



CITY OF LONG BEACH

DEPARTMENT OF DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

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November 13, 2017

CHAIR AND CULTURAL HERITAGE COMMISSIONERS

City of Long Beach
California

RECOMMENDATION:

Recommend the City Council designate the roof-mounted VIP Records sign located at 1014 E. Pacific Coast Highway as a local Historical Landmark. (District 6)

Recommend that the Cultural Heritage Commission grant the Development Services Department authority to issue a Staff-level Certificate of Appropriateness to remove, restore and relocate the VIP Records sign.

APPLICANT: Kelvin Anderson
1030 E. Pacific Coast Highway
Long Beach, CA 90806
(Application No. HP17-342)

THE REQUEST

The applicant requests that the Cultural Heritage Commission review the background materials and recommend that the City Council designate the "VIP Records" sign currently located at 1014 E. Pacific Coast Highway as a local Historical Landmark.

BACKGROUND

The subject property is located on the southeast corner of Pacific Coast Highway and Martin Luther King Jr Avenue (Exhibit A – Location Map) and is developed with a one-story multi-tenant strip mall. The building footprint is laid out in an "L" shape with storefronts facing the street and parking lot. The subject sign is located on the roof directly over the tenant space at 1014 E. Pacific Coast Highway which abuts the front property line and has storefronts facing the parking lot. A portion of the sign extends over the sidewalk and due to its height and design is highly visible from Pacific Coast Highway. At one time, VIP Records occupied multiple tenant spaces within the shopping center, but 1014 E. Pacific Coast Highway was the primary tenant space. The space is currently under construction as a convenience store with no changes proposed to the sign by the proposed tenant. The VIP Records store has since relocated to 1030 E. Pacific Coast Highway to a tenant space within a separate building.

In the 1980's, Rap music saw huge growth in popularity throughout the country including Long Beach. Future rap artists such as Snoop Dogg, Warren G, and Nate Dogg were growing up in this area of Long Beach at the time. Snoop Dogg, Nate Dogg, and Warren G purchased music from VIP Records, food from the fish market, and had their hair cut at the local barbershop, all of which were located in the subject shopping center. VIP Records, owned by Mr. Kelvin Anderson, was expanding his store during the 1980's and 1990's when gang violence escalated in the area. Mr. Anderson purchased music-recording equipment, a drum machine and sampler with the assistance of acclaimed record producer Sir Jinx and built a recording studio and small stage within the rear of his store. He offered up the space to local youth as a way to help young people in the community escape the gang violence. Mr. Anderson helped protect the community when gang violence and crime were at their highest levels in the City in the late 80's and early 90's.

ANALYSIS

SIGN STYLE

The sign is primarily made of sheet metal and consists of five primary components: a person whistling, a ribbon-shaped sign, an oval-shaped sign painted to resemble a record, two rectangular box signs, and metal posts. The two-sided sign features a person whistling in reference to the original business named Whistler Liquor store. A metal ribbon-shaped sign features the letters V.I.P. atop an oval shaped metal sign with the words "World Famous" and in smaller font in the center of the oval, the words "Long Beach". The oval shape has been painted to resemble a record. Two smaller rectangular metal box signs feature the words "Records" and "Tapes · CDs." The sign also originally included three space age globes extending from the top of the sign at varying heights. The sign is oriented in an east-west direction and highly visible to travelers in both directions on Pacific Coast Highway. Overall, the sign appears to be in fair condition and retains its essential form and character.

Stylistically, the sign falls into a Googie architectural style. The Googie style first emerged during the late 1940's and early 1950's in Los Angeles. The style name was derived from a Los Angeles coffee shop, "Googies", that was built in 1949 with a design by architect John Lautner. In turn, Googie has come to describe a dynamic style of contemporary architecture popular throughout the 1950's and 1960's that embodied America's fascination with the space age and technology.

The sign uses exposed gooseneck lighting on the "World Famous" portion of the sign. The sign uses the four colors of black, brown, blue and white. It is the most prominent remaining visual symbol of the company's existence in Long Beach (Exhibit B – Photographs).

LANDMARK DESIGNATION CRITERIA

Chapter 2.63.050 of the Long Beach Municipal Code provides criteria for designation of Landmarks within the City of Long Beach. A Cultural Resource means a district,

building, structure, natural feature, work of art, sign or other similar objects having a special historical, cultural, archaeological, architectural or aesthetic value. The sign can be considered a cultural resource eligible for landmark designation under the City's Municipal Code. Two other signs are designated historic landmarks including the Dolly Varden sign at 335 Pacific Avenue and the Fly DC Jets sign at 3860 N. Lakewood Boulevard. In both those cases, the landmark designation only applies to the sign and not the building. A Cultural Resource would be eligible for designation if it retains integrity and manifests one or more of the following criteria:

- A. It is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of the City's history; or
- B. It is associated with the lives of persons significant in the City's past; or
- C. It embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction, or it represents the work of a master or it possesses high artistic values; or
- D. It has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

In order to further evaluate the landmark nomination request, the Development Services Department hired ESA Consultants to prepare a Cultural Resource Evaluation (Exhibit C – Local Landmark Evaluation Report). The evaluation confirms that the VIP Records sign meets Criteria A and B for landmark designation (Exhibit D – Findings). The sign is associated with the African American community, West Coast Rap and Hip Hop music genres, and Mr. Kelvin Anderson. Rap and Hip Hop were emerging in Southern California and VIP Records was one of the few places to carry these self-published artists, some of which produced their demos at VIP Records. Many artists and groups are associated with VIP Records including Snoop Dogg, Nate Dogg, Warren G, 213, The Dogg Pound, Domino, The Twinz, Dove Shack, and Tha Eastsidaz. Snoop Dogg recorded his first demo here and at least two music videos have been filmed at VIP Records, both featuring the iconic Sign; “Who Am I (What’s My Name?)” (1993) by Snoop Dogg and “G’d Up” by Tha Eastsidaz (1999/2000). The Sign has also appeared in “Welcome To Atlanta Remix 2002” (2010) by Jermaine Dupri featuring Snoop Dogg, “I’m From Long Beach” (Official Video) (2016) by Snoop Dogg, the Warren G Documentary “G Funk” (2017), and most recently in HBO’s “The Defiant Ones” (2017).

