

THE TALMADGE
3278 West Wilshire Boulevard; 656 – 660 South Berendo Street
CHC-2026-2057-HCM
ENV-2026-2058-CE

FINDINGS

- The Talmadge “exemplifies significant contributions to the broad cultural, economic or social history of the nation, state, city or community” for its role in Wilshire Boulevard’s transition from an upscale, suburban residential district to a more automobile-oriented destination centered on commercial-retail and luxury apartment houses.
- The Talmadge “embodies the distinctive characteristics of a style, type, period, or method of construction” as an excellent and highly intact example of the Beaux Arts architectural style and an excellent example of a 1920s apartment tower.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The Talmadge meets two of the Historic-Cultural Monument criteria for designation under the Cultural Heritage Ordinance. It “exemplifies significant contributions to the broad cultural, economic or social history of the nation, state, city or community” for its role in Wilshire Boulevard’s transition from an upscale, suburban residential district to a more automobile-oriented destination centered on commercial-retail and luxury apartment houses. It also “embodies the distinctive characteristics of a style, type, period, or method of construction” as an excellent and highly intact example of the Beaux Arts architectural style and an excellent example of a 1920s apartment tower.

At the Cultural Heritage Commission hearing on May 21, 2026, the Commission requested that the applicant provide additional information about the subject property related to its role in the early 20th century development of Wilshire Boulevard. The applicant submitted the attached supplemental material on June 14, 2026, which supports the claim that the subject property meets Criterion 1 for its association with the establishment of Wilshire Boulevard as an upscale commercial district and cultural center for Hollywood trendsetters throughout the early 20th century.

As the city continued expanding to the west, Wilshire Boulevard experienced significant growth. During the 1920s population boom, commercial real estate values soared and Wilshire Boulevard was referred to as, “Fifth Avenue of the West.” An array of newly built commercial buildings and their associated neon signs began to visually define the area. In 1921, the Ambassador Hotel, designed by renowned local architect Myron Hunt, was opened between Wilshire Boulevard and 8th Street and was immediately hailed as one of the west’s grandest resorts. Radio and motion picture stars were regulars at the Ambassador, as were industrialists, foreign dignitaries, and a handful of American presidents. Tourists and locals alike flocked to experience the high-end area’s numerous multi-story apartment buildings and emerging shopping district that emulated the glamour of New York’s Fifth Avenue high rises—specifically, the Asbury (1925), the Langham (1928), The Talmadge (1923), and the Windsor (1927). A 1927 beautification plan by the Wilshire

District Chamber of Commerce sought to distinguish Wilshire Boulevard as “one of the most unique commercial thoroughfares in the world.” The landscape design consisted of a combination of trees, ornamental gratings and guards, and decorative sidewalk tiles.

An aerial photo of The Talmadge from 1924 shows it to have been surrounded by mansions along with empty lots on nearby parcels along Wilshire Boulevard. The subject property, following the opening of the nearby Ambassador Hotel and Coconut Grove nightclub in 1921 (demolished in 2005), signaled a new phase of the neighborhood's development. Wilshire Boulevard's commercial identity became one of affluence, newness, and convenience, in contrast to the older and more established downtown. By the mid-1920s, the automobile became the primary mode of transportation in Los Angeles, and throughout the 1920s, large parking lots appeared for use by local residents and visitors alike, and service stations, billboards, drive-up markets, and drive-up coffee shops popped up on nearly every major intersection. The 1923 construction of the subject property with a below-grade parking structure and its direct link to the Hollywood film industry stands as a testament to Wilshire Boulevard's transition from a single-family residential street to an upscale, automobile-centric commercial district.

