DATE: September 13, 2018

TO: The Honorable Landmarks Commission

FROM: Planning Staff

SUBJECT: 200 Santa Monica Pier, 18ENT-0065

Public Hearing to consider Landmark Designation Application 18ENT-0181 to determine whether Carousel Park, described as the entrance to the Santa Monica Pier from Ocean Front Walk, and generally bounded by Ocean Front Walk, the Looff Hippodrome, the Pier Bridge and the southern edge of the Pier Parking Lot, in whole or in part, should be designated as a City Landmark and, if so designated, whether an associated Landmark Parcel or boundary should be defined and described in order to preserve, maintain, protect, or safeguard the Landmark.

PROPERTY OWNER: City of Santa Monica

APPLICANT: Chattel, Inc, Santa Monica Conservancy, and The Cultural Landscape Foundation

INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

The applicant has filed a Landmark Designation application for Carousel Park located at the southeast edge of the Santa Monica Pier between the Looff Hippodrome building and Ocean Front Walk.

A Landmark Assessment report was prepared for the subject building by the City’s historic preservation consultant, Ostashay and Associates Consulting (OAC), provided as Attachment C. Based on the findings as provided in the report, the consultant finds that the property is eligible for Landmark designation under the City of Santa Monica Landmark Criterion 9.56.100(A)(1), 9.56.100(A)(2), 9.56.100(A)(4), 9.56.100(A)(5), and 9.56.100(A)(6) as further described in this report. Based on the research and evaluation of Carousel Park, staff agrees with the consultant’s findings that the property satisfies Landmark designation criterion 1 and 2, however does not agree with the findings presented under criterion 4, 5, and 6.
Historic Resources Inventory Status

The subject property has not been previously identified, documented, or evaluated for historical significance under any of the City’s previous historic resources survey efforts. In addition, it is not included in the California Historical Resources Information System (CHRIS) list and has not been formally designated in the National Register or California Register.

PUBLIC NOTIFICATION

Notice of this hearing was provided as required by Section 9.56.170(c) of the Landmarks Ordinance, with notice sent to all owners and occupants within a 300-foot radius and a newspaper notice published in the Santa Monica Daily Press at least 10 consecutive calendar days prior to the hearing. A copy of the notice is included as Attachment A.

ANALYSIS

Property Information and Architectural Description

Carousel Park is situated at the entrance to the Santa Monica Pier from Ocean Front Walk and is generally bounded by Ocean Front Walk to the east, the Looff Hippodrome to the west, the Pier Bridge to the north, and the southern edge of the Pier Parking lot.

Carousel Park was designed as a pedestrian entry to the raised Santa Monica Pier deck from Ocean Front Walk and the beach area to the south. Developed in the mid-1980s and completed in 1986, Carousel Park was designed with a stepped octagonal-shaped central plaza with stylized poured-in-place concrete light standards, concrete half-walls with incised horizontal speed lines that terminate with anchoring concrete seahorses, and
a series of angled walks, steps, ramps, and an arched shape arcade. At the southern edge of the site (southeast) is a 5,000 square foot children’s park that includes a sandy play area and landscaped play sculptures set in a nautical theme. Within the sand box is a concrete sailing ship and a monolithic cast stone dragon with a large head, wide-open jaws, amber-lit eyes, and scales of river-washed granite boulders.

Other features of the park include informal wood-plank amphitheater seating with integrated wood-plank stairs set between two observation pavilions that sit above the elevated pier deck. The metal-framed, opened-air octagonal-shaped pavilions consist of a design inspired by the nearby Looff’s Hippodrome carousel building and provide seating for views of the pier, Carousel Park, and beach area. Flat metal decorative pelicans are affixed on top of the two pavilion structures. The elevated pier deck in this area is enclosed underneath by a series of vertical wood plank boards along its eastern and southern edges. The park and its associated features remain in good condition and retains its historic integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, setting, feeling, and association.

Carousel Park derives its name from the Looff Hippodrome situated at the entrance to the Santa Monica Pier. The park was the result of a competitive community-based planning process involving the design of a new entranceway and an overall master plan for the pier. In 1983, five teams of architects and landscape architects were selected by the newly established Santa Monica Pier Restoration Corporation to provide a conceptual design scheme based on the 1982 Santa Monica Pier Guidelines. The joint venture team of Campbell and Campbell landscape architects, and Moore Ruble Yudell architects were selected to design the new carousel park. From its completion, the project received many accolades in addition to negative scrutiny. The project was given several awards, including an official commendation from the mayor of the City of Santa Monica in 1987, and marked a renewed interest in the Santa Monica Pier and a new era in its history.

