

D. CULTURAL RESOURCES

Existing Conditions

This Section is based upon the Cultural and Historical Evaluation report prepared by Historical Resources Group (HRG), dated January 16, 2002 (**Appendix 17**). This report provides a brief discussion of the Project site within several applicable historic contexts and an evaluation of the site according to local, State, and Federal criteria for historic designation.

The ABC Entertainment Center is located in Century City, a section of the City of Los Angeles that was master-planned in 1964 to 1966 on 180 acres of land purchased from Fox Studios by the Aluminum Company of America (Alcoa). The land was formerly the back lot of Fox Studios, and was a major real estate holding and one of the studio's most valuable assets. The entire Fox holding was a rectangle oriented north-to-south and bounded (using contemporary street names) by Santa Monica Boulevard to the north, Pico Boulevard to the south, Century Park West to the west, and Century Park East to the east. The parcel was divided into four quadrants by major cross streets, with Olympic bisecting the site from east to west and Avenue of the Stars bisecting it from north to south. The quadrant south of Olympic and west of Avenue of the Stars was retained by Fox and it remains the historic Fox Studios lot. The remaining three quadrants were developed by Alcoa as Century City.

Century City was conceived as a "city within a city," a 180-acre site master planned by Charles Luckman Associates that would contain high rise office space, high rise and low rise condominium and apartment buildings, a shopping mall, an 800-room hotel, and cultural-entertainment facilities all connected by landscaped boulevards, bridges, and tunnels oriented to pedestrians. Among the first buildings developed were the "gateway" buildings flanking the north end of Avenue of the Stars (moderate-rise buildings clad in aluminum panels and glass), the Century Plaza Hotel just north of the center of the cross axis, and residential towers at the south end at Olympic Boulevard. The future ABC Entertainment Center was aligned with the hotel to the west and the future site of the twin office towers to the east. The residential buildings were concentrated in the southeast quadrant, south of Olympic Boulevard.

The portion of Century City planned in the 1960s to contain the "Cultural Center," among other uses, was a 12-acre site, originally designated Block 8 and eventually named the "Theme Plaza", occupying six percent of Century City's acreage. The Theme Plaza was to contain a large office building over fifty stories tall (a significant size in a city where height had been capped at 150 feet (approximately 13 stories) until 1957) towering over an open plaza that was flanked by two buildings, one holding a legitimate theater and the other holding multiple cinema auditoriums. The ABC Entertainment Center contains low-profile buildings on a small percentage of the overall land of Century City, less than three percent.

A review of historic references, conducted by Law/Crandall, indicates the site was occupied by oil wells as early as 1910 (**Appendix 7**). Aerial photographs from 1930 show the site as undeveloped land occupied by three oil wells. Documents reviewed at the California Division of Oil and Gas (CDOG) indicate that the wells were properly abandoned prior to 1940. An aerial photograph from 1961 shows the site as undeveloped but may have served as a boxed tree storage yard in the early 1960's. Aerial photographs from 1966 to 1969 show a majority of the site covered with an asphalt parking lot.

Excavation for the existing structures at 2020 and 2040 Avenue of the Stars commenced in 1969. Aerial photographs from 1971 show some of the lower parking levels constructed and some of the steel framework for the ABC Entertainment buildings (Law/Crandall, 1997, updated 2001).

The two principal buildings that flank the sunken plaza were designed as a visual gateway to the single office tower that was envisioned for the east half of the block. The concept of a single tower was later replaced by the triangular-plan twin towers realized in the early 1970s and designed by Minoru

Yamasaki, arguably the most distinguished architect to contribute buildings to Century City. The Century City Hotel to the west of the Entertainment Center is also the work of Yamasaki, completed in 1966.

The ABC Entertainment Center can be evaluated within several contexts: as a live theater and arts complex in Los Angeles and in connection with the Shubert organization; as an example of late Modern architecture; and as a component of the Century City Master Plan. The Center is discussed briefly within each of these contexts below.

