

# Los Angeles Department of City Planning

## RECOMMENDATION REPORT

**CULTURAL HERITAGE COMMISSION**

**CASE NO.: CHC-2013-1538-HCM  
ENV-2013-1539-CE**

**HEARING DATE:** August 1, 2013  
**TIME:** 10:00 AM  
**PLACE:** City Hall, Room 1010  
200 N. Spring Street  
Los Angeles, CA  
90012

Location: 6101 W. Wilshire Blvd.  
Council District: 5  
Community Plan Area: Wilshire  
Area Planning Commission: Central  
Neighborhood Council: Mid City West  
Legal Description: Lot 1 of TR 7555

**PROJECT:** Historic-Cultural Monument Application for the  
JOHNIE'S COFFEE SHOP RESTAURANT

**REQUEST:** Declare the property a Historic-Cultural Monument

**OWNER:** Au Zone Investments #2 L.P.  
4000 Union Pacific Avenue  
Commerce, CA 90023

**APPLICANT:** Los Angeles Conservancy/MODCOM  
523 W. 6<sup>th</sup> Street, #826  
Los Angeles, CA 90014

**RECOMMENDATION**      **That the Cultural Heritage Commission:**

1. **Declare the property** a Historic-Cultural Monument per Los Angeles Administrative Code Chapter 9, Division 22, Article 1, Section 22.171.7
2. **Adopt** the report findings.

MICHAEL J. LOGRANDE  
Director of Planning

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Ken Bernstein, AICP, Manager  
Office of Historic Resources

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Lambert M. Giessinger, Preservation Architect  
Office of Historic Resources

Prepared by:

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Edgar Garcia, Preservation Planner  
Office of Historic Resources

Attachments:      Historic-Cultural Monument Application

## **FINDINGS**

- 1) The building “embodies the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type specimen, inherently valuable for a study of a period style or method of construction” as an example of Googie-style architecture.
- 2) The building “reflects the broad cultural, economic, and social history of the nation, state, or community” for its association with the post-WWII development of the Miracle Mile area.
- 3) The building is a “notable work of a master builder, designer, or architect whose individual genius influenced his or her age”, designed by the famed architectural firm Armet & Davis.

## **SUMMARY**

Built in 1956 and located at the intersection of Wilshire Boulevard and Fairfax Ave, this one-story commercial building exhibits character-defining features of Googie-style architecture. The subject building is rectangular in plan and features a prominent butterfly wing form roof with wide cantilevered eaves covered in rolled asphalt. This roof is supported by angled pylons clad in natural stone, concrete walls, and by steel columns integrated into a glass-wall frame. A low screen wall hides mechanical equipment on the roof. At the north and south elevations, the roof form folds down and then up in a “knuckle” shape. Five raised stripes delineated by metal impressed with a modified egg-crate style texture provide definition to the roof form. Panels of scintillating incandescent lightbulbs fill the space between the five raised stripes. Neon signage spelling “Johnie’s Coffee Shop Restaurant” is located on this horizontal band and directly located over the off-center entrance. A secondary sign spelling “Coffee Shop Restaurant” is located on the downward sloping side elevation eaves. This side elevation contains a low natural stone wall integrated into the glass wall. The back elevation has a third sign spelling “Johnie’s.” The interior space contains terrazzo flooring, formica veneered counters, fixed seating booths, counter stools, and high acoustic tile ceiling. The rear parking lot has a freestanding neon sign consisting of a curved arrow. Planting beds are located around the exterior stone pillars and walls.

The proposed Johnie’s Coffee Shop and Restaurant historic monument was designed by architects Louis Armet (1914-1981) and Eldon Davis (1917-2011) of the firm Armet & Davis. The firm was extremely influential in the development of the Googie style and the California Coffee Shop. Beginning with their first coffee shop design in 1951, they designed several notable Googie coffee shops for chains such as Norm’s, Pann’s, Ship’s, as well as Denny’s and Big Boy.

The subject building was built in 1956 as Romeo’s Times Square. A year later, the restaurant was renamed Ram’s. In 1967, the restaurant was purchased by Frank and Marie Johnson who changed the name and altered the signage to its existing name. The subject building closed as a restaurant in 2000 and has served primarily as a film location.

Alterations to the subject property include the addition of a freestanding billboard structure, removal of sections of exterior glass and stone wall, and some interior remodeling.

## **CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT (“CEQA”) FINDINGS**

The Commission hereby recommends that Council find the proposed designation of the Johnie’s Coffee Shop Restaurant property as a Historic-Cultural Monument to be exempt from further analysis under the California Environmental Quality Act pursuant to Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations, Sections 15308 (Class 8) and 15331 (Class 31).

