



Staff Report

File #: REPORT 20-0480, Version: 1

Honorable Mayor and Members of the Hermosa Beach City Council
Regular Meeting of July 28, 2020

**C 42 #9- CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS FOR A
MURAL DISPLAY MEASURING APPROXIMATELY 3,376 SQUARE
FEET ON THE WEST FACING BUILDING WALL OF THE HISTORIC
BIJOU BUILDING LOCATED AT 1221 HERMOSA AVENUE AND
DETERMINATION THAT THE PROJECT IS CATEGORICALLY
EXEMPT PURSUANT TO SECTIONS 15301 AND 15061(B)(3)
UNDER THE CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL
QUALITY ACT (CEQA)**

(Community Development Director Ken Robertson)

Recommended Action:

Staff recommends the City Council adopt the attached resolution, thereby approving a Certificate of Appropriateness (C 42 #9) for a mural display measuring approximately 3,376 square feet on the west facing building wall of the historic Bijou building located at 1221 Hermosa Avenue and determining that the project is Categorically Exempt pursuant to Sections 15301 and 15061(b)(3) under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

Executive Summary:

The applicant, Hermosa Beach Murals Project (HBMP), submitted a proposal for a mural display measuring approximately 3,376 square feet on the west facing building wall of the of the Bijou Theater Building. Since the Bijou Theater Building is a historical landmark, Hermosa Beach Municipal Code (HBMC) Section 17.53.150 requires approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness prior to conducting any improvement on the property.

Background:

The subject site is located on the southwest corner of Hermosa Avenue and the building occupies the entire property between 13th Street and 13th Court with the primary building frontage facing Hermosa Avenue to the east. The site has a General Plan Land Use Designation of Recreational Commercial and is within the General Commercial (C-2) zone. The 14,031 square foot parcel is currently improved with a 24,860 square foot three-story building known as the Bijou Building.

Constructed in 1923, the neoclassical revival building served as a first run live vaudeville theater and motion picture house. Additionally, the building housed office space, commercial storefront, and the

local Masonic lodge on the third floor.

In 1999, a historic resource survey (**Attachment 5**) was conducted; at which time it was determined the building was eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places due to the distinctive architectural style and the building exemplified the early social and economic history of Hermosa Beach. In 1999, the City designated the Bijou Building as a historical landmark pursuant to HBMC Section 15.53.070 (Historical Preservation Ordinance).

An application was filed on July 1, 2020 by Hermosa Beach Mural Projects, seeking determination of whether the proposed mural display covering approximately 3,376 square feet of the west side of an existing building is consistent with the Hermosa Beach Municipal Code (HBMC) definition of "Mural." On July 21, 2020, the Planning Commission approved the applicants request and determined pursuant to HBMC Section 17.50.130.B, it was appropriate to waive the specific provisions of the sign code pertaining to sign area, coverage, height, type and style for the 3,376 sq. ft. mural display because the display meet the definition of a mural.

Since the Project shall be located on the Bijou Theater Building, Hermosa Beach Municipal Code (HBMC) Section 17.53.150 requires approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness prior to conducting any improvement on the property.

Discussion:

The applicant is proposing a mural display measuring approximately 3,376 square feet on the west facing building wall of the Bijou Theater Building. The proposed display depicts an image of the historic Sand & Surf Club a.k.a. the Hermosa Biltmore Hotel and was designed by artist, John Pugh. The proposed display would cover the entirety of the west-building wall. The proposed image provides the illusion of a hidden layer of history being unveiled beneath the Bijou building wall and depicts an image of the Biltmore Hotel. The display is a tribute to the demolished hotel which once stood where Noble Park is now located.

The mural display would be applied using a combination of painting directly on the existing wall and applying a painted fabric to the existing wall. The top portion of mural display would be applied as a painted fabric, while the lower portion would be painted directly to the building surface. A thin base of protective sealer would be applied to the outermost stucco layer of west building wall to prepare for the application of the mural. The thin base coat would then have a very thin net applied, in order to prevent future cracking of the display. The skim coat (which is a thin plaster to smoothen the surface) would be applied over the net. The painted fabric would then be applied to the skim coat surface. The painted fabric must be applied to a smooth surface and cannot be applied to the existing stucco, which would otherwise compromise the integrity and durability of the fabric surface and appearance.

The Project will take approximately five weeks to complete. A freestanding outrigger scaffold would be installed in the City's parking (Lot B) adjacent to the west-facing building wall for the application of

the mural. Due to the size, the scaffold would occupy eight public parking spaces for the duration of the project. The applicant also proposes to add additional lighting to the existing lampposts in parking lot (Lot B) in order to illuminate the mural display during evening hours.

