

Los Angeles Department of City Planning

RECOMMENDATION REPORT

CULTURAL HERITAGE COMMISSION

CASE NO.: CHC-2007-4659-HCM

HEARING DATE: November 1, 2007
TIME: 10:00 AM
PLACE: City Hall, Room 1010
200 N. Spring Street
Los Angeles, CA
90012

Location: Crossing the Los Angeles River on 4th Street between S. Clarence St. and Molino St.
Council District: 14
Community Plan Area: Boyle Heights/
Central City North
Area Planning Commission: East Los Angeles/
Central
Neighborhood Council: Boyle Heights/Historic Cultural
Legal Description: Bridge #53C0044

PROJECT: Historic-Cultural Monument Application for the FOURTH STREET BRIDGE

REQUEST: Declare the property a Historic-Cultural Monument

APPLICANT: Cultural Heritage Commission

OWNER: City of Los Angeles

RECOMMENDATION **That the Cultural Heritage Commission:**

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

S. GAIL GOLDBERG, AICP
Director of Planning

[SIGNED ORIGINAL IN FILE]

Ken Bernstein, 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

FINDINGS

1. The structure “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 Gothic Revival style monumental bridge design.
2. The structure is associated with a master builder, designer, or architect, as a work by Merrill Butler, Engineer of Bridges and Structures for the City of Los Angeles Bureau of Engineering from 1923-1961.
3. The structure reflects “the broad cultural, economic, or social history of the nation, State or community” for its association with the development of the City of Los Angeles and the history of the Los Angeles River.

SUMMARY

Built in 1931, this reinforced concrete arched bridge exhibits character-defining features of Gothic Revival monumental bridge design. Located on Fourth Street as it crosses the Los Angeles River between Boyle Heights and Downtown Los Angeles, the subject structure rests on several vertical piers with closed spandrel barrel arch spans and two larger vertical piers at its center where it crosses the Los Angeles River. The central open spandrel arched span uses a fixed hinge design. On the western section of the subject structure, the deck slits into two roadways. Two pairs of massive piers on the central portion of the deck have lancet arch openings and Gothic-style decorative elements. The deck of the bridge exhibits a sculpted concrete railing with incised trefoil patterns on triangular forms. Low-height pylons support fluted electroliers with paired Gothic-style light fixtures. Several piers feature built-in seating for pedestrians.

The proposed Fourth Street Bridge historic monument was designed by Merrill Butler, Engineer of Bridges and Structures for the City of Los Angeles Bureau of Engineering along with Louis L. Hunt. The subject structure forms part of a monumental bridge building program dating from 1909-1932 that oversaw the construction of several bridges across the Los Angeles River. While addressing the transportation needs of the growing metropolis in the early 20th century, these bridges also embodied the values of the City Beautiful Movement which sought to beautify urban areas with Beaux-Arts style architectural design and planning for public buildings, structures, and infrastructure. The Fourth Street Bridge was one of only two bridges on the Los Angeles River to depart from the Beaux-Arts and Classical aesthetic and use a Period Revival design. The subject structure introduced a new type of experimentation in bridge design by the early 1930s. Although its use of the Gothic style produced a highly original and distinctive bridge, the subject bridge in its materials, form, and layout is still tied securely to the monumental bridge aesthetic of other Los Angeles River Bridges.

There are few alterations to the subject structure.

The Fourth Street Bridge was determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places by the Caltrans Historic Bridge Inventory in 1986 and the Caltrans Statewide Historic Bridge Survey Update in 2004.

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.

DISCUSSION

The Fourth Street Bridge structure successfully meets three 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,” 2) reflects “the broad cultural, economic, or social history of the nation, State or community,” and 3) is associated with a master builder, designer, or architect. As a bridge designed in the Gothic Revival style by a master engineer and reflective of the history and development of Los Angeles and the Los Angeles River, the property qualifies for designation as a Historic-Cultural Monument based on these criteria.

The subject structure forms part of one of the largest and most architecturally significant groupings of historic bridges in the State of California and the United States. The Fourth Street Bridge is also recognized for its thematic relationship to other Los Angeles River bridges from the 1909-1932 time period. Like other pre-WWII bridges spanning the Los Angeles River, the subject structure was constructed of concrete in response to the unpopularity of metal truss bridges; utilized funds from the Viaduct Bond Act of 1923; used new engineering and technical innovations for bridge construction; incorporated monumental design elements, reflecting the values and objectives of the City Beautiful Movement; involved the leadership of Merrill Butler and his team of architects and engineers with the City of Los Angeles Bureau of Engineering; and engaged the City of Los Angeles Municipal Arts Commission to oversee the aesthetic and artistic merits of all bridges in the City of Los Angeles.

BACKGROUND

At its meeting of September 6, 2007, the Cultural Heritage Commission moved to consider Historic-Cultural Monument designation of the subject structure as part of a motion encompassing thirteen Los Angeles River bridges. On October 18, 2007, the Cultural Heritage Commission toured the subject structure.