

Memorandum

To: William Crouch, City of Beverly Hills

Date: 10/03/2012

From: Jan Ostashay, Principal OAC

Re: LANDMARK ASSESSMENT CONFIRMATION REVIEW: The Wilshire Theatre/Saban Theatre,
8440 Wilshire Boulevard, Beverly Hills, CA

Overview

At the request of the City of Beverly Hills Community Development Department, Planning Division, Ostashay & Associates Consulting has conducted an assessment review to confirm local landmark eligibility for the property located at 8440 Wilshire Boulevard (8430 Wilshire Boulevard). This property, referred to as The Wilshire Theatre or Saban Theatre, is currently listed on the National Register of Historic Places (see Attachment A).

The City's Historic Preservation Ordinance (Title 10, Chapter 3, Article 32; Beverly Hills Municipal Code 10-3-32) states that a property may be designated as a Landmark if it satisfies the following three criteria:

A. The Property meets at least two of the following criteria:

1. Is identified with important events in the main currents of national, state, or local history, or directly exemplifies or manifests significant contributions to the broad social, political, cultural, economic, recreational, or architectural history of the Nation, State, City, or community;
2. Is directly associated with the lives of Significant Persons important to national, state, City or local history;
3. Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a style, type, period, or method of construction;
4. Represents a notable work of a person included on the City's List of Master Architects or possesses high artistic or aesthetic value;
5. Has yielded or has the potential to yield, information important in the prehistory or history of the Nation, State, City, or community;
6. Is listed or has been formally determined eligible by the National Park Service for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, or is listed or has been determined eligible by the State Historical Resources Commission for listing on the California Register of Historical Resources.

B. The property retains integrity from its Period of Significance.

The proposed landmark retains integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, and association. Integrity shall be judged with reference to the particular criteria specified in subsection 10-3-3212 (A) of this section. A proposed Landmark's deferred maintenance, dilapidated condition, or illegal alterations shall not, on their own, be construed to equate to a loss of Integrity.

C. The Property Has Historic Value.

The proposed Landmark is of significant architectural value to the community, beyond its simple market value, and its designation as a Landmark is reasonable, appropriate, and necessary to promote, protect, and further the goals and purpose of this Article.

As part of the landmark assessment confirmation review, a brief context of information regarding the property has been provided followed by the application and evaluation of local significance for local designation consideration.

Background Information

THE WILSHIRE THEATRE/SABAN THEATRE

Address: 8440 Wilshire Boulevard (8430 Wilshire Bl.)

APN: 4333-029-018

National Register Info: 12000164; Listed: 2012

Significance: Entertainment-Recreational History, Architecture

Period of Significance: 1930

Architect: S. Charles Lee

The Fox Wilshire Theatre (The Wilshire Theatre) has been both a significant cultural and an architectural landmark for Los Angeles and Beverly Hills since its opening in 1930. It was designed with 2500 seats by noted theatre architect S. Charles Lee to be a major film presentation house, even including a stage for live musical acts before the films. The theater is located on Wilshire Boulevard, the one of the most important and prestigious thoroughfares in the Southland. Situated one block inside the border of Beverly Hills the Fox Theatre drew patrons from that city as well as from outlying areas but did not compete with its other flagship theatre in downtown Los Angeles. The iconic exterior of the building with its simple Art Deco ornamentation and central office tower is one of the first buildings seen by pedestrians and drivers entering the eastern boundary of the city of Beverly Hills along Wilshire Boulevard. Over its 80 year history, the Wilshire has been the site of numerous film premieres, exclusive first-run film engagements, live concerts and touring Broadway shows. Despite several renovations, the largely intact interior of the theater continues to delight and amaze theater-goers with its columned two-story rotunda lobby, spacious orchestra and balcony level seating for 2,000, and its breath-taking silver, gold and black proscenium and organ screens. The connection with architect S. Charles Lee, a long-time resident of the city of Beverly Hills, make the Wilshire significant also as a virtually intact example of Lee's transition from the French Regency style of the Tower and Los Angeles Theatres to the nascent Art Deco style that would come to dominate movie palace architecture in the 1930's.

Local Significance Findings

Pursuant to the City of Beverly Hills Historic Preservation Ordinance (Title 10, Chapter 3, Article 32; BHMC 10-3-32), this property satisfies the necessary requirements for local landmark designation. Fox Wilshire is eligible under “significance” criterion A.1, for its association with the cultural and recreational history of the City. As such, the Wilshire Theatre has been a preferred location for film premieres, long running film engagements and live theatrical performances due to its central location in the city of Beverly Hills. From early talking pictures accompanied by stage shows, through major road show film engagements, lavish movie premieres and, most recently, Broadway plays and musicals, the Wilshire has always been a key entertainment venue for the city of Beverly Hills and the west side of Los Angeles. Its modernistic architecture was also an optimistic rejection of the Depression and reflected the hope of moving forward to better times. The theatre is also eligible under “significance” criterion A.3, since it is a distinctive and unique property type in the City and was designed in the Art Deco style to specifically fit the corporate Fox Theatre image as well as the regional forms of architecture popular in the late 1920s and early 1930s. In addition, the property satisfies local landmark “significance” criteria A.4, as it was designed by master architect S. Charles Lee. Finally, this property satisfies “significance” criteria A.6, since it has been formally listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The property also retains sufficient historical integrity from its period of significance (1930), and clearly has exceptional significant architectural value to the community.



Figure 1, Source: National Register Nomination

ATTACHMENT A
National Register Form