This project was reviewed and inspected by City staff, which found that all work conformed to the Secretary of Interior's standards for historical resource restoration. City staff used a previous report conducted by Environmental Science Association (ESA) for the City of Hermosa Beach for a Certificate of Appropriateness Review for a proposed tenant improvements (Project) at 1221 Hermosa Avenue, Hermosa Beach, California ("1221 Hermosa Avenue" or "Project Site") by Gensler for Beach City Capital (Tenant), dated September 12, 2019 and the 1999 Architectural Resources Survey Report of the Bijou Theater Building prepared by PCR Services Corporation for the City of Hermosa Beach, to evaluate the federal, state and local historical significance of the Bijou Theater Building based upon criteria used by the National Register of Historic Places, the California Register of Historic Resources, the City of Hermosa Beach Historic Resource Preservation Ordinance, and survey methodology of the State Office of Historic Preservation (OHP), to analyze the project's compliance with the Secretary of Interior's standards for historical resource restoration. Staff found the Project would retain and preserve the historic character of the Neoclassical style Bijou Building and would not result in the removal, destruction, or alteration of any character-defining features that contribute to the subject property's significance as a historical resource.

Exterior Character-Defining Features

The 1999 Architectural Resource Survey Report describes the composition of the building as symmetrical and formal and continues to state that, "though the entire building is constructed of unreinforced red brick, the primary façade and those small portions of the south and north façades which wrap around the store fronts and can be seen from Hermosa Avenue are clad in terra cotta," and continues to say, "other than the terra cotta veneer that wraps around the store front corners, the north and south elevations contain little exterior ornamentation. The south elevation is divided by pilasters and punctuated by three recessed entries, two standard single doors exits and one large stage door all which retain their original wooden doors and arched entryways. The north elevation is also divided by pilasters and contains three entries. However, the doors and entryways have been modified on this elevation and do not retain their original material and configuration. Both the north and south elevations have fire escapes attached to them. The west (rear) elevation is completely void of ornamentation, fenestration, and entryways. Only a small, rectangular shaped vent opening highlights this façade." The exterior character-defining features of the Bijou Building identified in the report include:

- Brick exterior walls clad with **stucco walls** (integrity of materials)
- Ornate terra cotta facade
- Electric trolley hooks
- Cast terra cotta ornamentation, including spandrels, pilasters, entry surrounds, and decorative cornice

- Roof forms and materials, including parapets, roofline balustrade, and fly tower at the west end of the auditorium roof
- Symmetrical composition massing
- Original wood-framed windows where they are extant
- Fenestration patterns
- Recessed foyer and multi-door entry



Photo from the Hermosa Beach Historical Society & Museum

Secretary of the Interior's Standards (Standards)

Under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), a project that follows the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitating, Restoring, and Reconstructing Historic Buildings or the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings (1995), Weeks and Grimmer, (Standards) shall be considered as mitigated to a level of less than a significant impact on the Historical Resource. The Standards were developed by the U.S. Department of the Interior as a means to evaluate and approve work on historic buildings for federal grants and rehabilitation tax credits. The Standards are codified at 36 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Section 67.7. CEQA recognizes the value of the Standards by using them to demonstrate that a project that generally follows the Standards shall be considered as mitigated to a level of less than a significant impact and may be approved without an EIR.⁸ See State CEQA Guidelines Section 15331 and 15064.5(b)(3). However, failure to strictly comply with the Standards may not result in significant impacts to a historical resource if the project does not result in material impairment that would detract from its eligibility.

Analysis of Project Impacts

As mentioned above, the mural display will be applied using a combination of painting directly on the

existing wall, and applying a painted fabric to the existing wall. The top portion of mural display will be applied as a painted fabric, while the lower portion will be painted directly to the building surface. The applicant reports that in 2010 and 2019 a spray coating was plastered on the west building elevation. Both the painted fabric and the painted mural display will be applied over the sprayed coating. The applicant has provided a painting from the Hermosa Beach Historic Society & Museum demonstrating that the original brick building finish lies underneath the existing stucco. As evidenced in the picture below from the Historical Society, to the extent the west side contributed at all to the character defining features, the contributing feature of the west building wall was brick not stucco. Although stucco has been vaguely referenced as defining-characteristic, the mural display will be applied to the west facing building wall and the west-building wall was elevated in the 1999 survey as completely void of ornamentation, fenestration and entryways. On the contrary, character-defining features of the east, north and south were described in elaborate detail in the 1999 survey. Thus, while the painted fabric may impact the existing stucco (which is already altered and covered by a spray coating), the brick underneath, will not be affected by the mural display. A condition of approval has been added to the resolution to ensure that the existing stucco shall be repaired to its original state prior to the application of the mural.