Charles Moore and Postmodernism
Moore Ruble Yudell is recognized as an architectural firm with an international presence. Established in 1977, the founding partners, which included Charles Moore, John Ruble, and Buzz Yudell, shared a passion for an original architecture that grew out of an intense dialogue with people and places, that celebrated human activity, and enhanced and nurtured community. Charles Willard Moore, FAIA (1925-1993) is widely recognized as one of the chief innovators of Postmodern architecture. Moore’s prolific architectural and academic career has been well documented by scholars and historians, including several books of his own on the theory and design of modernist and postmodernist architecture. In 1989 he was awarded the Topaz Medallion for Excellence in Architectural Education and received the American Institute of Architects Gold Medal for a lifetime of professional achievement in 1991. A prolific architect, Moore completed roughly 180 commissions, and served as principal architect in firms in California, Connecticut, and Texas, including Moore Ruble Yudell in Santa Monica.

Postmodernism developed in the 1970s partly in response to the social and political upheavals of the 1960s, and similar to Late Modernism was a conscious reaction against
the rigid architectural language of earlier Modern styles. While Late Modern architects attempted to adapt the tenets of Modernism to contemporary culture, Postmodern architects rejected them altogether and instead resurrected traditional building forms, from the Classical to the vernacular, in an effort to reintroduce decorative detail and human scale, and to convey symbolic meaning through commonly recognizable features.

Traditional details, including pediments, arches, keystones, and columns, were used in unconventional and abstracted ways, and were frequently applied as superficial surface ornament unrelated to the underlying structural system of a property. Postmodern buildings frequently feature an exaggerated monumentality and a broad palette of colors, from saturated to pastel. Some of the early leading architects of the movement include Robert Venturi, Michael Graves, and Charles Moore, whose Piazza d’Italia in New Orleans (1979) has become an icon of the style consisting of a pastiche of Roman colonnades, neon lighting, bright colors, and a tiered fountain in the shape of the Italian peninsula.

Postmodernism was applied to a variety of property types, including institutional consisting of educational, civic, public parks, and visual and performing arts venues. Postmodern institution improvements often use abstracted ornamentation and exaggerated monumentality to evoke historical associations. Carousel Park was designed with Postmodern principles set throughout its program however is a modest example of Charles Moore’s work in terms of its scale and architectural detail. Although not greatly detailed, elements of the Postmodern idiom include its neo-eclectic exaggerated classical influences, context sensitive design, sculptural forms, and symbolism.

Cultural Landscapes
Carousel Park is being considered for Landmark designation as a cultural landscape. Cultural landscapes are geographic areas that have been shaped by human activity. They can result from a conscious design or plan. Since the late 1980s, cultural landscapes have been accepted as historic resources along with buildings, structures, objects, sites, and archaeological resources. Important cultural landscapes may be composed of a number of character-defining features which individually or collectively contribute to the landscape’s physical appearance as they have evolved over time and within the property’s period of significance. These landscapes may include a grouping of features such as topography, vegetation, water elements, circulation elements (roads, paths, steps, walls, etc.), buildings and furnishings (fences, benches, lights, gates, sculptural objects).

Historic Context: Santa Monica Pier
Santa Monica became the destination of beach goers in the late 1800s and early 1900s, with the construction of several bathhouses. Other seaside entertainments included several pleasure piers in Santa Monica and nearby Venice, including the present Santa Monica Municipal Pier. The piers housed carnival attractions, restaurants, dance halls, and wooden roller coaster rides. In addition to entertainment, several hotels were built to accommodate the many tourists visiting the Santa Monica beachfront.
Santa Monica continued to be a major tourist destination into the 1920s and 1930s. The Santa Monica Pier became the terminus of the transcontinental highway. Offshore gambling boats attracted patrons during Prohibition and through the 1930s. During the Depression, tourists and locals frequented the local beaches, engaging in free recreational activities such as surfing and beach volleyball. Muscle Beach was located just south of the Santa Monica Pier, and in the mid-1930s became a famous tourist attraction.

Additional hotels, such as the Shangri-La, the Georgian, and the Breakers Beach Club were constructed to accommodate and attract the growing number of tourists to Santa Monica and the oceanfront. There were also a number of motels that were erected along Ocean Avenue and Santa Monica Boulevard in the vicinity of the famous piers. Unlike Santa Monica's resort hotels, which were more formal and less auto-oriented, the City's motels were more modest, catered to motorists, and were oriented towards the street.