Live theater in Los Angeles and the Shubert Organization

The American Broadcasting Company (ABC) and the Shubert Theater were the original tenants of the ABC Entertainment Center. In the Los Angeles Times at the time of the ABC Entertainment Center's opening, critic Dan Sullivan asked, "How big is the audience for Broadway-style, Shubert-style theater in Los Angeles?" (Los Angeles Times, 8/17/70, Cal., p. 1)

The establishment of the Shubert Theater in the ABC Entertainment Center was based on the assumption that there were existing but untapped audiences for live theater on the west side "who wouldn't come all the way downtown to the Music Center but might to Century City," as critic Dan Sullivan stated in the Los Angeles Times (8/17/70, Calendar, p. 24). The Music Center was a project of the County of Los Angeles and was built between 1964 and 1969, at roughly the same time as the planning of the ABC Entertainment Center. The success of the Shubert Theater was limited by the available audiences and never did achieve the success of comparable establishments such as the Music Center in downtown Los Angeles.

The Shubert organization had been established in the live theater world for over 70 years by the time they came to Los Angeles. The person behind the expansion to Los Angeles was Lawrence Shubert. Lawrence, who was the heir to his uncles Lee Shubert and Jacob J. Shubert, as well as to Sam Shubert who had been the father of the organization. These three men founded the company around 1900. By 1970 they were known mainly as the owners of much of the theater real estate on Broadway. As of 2001, they owned and operated 23 theaters nationwide. The Los Angeles Times in 1970 stated that the Shuberts ". . . remain the dominant landlord on Broadway and the road. Once, the Shuberts were big producers as well as landlords. They presented more than 500 shows in their time. . ." implying that this era (the years of their most influential work) had ended long before 1970. The establishment of the theater in Los Angeles by the Shubert Organization in 1971 is not a local example of an important nationwide phenomenon as are some of those Shubert properties established in earlier decades. This era in the overall history of the Shubert Organization is too recent to properly evaluate within a historic context.

The ABC Entertainment Center is not strongly associated with the activity of the Shubert organization during a significant period of its history and is not prominent enough in theater in Los Angeles, or old enough to be considered historic. Therefore, it would not be considered eligible for listing in any National, State, or Local historic listing based on its associative value or for its "contribution to the broad patterns of our history," as National Register Criterion A requires (National Register Bulletin 15, page 12).

Architecture of the ABC Entertainment Center

Most of the architecture in Century City was produced during the initial decade of development from 1964 to 1975. Several more high rise buildings were completed in the 1980s. The architects who contributed major buildings to Century City were the most respected corporate commercial architects of the period, including Daniel Mann Johnson and Mendenhall (DMJM; Anthony Lumsden and Cesar Pelli); William Pereira Associates; Minoru Yamasaki; Albert C. Martin and Associates; Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill; and Welton Becket Associates. Two of the more distinguished, or at

least unique, buildings in Century City are Minoru Yamasaki's Century Plaza Hotel (one of the earliest buildings, 1966) and Century Plaza Towers (completed in 1975). The ABC Entertainment Center is situated between these buildings along the east side of Avenue of the Stars, the main spine of Century City.

The ABC Entertainment Center was designed by architect Henry George Greene and completed in 1971. Greene maintained offices in New York and Los Angeles. The site's landscape architects' work is better-documented; the landscape design for the complex was by Sasaki, Dawson, and DeMay who also redesigned Boston's Copley Square in 1966-1969. Much of the original landscaping around the perimeter of the complex, such as the plantings on the west terraces, is intact.

In their book *Los Angeles: An Architectural Guide* (Gibbs Smith, 1994), architectural historians David Gebhard and Robert Winter noted ten individual buildings at Century City, among which was the ABC Center. Their entire assessment of ABC reads, "Big and dull -- mildly Brutal below, crisper above" (133). "Brutal" referred to "New Brutalism," the style of later Modern architecture that was mainly practiced in Europe and usually in institutional settings, such as hospitals, universities, and state-sponsored housing. New Brutalism is characterized by block-like and sometimes monumental massing, deep shadows from large inset window openings, stark exterior materials such as raw concrete or brick, and a relationship between buildings and largely unplanted plazas and terraces. The 1950s and 1960s were its most significant period. The ABC Entertainment Center is a late example of the style, removed from the building types of its roots.

The original plans for the "Theme Plaza" (site of the ABC Entertainment Center) and the Music Center in downtown Los Angeles were both developed by Welton Becket Associates, among the few most significant firms working in the Corporate Modern and other late Modern styles in Los Angeles. Welton Becket Associates appears to have created the scheme for the "Theme Plaza"; however, the design itself was developed by others with only the rudiments of the Welton Becket concept -- two low, block-like buildings flanking a plaza -- retained in the later design stages. By contrast, the Music Center was fully developed by Welton Becket Associates.