In addition, since the proposed freestanding scaffolding will not be affixed to the west-building wall, the scaffolding will impact neither the stucco nor the brick. The east (primary), north, and south building walls will not be affected by the Project as the mural will be displayed only on the west facing building wall.

Finally, the proposed lighting shall be placed on existing lamppost located in the public parking lot and not on the historic building.

The Project's compliance with the secretary of interior standards are described in greater detail below, as further evidence that the mural will not significantly impact the resource.

Secretary of the Interior's Standards Review

Standard 1: A property will be used as it was historically or be given a new use that requires minimal change to its distinctive materials, features, spaces, and spatial relationships.

The Project will not alter the use of the building because the project consists of a mural display on the exterior west facing building stucco wall and the use of the building as a mixed-use commercial building will be preserved. **Therefore, the Project would conform to Standard 1.**

Standard 2: The historic character of a property will be retained and preserved. The removal of distinctive materials or alteration of features, spaces, and spatial relationships that characterize a property will be avoided.

The applicant reports that there is an existing spray coating that was placed on the west-building wall sometime in 2010. The applicant retained a stucco contractor to evaluate the integrity of the western building wall, in anticipation of the potential application of a mural. The stucco contractor's analysis substantiated the applicant's belief that there is a spray coating covering the west-building wall of the Bijou Theatre Building (commonly known by one of its popular trade name as "Tex-Cote"). Although generally permits are not required for sprayed coating, permit records demonstrate that in 2019, the City's Public Works Department issued an encroachment permit for "rolling scaffolding for use in exterior painting". The applicant has also provided a photo from the Historic Society of the existing west building elevation to demonstrate that the existing stucco coating was applied over the building's original brick. The Project includes applying both the painted fabric and the paint directly onto the west-building wall. As noted earlier in the report, a skim coat (thin plaster) will be applied to the upper portion of the west-building wall, in order to smooth out the stucco for the application of the painted fabric. A condition of approval has been added to the resolution to ensure that if the mural were to be removed, the stucco would be repaired to the pre-existing condition prior to the application of the mural. The historical character below the spray coating will not be affected by the mural display. **Therefore, the Project would conform to Standard 2.**

Standard 3: Each property will be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or elements from other historic properties, will not be undertaken.

Elements from other historic properties will not be added to the existing building as part of the mural display. As noted above, although stucco has been tangentially referenced as a defining-characteristic, the mural display will be applied to the west facing building wall and the west-building wall was elevated in the 1999 survey as completely void of ornamentation, fenestration and entryways. While, character-defining features of the east, north and south were described in elaborate detail in the 1999 survey. Thus, the mural display will not disrupt the character-defining features such as the column and cornice detailing of the building as present on the east, north and south building walls, which are of the grand theater that has been restored. **Therefore, the Project would conform to Standard 3.**

Standard 4: Changes to a property that have acquired historic significance in their own right will be retained and preserved.

The mural display will be applied to the west facing building wall and will not affect the east (primary), north and south building elevations. In addition, as noted in the standards 2 and 3, it can be argued that the exiting stucco the west facing building wall is not a distinctive feature that characterize the property and only the spray coating will be affected (which actually covers up the original brick that exists under the stucco and is more illustrative of the building's history as shown in the picture from the historical society). The significant character defining features present on the east, north and south building walls will be preserved, and the character-defining features will not be disrupted. **Therefore,**

the Project would conform to Standard 4.

Standard 5: Distinctive materials, features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property will be preserved.

The Project would retain the distinctive materials, features, finishes, construction techniques and examples of craftsmanship that characterize the Bijou Building. The Project is limited to the west facing building wall and will only affect the sprayed coating on top of the stucco, which covers up the original brick. The character-defining features located on east, north and south facing building walls identified in the Architectural Resource Survey will remain completely unaffected by the project.

Therefore, the Project would conform to Standard 5.

Standard 6: Deteriorated historic features will be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature will match the old in design, color, texture, and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features will be substantiated by documentary and physical evidence.

The Project involves repairing existing cracks on the west facing building wall by filling the existing cracks with plaster, in order to apply the mural display on a smooth surface. As noted above, the west building wall has an existing spray coat. The repairs will be made directly to the sprayed coating. In addition, the project does not involve replacing any historic features, as the elements of interest are on the other facades. The Architectural Resource Survey report does not identify any defining characteristic specific to the west building façade. The historic architectural features of the building, notably its terra cotta ornamentation, are on the north, south and east facades and will not be impacted by the proposed mural display. **Therefore, the Project would conform to Standard 6.**

Standard 7: Chemical or physical treatments, if appropriate, will be undertaken using the gentlest means possible. Treatments that cause damage to historic materials will not be used.