The Santa Monica Municipal Pier opened to the public on September 9, 1909. The Pier attracted large crowds of visitors and impressed Charles Looff, a pioneer amusement entrepreneur who had built Coney Island's first carousel in Brooklyn, New York. In 1916, Looff began construction of the Looff Pleasure Pier alongside the Municipal Pier to the south. Looff's Pier featured the historic Hippodrome building, a California-Byzantine-Moorish-style fantasy that has accommodated a succession of vintage merry-go-rounds and Wurlitzer organs. Additional attractions were added including the Blue Streak roller coaster and the La Monica Ballroom, and soon the Looff Pier was enlarged to its current size of 270 feet by 1080 feet.

During the 1930s and 1940s, the city continued to grow. In 1939, a new overpass was completed that connected Palisades Park bluff at Colorado Avenue and Ocean Avenue with the Santa Monica Pier. The amusement piers and associated commercial businesses along the beachfront promenade continued to entertain visitors as well as the military service personnel who were stationed nearby.

The Pier's popularity continued throughout the 1930's however was affected by severe weather storms, heavy use of the Pier, and changes in entertainment preferences. The Blue Streak roller coaster was removed in 1930 and the La Monica Ballroom was closed in the 1960s. While the Municipal Pier continued to be owned and operated by the City of Santa Monica, the Looff Pleasure Pier had a succession of owners. In 1953 the City obtained the Loof Pier and leased it to a private operator. By the early 1970s, both Piers were suffering financially and the City developed a plan to demolish the Piers.

Outraged by the potential removal of the Piers, residents established the "Save Our Pier Forever" initiative, with the objective to establish the Pier as a Los Angeles County Historical Landmark. In 1976, the Santa Monica Pier was designated a City of Santa Monica Landmark. In 1981, the City appointed the Pier Task Force (later named the Pier Restoration Corporation or PRC) to provide management and oversight on the Pier’s restoration which included restoring the Hippodrome building back to its original
conditions. Significant storms halted work in 1983 destroying 100,000 square feet of the ocean end of the Pier. In 1988, the City adopted the Santa Monica Pier Development Program. As part of the Development Program, a new concrete substructure was constructed, adding structural stability to the Pier. A variety of retail, food and entertainment outlets, as well as a police substation, a small public park, and a world class amusement park were constructed on the Pier to enhance the overall experience.

Landmarks Ordinance/Findings

The Landmarks Ordinance requires the Commission to review the building’s eligibility as a landmark based on the six criteria discussed below. In order to be designated as a City Landmark, the Commission is required to find that the property meets one or more of these criteria.

Based on the findings as provided in the Landmark Assessment Report, the consultant finds that the property appears eligible as a landmark under the City of Santa Monica Landmark criterion 9.56.100(A)(1), 9.56.100(A)(2), 9.56.100(A)(4), 9.56.100(A)(5), and 9.56.100(A)(6). Based on the research and evaluation of Carousel Park, staff agrees with the consultant’ findings that the property satisfies Landmark designation criterion 1 and 2, however do not agree with the findings presented under criterion 4, 5, and 6.

Under criterion 4, the consultant’s report indicates that Carousel Park as a unique modern cultural landscape public park, is a valuable example both for the study of the Postmodern style in Santa Monica and for its association with an interactive and competitive community-based planning process. However, staff believes that although the park is designed with stylistic elements characteristic of the Postmodern idiom and is considered a rare example of Postmodern design as applied to a cultural landscape, Carousel Park’s Postmodern features are modestly designed and do not embody distinguishing architectural characteristics valuable to a study of the Postmodern style.

Under criterion 5, the consultant’s report indicates that Carousel Park is a unique, notable representative example of the work by Moore Rubel Yudell (MRY), particularly by the founding member of MRY, Charles W. Moore, heralded as one of the chief innovators of Postmodernism architecture. However staff believes that although Moore’s influence of Postmodern philosophy and design is evident in the park’s conception through public engagement, use of materials and symbolism, and overall exaggerated design statements, Carousel Park is a modest example exhibiting Postmodern design and is not one of the best examples of Moore’s work applied to a cultural landscape that includes the notable Piazza d’Italia in New Orleans. The subject park does not appear as a significant or representative example of work of the notable architect, and therefore Carousel Park does not appear to satisfy this criterion.

Under criterion 6, the consultant’s report indicates that Carousel Park’s location, property type and features, and recognizable Postmodern design elements make Carousel Park a highly active familiar visual feature of the City. However, staff believes that the park appears subservient in the foreground of the elevated Pier and Loof Hippodrome building. Further, it appears to lack prominence and a cohesive design in its overall layout in its
relationship to the elevated pier deck. Although uniquely situated at the base of the Pier, the park appears more of an extension of the pier deck surrounding the Loof Hippodrome rather than a singular physical characteristic of the Pier.

