



04 October 2017

Richard Barron, *President*
Cultural Heritage Commission
Attention: Melissa Jones
Office of Historic Resources
City Hall, 200 N. Sprint Street, Room 559
Los Angeles, CA 90012
Sent via email: melissa.jones@lacity.org

Re: Beneficial Plaza and Liberty Park, 3700 Wilshire Boulevard

Dear President Barron and Members of the Commission:

I write to you on behalf of The Cultural Landscape Foundation (TCLF) to express our support for the nomination of Beneficial Plaza and Liberty Park as a Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument. A non-profit established in 1998, TCLF educates and engages the public to make our shared landscape heritage more visible, identify its value, and empower its stewards.

Located at 3700 Wilshire Boulevard, Beneficial Plaza and Liberty Park is significant as a prominent cultural landscape on corporate property in Los Angeles' Wilshire Center business district that exemplifies both the city's postwar commercial development and the value of community open space during that period of the city's growth.

Completed in 1967 as the new headquarters for Beneficial Standard Life Insurance Company, Beneficial Plaza and Liberty Park was collaboratively designed by master architects Gordon Bunshaft and Edward Charles Bassett of the architecture firm Skidmore, Owings & Merrill and noted landscape architect Peter Walker, FASLA, of Sasaki, Walker & Associates. The 11-story office tower of Late Modern design is fronted by a 2.5-acre designed landscape (Liberty Park) spanning the entire frontage of Wilshire that incorporates a hardscaped plaza, a lush lawn, and an off-centered grove of Canary Island pines. Walker's design features a horseshoe-shaped border that frames the central lawn and opens to embrace Wilshire Boulevard.

While Los Angeles was experiencing the height of a postwar development boom during the 1960s, with numerous new construction projects transforming the city's commercial corridors, the decisions that shaped the development of the property at 3700 Wilshire were unusual. As a corporate entity occupying privately owned property, the company and its ownership prioritized the creation of open space and the promotion of aesthetic values as part of the development project.

The concept of dedicating private corporate property as community open space, particularly on a major commercial corridor such as Wilshire, was uncommon at the time and remains so

today. In size and scope, the 315-foot setback of Liberty Park was described by the *Los Angeles Times* at the time of its construction as the deepest setback of any major office building in the nation.

Of particular note is the public discourse surrounding Liberty Park at the time of its completion, which reveals much about the value of community open space. While the developer's contribution of community open space was honored by a proclamation from the City of Los Angeles and by the highest award of the U.S. Treasury Department, Savings Bond Division, the City of Los Angeles used zoning practices in an effort to protect Liberty Park as an open space asset to the community for future generations. By changing the zoning of the parcel containing Liberty Park from commercial (C4-4) to parking (P-4) via City Planning Case No. 21684, the Los Angeles City Planning Commission attempted to protect the designed landscape and limit its vulnerability to commercial development—a threat often faced by cultural landscapes across the nation.

Beneficial Plaza and Liberty Park turned fifty years old this year, and both the building architecture and the landscape architecture retain a high degree of design integrity. The skillful and restrained design of this Modernist corporate undertaking by an internationally prominent design team results in a unified whole. In sum, Beneficial Plaza and Liberty Park is a significant cultural landscape for the City of Los Angeles that merits designation as a Historic-Cultural Monument.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, consisting of a stylized 'C' followed by a horizontal line that tapers to the right.

Charles A. Birnbaum, FASLA, FAAR
President & CEO
The Cultural Landscape Foundation

cc: Save Liberty Park