There have been fairly obtrusive alterations made to the complex over the years in order to adapt it to current accessibility standards and provide improved circulation. The major exterior space, the sunken plaza, has been the most obvious site of exterior alterations.

The ABC Entertainment Complex is not associated with a significant architect and is not an important or strongly characteristic example of its architectural style. Therefore, it would not be considered eligible for any National, State, or Local historic designation based on National Register Criterion C, which requires that a property must "embody distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction; represent the work of a master; (or) possess high artistic value" (National Register Bulletin 15, page 17).

ABC Entertainment Center as a component of the Century City Master Plan

Century City was one of several planned communities that were developed on large, previously uninhabited or underdeveloped tracts of land in the Los Angeles area during the 1960s. During this period, movie studios were selling their back lots for development, including Universal and Fox. Century City, formerly the Fox Studios back lot, was conceived as an urbanized center for West Los Angeles, while other master planned areas in the region were focused on creating primarily residential environments, low in density and on much larger sites than Century City.

Most of the buildings from Century City's first decade of development are intact. However, there has been a large amount of infill in the area of additional office towers that for the most part dwarf and/or outnumber the original buildings. The original plan is discernable and does represent 1960s master planning principles, with the location of large signature buildings interspersed among wide

boulevards, fountains, multi-level plazas, and underground concourses. However, the plan has served mainly as a framework for future development, as intended, and the area is no longer representative of the period 1966-1975, from the year the master plan was at its most developed and the first buildings were constructed to the end of the first phases of construction.

Although the Century City Master Plan was designed by significant architects and planners, many of the component buildings themselves have been modified over the years and the presence of so many new structures keeps the area from being a discernable historic district, where buildings and features from the period of significance would have to predominate. Therefore, the area would be unlikely to qualify under National Register criteria for its significance in planning history and would not be considered eligible for any National, State, or Local historic designation and the ABC Entertainment Center would not be considered a contributing building within any such district.

Threshold of Significance

Based upon criteria established in the City of Los Angeles Draft CEQA Thresholds Guide (1998), the proposed Project would have a significant impact on cultural resources if the Project resulted in:

- The permanent loss of, or loss of access to, a paleontological resource, where the paleontological resource is of regional or statewide significance; or
- Disturbance, damage, or degradation of an archaeological resource associated with an event or person of recognized importance in California, American prehistory, of recognized scientific importance, or is at least 100-years-old and possesses substantial stratigraphic integrity; or
- Demolition of a significant resource; or
- Relocation that does not maintain the integrity and significance of a significant resource; or
- Conversion, rehabilitation, or alteration of a significant resource which does not conform to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings; or
- Construction that reduces the integrity or significance of important resources on the site or in the vicinity.

Project Impacts

The ABC Entertainment Center does not meet the criteria for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, the California Register of Historical Resources, or the list of City of Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monuments. The property is an original part of the Century City Master Plan, but the center itself is different from the original intent of the master plan. The buildings and the complex lack architectural distinction, have not played a significant role in local history, and are not a part of an established historic context. The Theme Plaza was not developed as a true "cultural center" in the language of the 1966 iteration of the master plan, and is not a cultural center in the sense that the Music Center in downtown Los Angeles clearly is. It was rather one of two entertainment and dining venues that were developed in Century City, one at the Theme Plaza and the other within the shopping center in the northwest of Century City. Because it has no historic, architectural, or cultural significance, the ABC Entertainment Center is not a historic property.

The applicant does not propose to remove the existing six-level subterranean parking structure. Excavation for the Project would consist of marginal subsurface disturbance associated with strengthening the existing foundation to support the structure within a smaller footprint as compared to existing conditions. Columns and footings would be expanded appropriately. As designed, the Project would modify approximately 74 columns. The Project would not excavate below the fill level of the 1969 excavation. Therefore, the proposed Project would not encounter any archaeological or paleontological resources if any did exist, which have not been previously disturbed.

Mitigation Measures

Based on stated thresholds of significance, no significant impacts to historic, archeological or paleontological resources would occur. Therefore, no mitigation measures are required or recommended.

Significant Project Impacts After Mitigation

The proposed project would not result in significant unavoidable impacts on cultural resources.

Cumulative Impacts

The Environmental Setting Section (Section IV) provides a list of related projects that are planned or are under construction in the Project area. Related projects at Harvard Westlake Middle School, and Palazzo Westwood would result in significant adverse historical impacts after mitigation. The proposed Project does not result in impacts to cultural resources, and therefore would not contribute to any cumulative effects.