The proposed skim coating (thin plaster) and the thin layer of adhesive will be applied to the existing sprayed coating and not on top of the original building finish. In addition, the applicant consulted with the City's Historical Society to ensure that the appropriate measures were taken to ensure that the proposed design was carefully thought out and well planned. **Therefore, the Project would conform to Standard 7.**

Standard 8: Archeological resources will be protected and preserved in place. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures will be undertaken.

Standard 8 is not applicable to the project, as the Project does not involve disturbance of archeological resources. The mural display will be applied to an existing building wall and mural preparation will not involve trenching or disturbance of soil.

Standard 9: New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction will not destroy historic materials, features, and spatial relationships that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and will be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale, and proportion, and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment.

The addition of the mural display on the west-facing building will not destroy the historic materials of the building. The east, north and south building walls will remain completely unaffected by the Project, which hold significant characteristic value to the historic property, as identified in the 1999 survey. In addition, conditions of approval have been added for the Certificate of Appropriateness to ensure that the scaffolding will not be attached to the west-building wall, and if the mural display were to be removed the stucco shall be restored to its pre-existing condition prior to the application of the mural display. Final, the mural will enhance the spatial relationships that characterize the property. The image will provide the illusion of a hidden layer of history being unveiled beneath the Bijou building wall and will depict an image of the Biltmore Hotel. The display is a tribute to the demolished hotel which once stood nearby where Noble Park is now located. **Therefore, the Project would conform to Standard 9.**

Standard 10: New additions and adjacent or related new construction will be undertaken in such a manner that, if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.

The Project would not result in the construction of any additions to the Bijou Building. Moreover, Conditions of approval have been added to the Certificate of Appropriateness to ensure that the addition of the proposed mural display to the existing stucco on the west facing building wall will be restored to its pre-existing condition before the application of the mural display. If removed in the future, the Bijou Building's integrity as a locally designated property would remain unimpaired. **Therefore, the Project would conform to Standard 10.**

Environmental Determination

The proposed project is Categorically Exempt pursuant to Sections 15301 and 15061(b)(3) under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) because the project involves minor exterior alterations to an existing facility. Pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15064.5(b)(3) generally, a project that follows the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitating, Restoring, and Reconstructing Historic Buildings or the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings (1995), (Weeks and Grimmer), shall be considered as mitigated to a level of less than a significant impact on the historical resource. The building is a designated historic resource and while a temporary alteration to the exterior, this action is found to be categorically exempt from CEQA as defined in Sections 15301 and 15061(b)(3), Historical Resource Restoration/Rehabilitation, because the mural project involves minor and temporary exterior alterations to an existing facility, in a manner

consistent with the Secretary of Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitation, Restoring and Reconstruction Historic Buildings. There is no evidence in the record that the temporary mural on the west façade will impact the character defining features of the resource.

General Plan Consistency:

PLAN Hermosa, the City's General Plan, was adopted by the City Council in August 2017. The Certificate of Appropriateness for the proposed mural display support the PLAN Hermosa goal and policy listed below.

Link to General Plan: <https://www.hermosabeach.gov/home/showdocument?id=9872>

Land Use and Design

Goal 5. Quality and authenticity in architecture and site design in all construction and renovation of buildings.

- **5.5 Preservation and adaptive reuse** *Provide incentives for the preservation or adaptive reuse of historic structures and iconic landmarks.*

Fiscal Impact:

The project consists of installing a freestanding outrigger scaffold near the west facing building wall in order to apply the mural display on the west wall. The applicant projects that the proposed freestanding scaffold would occupy eight parking spaces for the duration of the project (five weeks) starting in October 2020 through November 2020 which would result in a maximum estimated loss of parking meter revenue of \$6,720 for 24 hours/day or \$4,340 for peak hours of 10:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.

Attachments:

1. Draft Resolution
2. Applicant Submittal
3. Site Photos
4. ESA 2019 Report
5. 1999 Architectural Resource Survey

Respectfully Submitted by: Yuritzzy Randle, Assistant Planner

Concur: Ken Robertson, Community Development Director

Noted for Fiscal Impact: Charlotte Newkirk, Accounting Manager

Legal Review: Lauren Langer, Assistant City Attorney

Approved: Suja Lowenthal, City Manager