


Date: January 26, 2022

To: Thomas B. Modica, City Manager 

From: Oscar Orci, Director of Development Services 

For: Mayor and Members of the City Council

Subject: **Recognizing and Preserving Historic and Cultural Sites for Communities of Color**

On April 6, 2021, the City Council adopted a [Recommendation](#) related to the naming of the Houghton Park Community Center as the Doris Topsy-Elvord Community Center, in recognition of the City of Long Beach's (City) first black woman elected to the City Council. As part of that action, the City Council directed the City Manager to identify additional sites of significance to the African American community, and all underrepresented communities, for the purposes of historic preservation, landmarking, and inclusion in the updated Citywide Historic Context Statement. This memo provides an overview of progress on these efforts and next steps to be undertaken by City staff.

The Development Services Department has been working on two historic preservation initiatives that involve a broader study and recognition of various underrepresented communities in City history to help fill historical gaps within City historic preservation documents, such as the Historic Context Statement, which currently provides very limited information about communities of color. The Historic Context Statement documents significant periods of development throughout the City's history, with a focus on the physical development patterns of the City as a result of significant social and economic factors, including contributions by important local individuals. The context statement focuses on how these events and patterns are reflected in the City's built environment and its architecture. Such documents are used by City staff and professionals as they determine which buildings and places must be protected through historic preservation in order to appropriately convey our complete and inclusive local history.

In the 10 years since the existing Historic Context Statement was last updated, the definition of what is 'historic' has evolved through national discussion on how historic preservation can fully encompass our diverse shared history. In the past, 'historic' places were generally limited to places with substantial architectural value as seen through a high or affluent architecture lens; or a direct association with a traditionally important person, such as a City founder. Today, cities across the country, including Long Beach, recognize that buildings and other places do not need to have architectural integrity or be associated with a wealthy individual to bear historic significance. The Planning Bureau (Bureau) is undertaking efforts to 'bridge the history gap' by telling the stories of various and diverse communities that make up the City's history and heritage to record a more comprehensive history in City records including to document, highlight, and preserve the histories of the black community and other communities of color.

Two ongoing initiatives toward this end are an update to the overall Citywide Historic Context Statement and a specialized Race and Suburbanization Context Statement. The Citywide Historic Context Statement update will extend the period of study, which now ends in 1969, to the year 1980. It will also expand the context, themes of significance, and property types to capture and address themes that were not addressed in the original document, including resources associated with underrepresented groups, arts and culture; Long Beach's rich history of significant Mid-Century Modern architectural design; archaeological and Tribal resources; historic preservation; and urban planning. Additional background research for the Historic Context Statement is currently underway.

The specialized Race and Suburbanization Historic Context Statement will cover how suburbanization and racial discrimination shaped the City's patterns of development, growth and demographic distribution between 1945 and 1979, including through exclusionary zoning, redlining, blockbusting, civil rights efforts, and various other factors that led to the location and concentration of communities of color in Long Beach during that period. It will also describe significant geographies, locations, events, and people associated with different racial and ethnic communities including African American, Latino, Cambodian, Japanese, Filipino, Vietnamese, and Chinese communities in Long Beach. The document is still being drafted and has been informed by community leader interviews, archival research, academic and expert readers, an Advisory Committee, and community feedback including through the #HistoryMattersLB "[Mark the Map](#)" tool and through a partnership with Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD) through which students have identified potential historic places and people. A draft is now being refined and is anticipated to be released for public review in the Spring of 2022.