The following draft findings are provided to support this conclusion:

(1) *It exemplifies, symbolizes, or manifests elements of the cultural, social, economic, political or architectural history of the City.*

Carousel Park’s setting, unique landscape and hardscape features, and its competitive community-based planning process manifests elements of Santa Monica’s recreational history as associated with the City’s beachfront culture and the Santa Monica Pier. The park features a children’s playground with interactive sailing ship and sea dragon, two high-profile observation pavilions, and monumental, exaggerated seahorses all evoke associations with Santa Monica’s coast and beachfront culture. The park was given several awards, including an official commendation from the mayor of the City of Santa Monica in 1987, and marked a renewed interest in the Santa Monica Pier and a new era in its history. Evident in its development conception and design as a cultural landscape, Carousel Park physically and visually exemplifies the rich and diverse architectural heritage of the City in its playful and Postmodern design as interpreted for use as a public park. The park also plays a vital role to the Pier’s continuing livelihood in providing an accessible yet playful alternative to the elevated pier deck from Ocean Front Walk. The period of significance is 1983-1986 reflecting the time period that includes the design development, construction, and completion of the cultural landscape. Therefore, the subject property appears to satisfy this criterion.

(2) *It has aesthetic or artistic interest or value, or other noteworthy interest or value.*

Carousel Park is an unusual and unique publically accessible cultural landscape designed in the Postmodernist style with elements consisting of neo-eclectic abstracted classical forms, playful sculptural shapes and symbolism, and exaggerated monumentality. As a rare local example of Postmodern design as applied to a cultural landscape, Carousel Park has relevant artistic interest and value to the City of Santa Monica. Therefore, the subject property appears to satisfy this criterion.

(3) *It is identified with historic personages or with important events in local, state or national history.*

Although Carousel Park is associated with the California Coastal Conservancy, the City of Santa Monica, and the Santa Monica Pier Restoration Corporation, there is no information to consider these entities, or the general public who utilizes the park, as historic personages. In addition, there is no evidence that an important event occurred at the site. Therefore, the subject property does not appear to satisfy this criterion.

(4) *It embodies distinguishing architectural characteristics valuable to a study of a period, style, method of construction, or the use of indigenous materials or craftsmanship, or
is a unique or rare example of an architectural design, detail or historical type valuable to such a study.

Carousel Park is designed with Postmodern principles set throughout its program. It was conceived as a cultural landscape during the height of the Postmodern movement in conjunction with a collaborative group of talented and highly creative individuals internationally known for their Postmodern designs. Although the park is designed with stylistic elements characteristic of the Postmodern idiom and is considered a rare example of Postmodern design as applied to a cultural landscape, Carousel Park’s Postmodern features are modestly designed and do not embody distinguishing architectural characteristics valuable to a study of the Postmodern style. Therefore, Carousel Park does not appear to satisfy this criterion.

(5) It is a significant or a representative example of the work or product of a notable builder, designer or architect.

Carousel Park was designed by architectural firm of Moore Ruble Yudell (MRY) and the landscape firm of Campbell & Campbell. Founding member of MRY, Charles W. Moore, is heralded as one of the chief innovators of Postmodernism architecture and is widely recognized as a master architect, philosopher, and teacher. Although Moore’s influence of Postmodern philosophy and design is evident in the park’s conception through public engagement, use of materials and symbolism, and overall exaggerated design statements, Carousel Park is a modest example exhibiting Postmodern design and is not one of the best examples of Moore’s work applied to a cultural landscape that includes the notable Piazza d’Italia in New Orleans. The subject park does not appear as a significant or representative example of work of the notable architect, and therefore Carousel Park does not appear to satisfy this criterion.

(6) It has a unique location, a singular physical characteristic, or is an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community or the City.

Carousel Park was designed as a pedestrian entryway connecting the elevated Santa Monica Pier to Ocean Front Walk and the beachfront along the south side of the Pier. When approaching Carousel Park from Ocean Front Walk, the park appears subservient in the foreground of the elevated Pier and Loof Hippodrome building and appears to lack prominence and a cohesive design in its overall layout in its relationship to the elevated pier deck. Although uniquely situated at the base of the Pier, the park appears more of an extension of the pier deck surrounding the Loof Hippodrome rather than a singular physical characteristic of the Pier. Therefore, Carousel Park does not appear to satisfy this criterion.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Commission designate Carousel Park as a City Landmark based on the boundaries established in Figure 2 of the Landmark Assessment Report prepared by Ostashay & Associates Consulting (Attachment D) as shown below, based
on the draft findings of designation Criteria 1 and 2 contained herein. The City’s consultant’s proposed boundary more closely outlines the footprint of the park compared to the outline identified in the applicant’s materials/application, and is generally described as an irregular “L” shape bounded by Ocean Front Walk to the east, elevated pier deck at the top of the steps and accessible ramp and Loof Hippodrome to the west, edge of the pier deck to the south, and an elevated concrete viaduct to the north.