Beaux Arts was the dominant type of high style architecture during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The style was inspired by the architectural principles taught at the École des Beaux Arts from where it derives its name. Beaux Arts evolved into a distinct architectural style distinguishable from other popular historicist styles beginning in the 1890s, and became an almost universal form for commercial and institutional buildings by the early 20th century. The rise of Beaux Arts architecture in Los Angeles coincided with the development of Downtown Los Angeles, resulting in a significant concentration of this style in the Historic Core; significant examples of the style continued to be constructed in other parts of the city through the 1920s. As can be seen at the subject property, the style is characterized by its use of Greek, Roman, Renaissance, and Baroque forms and tripartite design mimicking the form of a Renaissance palazzo. Like the subject property, Beaux Arts-style buildings were constructed out of high-quality materials, primarily limestone or marble with cast stone or glazed terra cotta ornament. As exemplified by the subject property, characteristic features of the style include its monumental entrance angled towards the street corner, a classical tripartite division on the exterior facade, the use of Corinthian and Ionic order exterior pilasters, decorative bas-relief panels, medallions, and classical window surrounds on upper stories.

Additionally, the subject property represents an excellent example of a 1920s apartment tower in the Wilshire area. Defined as an apartment building that is six or more stories in height, an apartment tower is a type of multi-family building that gained popularity in the early 20th century and emphasized maximizing lot coverage and orientation towards the street. Similar to other forms of multi-family dwellings in Los Angeles such as bungalow courts and apartment houses (an apartment building between two and six stories in height), apartment towers grew in popularity as tourism became increasingly important to the local economy and temporary residents rented out individual units for extended stays. Dense apartment towers also saw increases in popularity to accommodate the growing workforce in Los Angeles. The peak of development of multi-family housing came in the mid-to-late 1920s with the construction of larger and taller apartment towers and blocks. These buildings were often taller than surrounding residential and commercial properties. Apartment towers were concentrated in areas such as Hollywood and Wilshire and were desirable for their high, hotel-like, quality. With its 10-story height, vertical massing, street orientation with architectural detailing on the street-facing elevations, maximization of lot

coverage, and single common building entrance with a lobby, The Talmadge exhibits the essential characteristics of the property type.

The applicant also claims that the subject property “meets Criterion 2 because it was built for, and named after Norma Talmadge, one of the most famous film stars of the silent era.” Though the application correctly notes that “[Talmadge] made important contributions to the history of Hollywood,” staff is unable to make the finding based on this argument.

SurveyLA’s Guidelines for Evaluating Resources Associated with Significant Persons in Los Angeles includes several Eligibility Standards which serve as a guide for establishing significance under Criterion 2. The subject property must be “directly associated with the productive life of a significant person,” and “for residential property types, the individual must have resided in the property during the period in which he/she achieved significance.” While the subject property is associated with Talmadge, it is not known to what extent the building was associated with her life. The application claims that Talmadge “resided at the building while at the peak of her popularity,” but there is no evidence provided that the subject property ever served as her primary working residence. Nor is there information provided about how long she or Schenck maintained an apartment there. The application simultaneously notes that Talmadge did not appear at the apartment’s grand opening, further stating that “it was not her physical presence at the building that gave the property its association with the glamour of Hollywood high society, but rather the curated larger-than-life image that she and Schenck created.”

The subject property has experienced few alterations over the years and retains a high level of integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association to convey its significance.

CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT (“CEQA”) FINDINGS

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.”

The designation of The Talmadge as an 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 an 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 an irreplaceable historic site/open space. The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for

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 City of Los Angeles has determined based on the whole of the administrative record, that substantial evidence supports that the Project is exempt from CEQA pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section Article 19, Section 15308, Class 8 and Class 31. The project was found to be exempt based on the following:

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 and sites in a manner consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties.

Furthermore, none of the exceptions to the Categorical Exemption Under CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2 apply to the proposed Project. The proposed Project will not result in significant cumulative impacts from successive projects of the same type in the same place. The Project does not involve unusual circumstances as it is in a similar location, topography, and streetscape as other Historic-Cultural Monuments in the Wilshire Community Plan Area. The Project will not damage scenic resources in a state scenic highway. The Project site is not on a list compiled pursuant to Government Code Section 65962.5 related to hazardous waste sites. The Project will also not cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of an historical resource.

Categorical Exemption ENV-2026-2058-CE was prepared on June 17, 2026.