These two important efforts will provide important information and histories for consideration to be recognized through specific structures or other appropriate strategies, such as naming or dedication of public buildings or locations, but they are generally too broad and limited in scope to provide the level of detail needed to evaluate the historic significance of individual sites and their potential affiliation with noteworthy individuals in the City across all communities. However, as a starting point, a list of 122 properties was developed based on research for the Race and Suburbanization Context Statement. Each identified structure is known to have an association with one of the themes addressed in the Historic Context Statement. This includes some potentially significant properties related to the broad impact of race and racial restrictions on residential development patterns in the city, as well as identification of individual commercial and institutional properties that have an important association with the fight for civil rights in the City; served as an important community gathering place; or have a particular association within a cultural community. Some examples of the noteworthy sites that have been identified include:

- The location of the first Fair Housing Foundation office (4108 E. 7th St.)
- The first independent location of the Long Beach Community Improvement League after moving out of a church basement circa 1963, and the site of the first Head Start program in the western region (222 Olive Ave.), both affiliated with the African American community

- The Eastside Neighborhood Center (Centro de la Raza)/United Cambodian Community Plaza, which was the site of children's and adult education programs on Mexican heritage to engender Chicano pride in the early 1970s
- 2338 E. Anaheim Street, which was the headquarters for several important organizations, including the Cuban Association and the Raza Unida Hispano Americana (RUHA) in the early 1970s and is affiliated with the Latinx community

Other, much more intensive parcel-specific surveys are needed to reach the level of specificity to identify what sites citywide would meet the historic significance criteria based on local, State and/or federal criteria or standards. However, the priority list of 122 properties provides us with starting materials and documented evidence of important sites.

Additional funding is needed to support a citywide study that could yield the sufficient property-level information needed for designation, using an approach and methodology similar to the City of Los Angeles' SurveyLA effort. In the meantime, the forthcoming Race and Suburbanization Context Statement will provide a valuable foundation toward any future survey and provide citywide information on histories and important people within black and communities of color in Long Beach history from 1945 to 1979, and also provide a starting point in identifying potential individual sites and structures that may be considered for additional analysis to support historic designation.

Efforts to better document the history of the City through its development patterns and built environment, inclusive of all the communities represented in Long Beach, and future site-specific analyses that could inform initiatives to recognize and name community assets for under-represented community leaders, is consistent with Goal 1, Strategy 1, of the Framework for Reconciliation. Goal 1 aims to end systemic racism in all local government and partner agencies through internal transformation, and this effort furthers one of its associated actions to, "create a process to review the names of public parks, schools (in partnership with LBUSD), buildings, and monuments with a racial equity lens."

To improve the City's Historic Preservation program, City staff have also been evaluating existing programs and resources through an equity lens. Prioritizing programs such as the Historic Context Statement update requires de-prioritizing other programs including the Mills Act Program, a property tax abatement program offered by the state and implemented by local governments to offer economic incentives to qualifying owners of historic or designated landmark sites upon agreement to rehabilitate, restore, and protect their property. Under the Mills Act contracts, private owners receive tax relief in exchange for proper maintenance and preservation of the historical and architectural character of the property for a revolving 10-year term. Long Beach reinstated the program in 2015, but the City did not accept new applications in 2021, during which time staff began assessing the program, its benefits and impacts on City budget, staff time, and capacity. City staff are analyzing best practices in cities throughout the state of California including examining how the Mills Act program can be administered through an equity lens. Although the City will not accept new applications in 2022 in order to continue this ongoing background work and research, it is anticipated the program will be reinstated in 2023 with revised criteria to focus on newly purchased properties and owners who propose

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robust work programs for substantial improvements that help prolong the life of historic structures while utilizing local goods and services in that rehabilitation program.

If you have any questions, please contact Advance Planning Officer Alison Spindler-Ruiz, at (562) 570-6946.

CC: CHARLES PARKIN, CITY ATTORNEY
DOUGLAS P. HAUBERT, CITY PROSECUTOR
LAURA L. DOUD, CITY AUDITOR
LINDA F. TATUM, ASSISTANT CITY MANAGER
TERESA CHANDLER, DEPUTY CITY MANAGER
APRIL WALKER, ADMINISTRATIVE DEPUTY CITY MANAGER
MONIQUE DE LA GARZA, CITY CLERK (REF. FILE #[21-0284](#))
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