### **CRITERIA**

The criterion is the Cultural Heritage Ordinance which defines a historical or cultural monument as any site (including significant trees or other plant life located thereon) building or structure of particular historic or cultural significance to the City of Los Angeles, such as historic structures or sites in which the broad cultural, economic, or social history of the nation, State or community is reflected or exemplified, or which are identified with historic personages or with important events in the main currents of national, State or local history or which embody the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type specimen, inherently valuable for a study of a period style or method of construction, or a notable work of a master builder, designer or architect whose individual genius influenced his age.

### **DISCUSSION**

The Johnie’s Coffee Shop Restaurant property successfully meets three of the specified Historic-Cultural Monument criteria. Exhibiting distinctive features of Googie-style architecture, the building “embodies the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type specimen, inherently valuable for a study of a period style or method of construction.” The subject building also “reflects the broad cultural, economic, or social history of the nation, State or community” for its association with the post-WWII development of the Miracle Mile area. The building exemplifies “the notable work of a master builder, designer, or architect whose individual genius influenced his or her age”, as a stylistic archetype of the architectural firm, Armet & Davis, an influential firm in the development of the Googie-style. Under these three criteria, the property qualifies for designation as a Historic-Cultural Monument.

### **BACKGROUND**

At its meeting on June 6, 2012, the Cultural Heritage Commission voted to take the property under consideration as a Historic-Cultural Monument. On July 18, 2013, the Cultural Heritage Commission toured the subject property.

## **CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT (“CEQA”) REVIEW**

State of California CEQA Guidelines, Article 19, Section 15308, Class 8 “*consists of actions taken by regulatory agencies, as authorized by state or local ordinance, to assure the maintenance, restoration, enhancement, or protection of the environment where the regulatory process involves procedures for protection of the environment.*”

State of California CEQA Guidelines Article 19, Section 15331, Class 31 “*consists of projects limited to maintenance, repair, stabilization, rehabilitation, restoration, preservation, conservation or reconstruction of historical resources in a manner consistent with the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitating, Restoring, and Reconstructing Historic buildings.*”

## **Johnies Coffee Shop and Restaurant**

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The designation of Johnie's Coffee Shop Restaurant as a Historic-Cultural Monument in accordance with Chapter 9, Article 1, of The City of Los Angeles Administrative Code ("LAAC") will ensure that future construction activities involving the subject property are regulated in accordance with Section 22.171.14 of the LAAC. The purpose of the designation is to prevent significant impacts to a Historic-Cultural Monument through the application of the standards set forth in the LAAC. Without the regulation imposed by way of the pending designation, the historic significance and integrity of the subject property could be lost through incompatible alterations and new construction and the demolition of irreplaceable historic structures. The Secretary of the Interior's Standards of Rehabilitation are expressly incorporated into the LAAC and provide standards concerning the historically appropriate construction activities which will ensure the continued preservation of the subject property.

The use of Categorical Exemption Class 8 in connection with the proposed designation is consistent with the goals of maintaining, restoring, enhancing, and protecting the environment through the imposition of regulations designed to prevent the degradation of Historic-Cultural Monuments.

The use of Categorical Exemption Class 31 in connection with the proposed designation is consistent with the goals relating to the preservation, rehabilitation, restoration and reconstruction of Historic buildings in a manner consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for Preserving Rehabilitating, Restoring, and Reconstructing Historic Buildings.

# Los Angeles Department of City Planning

## RECOMMENDATION REPORT

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Los Angeles, CA 90014

**RECOMMENDATION**      **That the Cultural Heritage Commission:**

1. **Take the property under consideration** as a Historic-Cultural Monument per Los Angeles Administrative Code Chapter 9, Division 22, Article 1, Section 22.171.10 because the application and accompanying photo documentation suggest the submittal warrants further investigation.
2. **Adopt** the report findings.

MICHAEL J. LOGRANDE  
Director of Planning  
**[SIGNED ORIGINAL IN FILE]**

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Ken Bernstein, AICP, Manager  
Office of Historic Resources

Prepared by:  
**[SIGNED ORIGINAL IN FILE]**

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Edgar Garcia, Preservation Planner  
Office of Historic Resources

Attachments:            Historic-Cultural Monument Application

## **Johnies Coffee Shop and Restaurant**

**CHC-2013-1538-HCM**

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### **FINDINGS**

Based on the facts set forth in the summary and application, the Commission determines that the application is complete and that the property may be significant enough to warrant further investigation as a potential Historic-Cultural Monument.