Recommended Certificate of Appropriateness Exemptions

In addition to staff’s recommendation to designate Carousel Park, the following discussion outlines the City’s recommendation to exempt from Certificate of Appropriateness requirements routine maintenance and similar activities that do not negatively alter any character-defining features of Carousel Park, consistent with certain exemptions that have been in place for the Santa Monica Pier since its Landmark designation in 1976 (memorialized in the Santa Monica Pier Statement of Official Action, Attachment E).

Pursuant to SMMC Section 9.56.120 (f), the Landmarks Commission has the power, after a public hearing, to specify the nature of any alteration, restoration, construction, removal, relocation or demolition of or to a Landmark or Landmark Parcel which may be performed without the prior issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness. In accordance with this provision, staff recommends the Commission adopt specific exemptions to Certificate of

City Consultant’s Proposed Designation Boundary (OAC Carousel Park Landmark Assessment Report Sept. 2018)
Appropriateness requirements in order to provide a predictable framework, similar to that established for the Santa Monica Pier, for future review of proposed alterations to Carousel Park, while also providing the flexibility required to continue holding special events and performing the routine maintenance and upgrades as needed for the public space considered in this Landmark application.

More specifically, Carousel Park is an historic cultural landscape with its own identity that also serves as a gateway to and physical extension of the Landmark Santa Monica Pier, which is the City's most recognizable social and recreational public space.

The staff-recommended boundary for the Carousel Park designation includes public plaza space and seating areas on wood plank decking; a series of wood and concrete steps and walkways; a pedestrian access ramp and railings; street furniture and lighting; a children’s area with landscaped play sculptures; and two metal-framed octagonal shaped open-air pavilions on the southern edge of the Pier deck. All of these features are either functionally integrated with the Pier (e.g., the wood plank decking for the plaza and seating areas) or experience a similarly high level of public access and use.

The Municipal Code already exempts ordinary maintenance from Landmarks Commission review of a Certificate of Appropriateness (SMMC Section 9.56.210). In this instance, staff recommends establishing a scope of activities in the Carousel Park designation area that would be exempt from Certificate of Appropriateness requirements. This framework would allow the City to perform necessary maintenance and improvements in a timely manner and allow for the continued use of the public space for special events and activities that contribute to the thriving atmosphere found at the Pier and surrounding recreational areas, including Carousel Park.

In the case of the Pier, the City has a long-standing practice of consultation and collaboration between Planning and Community Development, which serves in a regulatory capacity due to the Pier designation, and other City departments who manage and maintain the Pier such as Housing and Economic Development and Public Works. The results of this interdepartmental consultation have demonstrated that allowing exemption from a Certificate of Appropriateness for certain routine maintenance and related activities has worked successfully to balance historic preservation best practices with the City’s charge for maintaining and programming an actively used, year-round public space.

Therefore, given the scope and level of public activity that occurs in and near Carousel Park and consistent with exemptions that are in place for the Landmark Pier, the following activities are recommended to be exempt from Certificate of Appropriateness requirements, provided that the work does not negatively alter character-defining features of Carousel Park:

1. Maintenance, repair, restoration, or in-kind replacement of features including but not limited to stairs, walkways, lighting, railings, landscaping, street furniture, wood plank decking and siding, and sidewalks and paving;
2. Construction of temporary structures for special events; and

3. Other structural or maintenance work that is required for safety reasons or when such work is necessary due to conditions affecting the public’s use and enjoyment of Carousel Park.

Other proposed activities would still require Certificate of Appropriateness review by staff and/or the Commission.

Pursuant to SMMC 9.36.180, the Landmarks Commission’s determination regarding this application may be appealed to the City Council if the appeal is filed with the City Planning Division within ten (10) consecutive days commencing from the date that the decision is made by the Landmarks Commission.

Attachments:

A. Public Notice
B. Applicant’s Materials
C. Landmark Assessment Report, Ostashay & Associates, September 2018
D. Potential Landmark Designation Boundary
E. Santa Monica Pier Statement of Official Action