
4.4 - Cultural Resources

4.4.1 - Introduction

The term “cultural” typically refers to historical, archaeological, and paleontological resources when used in the context of a CEQA document such as an EIR. During the NOP period, the Native American Heritage Commission suggested the City contact local Native American (NA) tribes regarding this project. However, the Proposed Project does not trigger consultation with local NA tribes under SB 18. Section 7 of the EIR explains that the site contains no known archaeological or paleontological resources. Therefore, this section addresses only potential impacts on historical resources.

This section describes the existing historical resources and potential effects from project implementation on the site and its surrounding area. Descriptions and analysis in this section are based on information contained in the *Historical Resources Impact Statement* prepared in June 1999 by Greenwood and Associates in June of 1999 (GA 1999) which is included as Appendix D of this EIR.

4.4.2 - Existing Conditions

The development of Westlake Park, as it was first known, commenced in the late 1880s. Originally swamp land, the City brought in topsoil to fill in the land and to cover the alkali deposits present. Trees and shrubs were planted and a few park benches were installed. In 1890, the lake was enlarged and landscaped to create a more picturesque lake encircled by a 40-foot wide carriage drive and a Temporary Boathouse was erected near Seventh Street. A bandstand was erected in 1896, providing a focus for the park and the Sunday afternoon concerts.

The Temporary Boathouse was replaced with a new structure in 1915. In 1924, the Fire Alarm Signal Station Building (Signal Building) was erected along the northern park boundary, adjacent to Sixth Street. The Mediterranean style building is the oldest existing structure in the park. It was constructed to house fire department communications equipment that received signals from fire alarm boxes located throughout the community. During World War II, the building was used by the military, which maintained an aerial observation post and air raid warning station. The original bandstand was eventually removed and the existing band shell was added to the north section of the park in 1957 and renovated in 2006. The 1915 boathouse was demolished in 1969 and replaced with the present structure in 1973.

The park was renamed in May of 1942 in honor of General Douglas MacArthur. Over the years, the park has undergone numerous alterations in an effort to reverse the decline of the grounds and facilities.

4.4.3 - Thresholds of Significance

According to the CEQA Guidelines' Appendix G, Environmental Checklist, a project may significantly impact cultural resources if it disrupts or adversely affects a prehistoric or historic archaeological site or a property of historic significance to a community, ethnic or social group, or a paleontological site except as part of a scientific study. For reference, Section 7 of the EIR describes potential impacts of the project on archaeological or paleontological resources – this section focuses on historical resources. The *L.A. CEQA Thresholds Guide* (Section D-3) states that a project would normally have a significant impact on historical resources if it would:

- a) *Cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource as defined in §15064.5?*

The State CEQA Guidelines Section 10564.5 defines historic resources as resources listed or determined to be eligible for listing by the State Historical Resources Commission, a local register of historical resources, or the lead agency. Generally, a resource is considered to be “historically significant” if it meets one of the following criteria listed:

1. Is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of local or regional history, or the cultural heritage of California or the United States;
2. Is associated with the lives of persons important to local, California, or national history;
3. Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, region, or method of construction, or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values; or
4. Has yielded, or has the potential to yield, information important to the prehistory or history of the local area, California, or the nation (§15064.5).

The State CEQA Guidelines Section 15064.5 defines a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource as any action affecting the resource or its immediate surroundings such that the significance would be materially impaired. Material impairment is further defined as the alteration of those physical characteristics of the resource that convey its historical significance and/or justify its inclusion in, or eligibility for inclusion in, any of the aforementioned historical resource lists.

4.4.4 - Project Impacts and Mitigation Measures

This section discusses potential impacts associated with the development of the project and provides mitigation measures where appropriate.

Historical Resource

Impact CUL-1 Cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource as defined in CEQA §15064.5?

