for its association with the Evening Star Missionary Baptist church as well as the African-American and Jewish communities in South Los Angeles.

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

Constructed in 1928 and located in Southeast Los Angeles, this one-story ecclesiastic building exhibits character-defining features of a simplified Byzantine Revival style. The church building is laid out in a traditional linear plan with a main elevation fronting West Brentwood Street, measuring roughly forty-seven feet wide by one hundred thirty one feet long with a height of fifty-one feet. The roof is a front-gable gambrel roof, trimmed with grey asphalt shingles and dentil detailing emphasizes the cornice. The exterior is constructed of reinforced concrete, clad with a rough stucco treatment. Windows throughout the building are stained glass louvered and fixed stained glass windows. The main entryway to the church is centered between two bell towers located on the West Brentwood Street facade. The left has two arches and is topped with a cross, while the right contains three arches and is topped with a Star of David. The second tier set of windows on the front façade likewise correspond to the arched elements. An added arch relief detail over the window with three arches emphasizes the prominence of its situation on the corner. The main entrance also contains a carved decorative moulding, painted blue, which features a repeating pattern of the Star of David and scroll work (further evidence of the church’s origin as a synagogue). The moulding highlights the recessed entry way to the main doors. The same moulding frames the entry doors as well. A smaller arch light rests directly over the entry door again featuring the same carved moulding. Above the central entry is an oculus window which contains a stained glass window from the 1967 renovation.

Though the main sanctuary was constructed in July of 1928, the addition of a basement above it at the back of the sanctuary hall did not occur until late August of that year. This space runs the full width of the church and is currently used as a kitchen and smaller congregational space. In 1967 a second story was added to that rear space to house a school room. During that same year a general plan to renovate the church was carried out by the congregation following the wishes of the Evening Star Missionary Baptist’s founding pastor, L.B. Brooks.

The interior of the church features a carpeted vestibule (the original scored concrete lies underneath) as well as a carpeted central nave flanked with pews. Just off of the vestibule is a recently added bathroom. Brightly colored louvered glass window panels are flanked by similarly colored leaded glass windows (from the 1967 renovation) depicting various Biblical symbols pertaining to the congregation line either wall along the nave of the sanctuary. The

windows were all previously affixed with leaded stain glass, though the specific decorative details are unknown. The oculus stained glass window on the west wall above the main entryway overlooks the main sanctuary from the former choir loft. Original theatrical lighting can still be seen lining the opening of the former choir loft. The addition of the masonry baptismal pool as well as the wooden pulpit, seen on the far east wall of the church, occurred during the 1967 renovation to the church. The floor is constructed of poured concrete. A side hallway with patterned cement brick (also added during the 1967 renovation) on the 59th Street facade lies along the first floor rear room allowing access between the lower and upper floors with an additional stair well and the main sanctuary hall.

The subject building was designed by then owner and architect Louis Seldon. Seldon designed several small office and factory buildings in Detroit, Michigan under the name Louis Scisorek prior to relocating his architectural practice to Los Angeles. He subsequently designed numerous residential and commercial commissions throughout Los Angeles including the California Fruit Market as well as the Los Angeles Convalescent Home in Montebello.

Founded in 1922, the Sephardic congregation of Talmud Torah Tifereth Jacob moved to the present site after outgrowing three previous locations. The congregation resided in an earlier smaller property on the parcel from 1925 – 1927. The cornerstone for the synagogue was laid on August 26, 1928, and greeted by much fanfare in the local area. The present owner and occupant, Evening Star Missionary Baptist Church, purchased the building in 1952, relocating from their previous location at 34th and Central Ave. Evening Star Missionary Baptist Church is the first historically African-American Baptist congregation in South Los Angeles. The congregation, numbering only 30 members when founded by the Reverend L.B. Brooks in 1932, was originally located in a small building at 909 E. 33rd Street. In 1939, having outgrown the first building, the congregation relocated to the Old Calvary Baptist Church building on 34th Street and Central Ave. The Evening Star Baptist Missionary Church would remain at the 34th Street for an additional 14 years until its final relocation to the subject property in 1952. The congregation was the spiritual home of several noteworthy members of the African American community including Robert (Bob) Minor, the first African American stuntman and first African American member of the Stuntman's Association of Motion Pictures as well as Kenneth Glover, a renowned gospel singer.

Alterations to the subject building include the addition of various styles and types of colored-glass louvered and fixed stained glass windows throughout the congregation's history, the addition of carpet to the sanctuary and vestibule which was originally tile, and a bathroom.

DISCUSSION

The Evening Star Missionary Baptist Church property successfully meets one of the specified Historic-Cultural Monument criteria: "reflects the broad cultural, economic, or social history of the nation, State or community." As a building associated with the Evening Star Missionary Baptist Church as well as the African-American and Jewish communities of South Los Angeles, the property qualifies for designation as a Historic-Cultural Monument based on these criteria.

BACKGROUND

At the City Council meeting of April 05, 2011, Councilmember Jan Perry introduced a motion directing the Cultural Heritage Commission to take the subject property under consideration as a Historic-Cultural Monument. On August 25, 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 Evening Star Missionary Baptist Church 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.

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 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.