



Memorandum

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR
AND CITY COUNCIL

FROM: Historic Landmarks
Commission

SUBJECT: SEE BELOW

DATE: June 12, 2020

COUNCIL DISTRICT: 3

**SUBJECT: HISTORIC CITY LANDMARK DESIGNATION (FILE NO. HL20-001) FOR
"170 PARK CENTER PLAZA" (FORMER BANK OF CALIFORNIA)**

RECOMMENDATION

The Historical Landmarks Commission recommends the City Council adopt a resolution designating the former Bank of California located at 170 Park Center Plaza as a City Landmark site with cultural, aesthetic, or engineering interest or value.

OUTCOME

Designation of the site as a City Landmark would help ensure preservation of a unique Brutalist style of architecture portraying the historic development pattern of San José in the era of community redevelopment in the Downtown. Any exterior alterations to the site, if designated a City Landmark, would require approval of a Historic Preservation (HP) Permit.

BACKGROUND

In response to the letter from the Preservation Action Council of San Jose (PAC SJ) dated January 30, 2020, the Historic Landmarks Commission (Commission) discussed a potential nomination of the former Bank of California building (Building) at its March 4, 2020 meeting. The Commission discussed the significance of the Building and that landmark status should be explored. On May 6, 2020, the Commission reviewed and considered the request for Commission nomination of the Building and voted unanimously to direct staff to prepare documentation for nomination of the Building as a Historic City Landmark. The nomination item was agendaized for the Commission's June 3, 2020 meeting where the Commission found that the Building meets the criteria for City Landmark status and voted to recommend that the City Council designate the Building as a City Landmark site.

A Nomination Application was prepared as a part of the Commission consideration of 170 Park Center Plaza as a City Landmark. Based on the information in the Nomination Application, the Building qualifies as a City Landmark based on five out of the eight following criteria under the Historic Preservation Ordinance Chapter 13.48.110(H) of the San José Municipal Code:

Criterion 1. *Its character, interest, or value as part of the local, regional, state or national history, heritage or culture;*

The building was once a key anchor to the Park Center Plaza financial center as a part of the City's first urban renewal project and was successful attracting major banking institutions to San José. This was a pivotal urban renewal project during the post-war period of industrialization and suburbanization. The brutalist design is characteristic of the design direction for the Plaza where many of the bank buildings were designed in abstract forms, others include the Bank of America California building and addition, the Heritage building, and the former Union Banks building. The original portions of City View Plaza remain today as a key and exceptional representative of an important local pattern of community redevelopment.

Criterion 4. *Its exemplification of the cultural, economic, social, or historic heritage of the city of San José;*

City View Plaza, known originally and until recently as Park Center Plaza, was San José's first major redevelopment project when conceived in the late 1950s and initiated between 1966-1968 by San José Center Corp under the authority of the Redevelopment Agency of the City of San José. One of the six remaining Park Center Plaza buildings and structures designed by Gruen Associates in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Bank of California building can be found to contribute to the period of significance, design, and use identified with the development of this financial center in Downtown San José. It exemplifies an important period in the city's economic history as a representation of planned redevelopment and of corporate design development and brutalist architecture.

Criterion 6. *Its embodiment of distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type or specimen.*

The Building has associations with César Pelli and Gruen Associates and is important for its excellence in architectural design, detail, materials, and craftsmanship. The Bank of California building has a distinctive brutalist architectural style and is set apart from the other contributing buildings by more recent infill construction, by its lower landscaped setting, and by its more sculptural design. However, the building shares the period of significance, the financial associations, an architect, and its excellence in materials and detailing.

Criterion 7. *Its identification as the work of an architect or master builder whose individual work has influenced the development of the city of San José; and*

The exceptional Bank of California building was designed by internationally renowned architect César Pelli while at Gruen Associates; his work has influenced the development of the City as the master designers of Park Center Plaza.

Criterion 8. *Its embodiment of elements of architectural or engineering design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship which represents a significant architectural innovation, or which is unique.*

The building is described as monumental in scale but small in size. It has recognizable and distinctive forms. It makes a statement in its nearly all concrete shapes with a stature. It is described as an architectural innovation and has a unique eye-catching entry. Its chiseled shapes in various linear, angled, and blocky forms were masterfully arranged.

ANALYSIS

A complete analysis, including Historic Preservation Ordinance conformance, is contained in the attached Historic Landmarks Commission staff report.

CONCLUSION

The Historic Preservation Commission recommends that the City Council designate the Building (former Bank of California) at 170 Park Center Plaza as a City Landmark.

EVALUATION AND FOLLOW UP

If the designation is approved, the subject Building would become a City Landmark. Any alteration to the Building or demolition of the Building would require a Historic Preservation Permit and would need to comply with the Secretary of Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties. Pursuant to the Historic Preservation Ordinance Chapter 13.48, Historic Preservation Permit applications are filed with the Director of Planning. Applications for alteration or demolition are referred to the Historic Landmarks Commission for recommendation. Applications are heard at Planning Director's Hearings for final action. The Planning Director's decisions on such applications are appealable to the City Council.

The Historic Landmarks Commission meets monthly on the first Wednesday of the month (except July or otherwise noticed). Planning Director Hearings are held every Wednesday or otherwise noticed.

CLIMATE SMART SAN JOSE

The recommendation in this memorandum will have no negative effect on the Climate Smart San José energy, water, or mobility goals.

POLICY ALTERNATIVES

Should the City Council take action to not designate 170 Park Center Plaza as a City Landmark, the Building would continue its place on the Historic Resources Inventory as a Candidate City Landmark and continue to qualify as a historic resource under the California Environmental Quality Act; it would not have the protections under the Historic Preservation Ordinance.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

Staff followed the public notification requirements of Section 13.48.110 of the San Jose Municipal Code. A public hearing notice for the designation consideration was published in a local newspaper, mailed, and posted at the site. Information about the proposed designation

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and the associated public hearings has been made available through the Planning Division website. Staff has been available to answer questions.

On May 22, 2020 a notice was mailed to the current property owner and surrounding owners regarding the proposed designation.

COORDINATION

This memorandum was coordinated with the City Attorney's Office.

CEQA

The designation will not have a negative effect on historic resources. It has been determined exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) per Section 15331 of the State CEQA Guidelines.

/s/

Rosalynn Hughey, Secretary
Historic Landmarks Commission

For questions please contact Robert Manford, Deputy Director, at robert.manford@sanjoseca.gov or Juliet Arroyo, Historic Preservation Officer, at Juliet.arroyo@sanjoseca.gov .

Attachments: [June 3, 2020 Historic Landmark Commission Staff Report and Nomination Application](#)