Impact Analysis - Signal Building

Renovations and improvements to historic features of MacArthur Park may result in the loss of historic architectural or design elements that contribute to its designation as a City historic-cultural monument. Loss of historic attributes and features would represent a potentially significant impact to cultural resources. It should also be noted that the Proposed Project includes the installation of a new historical monument commemorating Oscar Romero, an El Salvadorean Catholic priest who was killed in 1980. No design or location has been finalized for this monument to date.

Originally used by the Los Angeles Fire Department as a communications hub and training facility, the Signal Building has served a variety of functions over the course of its history. Its design offers an attractive addition to the park setting, while achieving optimum utility. The interior incorporates large clear span interior spaces, durable finishes, and a minimum of interior architectural detailing or stylistic embellishments, allowing maximum adaptability. Stylistic expression and ornamentation is largely restricted to its exterior.

The significant character defining elements evident in the interior of the building are those that relate to its historic functions as a fire department office and training facility, and its later use by the military. Also important are materials and architectural details that express its era of construction. While the period of significance has not been formally established for this building, it approximates 1924 to ca. 1950.

Level of Significance Before Mitigation

Potentially Significant Impact.

Mitigation Measures

The proposed project is limited to renovation of portions of the interior of the structure. Character defining features that should be retained and preserved in the improvements to the interior include basic room configurations and partitions.

MM CUL-1a **Signal Building.** The long-span, open spandrel reinforced concrete arches visible on the ground and intermediate levels are important features of the building's design and shall remain exposed.

MM CUL-1b **Signal Building.** Perimeter walls and ceilings of the ground and intermediate levels are generally painted concrete. This type of concrete work is typical of the Signal Building's period of construction shall remain exposed.

MM CUL-1c **Signal Building.** The original paneled wooden doors with brass-finished locksets are located on various levels and in the maintenance yard shall be retained. All windows

shall remain in their original condition or their appearance maintained throughout the structure.

Level of Significance After Mitigation

Less than Significant Impact.

Impact Analysis – Grounds and Recreation Areas

Within the bounds of the park, there are numerous mature trees more than 50 years old that relate to the historic development of the grounds and are considered character-defining resources. MacArthur Park also contains numerous built features and objects that contribute to the historical and cultural values of the park. They include sculptures, plaques, and monuments, a stone drinking fountain and other park furniture, a rock-lined stream and lagoon, the lake, and stairs, tunnels, and boundary walls related to the 1934 extension of Wilshire Boulevard through the park. The site also contains a number of murals also considered community and cultural resources. While not expected, it is possible that some of the hardscape walkway or landscaping improvements may affect some of the existing artwork in the park.

City park staff has indicated that one of their goals in designing the project was to preserve healthy trees more than 50 years old in place to the greatest extent feasible. City staff considered design and construction alternatives prior to the determination to remove trees more than 50 years old. Staff indicated that if a tree cannot be feasibly maintained in place, they will salvage and relocate it to an appropriate location within the park before considering its removal. They further indicated the determination of feasible relocation shall be made in consultation with a qualified historical arborist or similar professional when necessary (P. Davis, personal communication, January 2008).

Level of Significance Before Mitigation

Potentially Significant Impact.

Mitigation Measures

The Proposed Project may result in unanticipated impacts to avoidable impacts to historic landscape or public art features that would remove them or radically alter their character defining aspects. Therefore, the following measures are recommended to be implemented with construction of the Proposed Project:

- MM CUL-1d Existing Park Features.** Where possible, existing trees, murals, sculptures, plaques, monuments and furniture shall be left in place to the greatest extent feasible. City staff shall consider design and construction alternatives prior to the determination to remove any of these existing improvements. If an existing trees or improvement cannot be feasibly maintained in place, City staff shall consider salvage relocation to an appropriate location within the park before considering removal. The determination of feasible relocation shall be made in consultation with a qualified

professional if necessary, and shall be documented prior to the start of any work in this regard.

Level of Significance After Mitigation

Less than significant.