The VIP Records sign is eligible under Criterion A (association with events) for its association with both the African American community, especially the youth population, and the music industry in Southern California, specifically the early development of the Hip Hop and Rap genres on the West Coast, the group 213 (Two-One-Three), and artists Snoop Dogg, Nate Dogg and Warren G.

The sign is also eligible for landmark designation under Criteria B because it is associated with the lives of persons significant in the City's past. As discussed above, VIP Records is associated with local businessman Kelvin Anderson, who contributed greatly to his community by providing a safe haven from gang violence for the youth in the area, as well as a number of regionally, and even world, famous musicians and groups including Snoop Dogg, Nate Dogg, Warren G, 213, The Dogg Pound, Domino,

The Twinz, Dove Shack, and Tha Eastsidaz. These individuals and groups were at the forefront of the Hip Hop and Rap genres as they emerged on the West Coast especially in Southern California. Southern California and Long Beach specifically were “hot spots” during the early days of the West Coast Hip Hop genre of music. VIP Records was integral to the success of many of these artists and the genre as a place to develop and distribute their music. The Sign became an iconic symbol of their success through its inclusion in their music videos. Therefore, the VIP Records sign is eligible under Criterion B for its association with local businessman Kelvin Anderson and the famous musicians discussed above, especially with the group 213 (Two-One-Three), and artists Snoop Dogg, Nate Dogg, and Warren G (association with significant persons).

REMOVAL OR RELOCATION CRITERIA

Due to current circumstances beyond Mr. Anderson’s and the City’s control, relocation of the sign is necessary. If the Commission were to recommend granting landmark designation to the sign, the recommendation should include criteria for removal, relocation and restoration of the sign. Currently, the sign is located at the shopping center where it was originally installed, but VIP Records has relocated to the abutting building to the east and no longer occupies the tenant space where the sign is currently located. The applicant’s long-term goal is to relocate the sign to a permanent location in Long Beach near the original store. The future location is envisioned to have the retail store; a museum devoted to African American music and history; and education programs. That location has not yet been secured, although the applicant is actively working on it and in regular communication with City staff (Exhibit E – VIP Records Letter).

The applicants have prepared plans that describe the steps necessary to remove the sign from the roof of the building and have prepared a restoration plan for the sign (Exhibit F – VIP Records Plan). The plan includes several restoration steps including replacement of some damaged materials, electrical re-wiring for new lighting, new paint where deteriorated, and replacement of non-functioning neon lighting. The plan also includes details on the removal and transport process that involves cutting the sign into multiple pieces to make it easier to move and transport.

Staff and Mr. Anderson have worked cooperatively on this nomination. Staff and the owner have discussed the potential future relocation of the sign and agreed to work cooperatively through the Certificate of Appropriateness application process when that future possibility occurs. It is staff’s recommendation to grant staff the authority to issue a Certificate of Appropriateness to relocate and restore the sign based on the Commission’s review and conditions of the applicant’s restoration plan. Prior to issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness, permit photo documentation will be prepared photographing the sign in its original location.

DESIGNATION CRITERIA

The Cultural Heritage Ordinance contains four criteria for designation: associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history

(Criterion A), associated with the lives of persons important to the City's past (Criterion B), embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, region or method of construction or represents the work of a master or possesses high artistic values (Criterion C), or has yielded, or has the potential to yield, information important in prehistory or history (Criterion D).

The subject sign is eligible for Long Beach Historic Landmark designation under Criteria A and B. The VIP Records sign is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of the City's history. VIP records is significant in Long Beach history and African American history for substantial achievements in keeping young people safe in Long Beach developing new artists from Long Beach that contributed to the West Coast Rap genre. The period of significance for VIP records corresponds the peak growth of the music genre that was crafted at VIP Records.

The sign is also significant under Criteria B for its association with Mr. Kelvin Anderson who is significant in Long Beach history. Mr. Anderson provided a safe haven for neighborhood youth for decades. Aspiring artists and neighborhood teenagers/young adults just trying to escape the violence on the streets would gather at his store to hang out, learn to use the recording equipment, and even record/perform new songs. Mr. Anderson became an advocate for these new artists and their art form before the larger record companies became involved. Rap and Hip Hop were emerging in Southern California and VIP Records was one of the few places to carry these self-published artists, some of which produced their demos at VIP Records. Therefore, the VIP Records sign is recommended eligible under Criterion B for its association with local businessman Kelvin Anderson and the famous musicians discussed above, especially with the group 213 (Two-One-Three), and artists Snoop Dogg, Nate Dogg, and Warren G (association with significant persons).

RECOMMENDATION

Staff has analyzed the landmark nomination and has determined that it meets the requirements set forth in Title 21 of the City's Zoning Code, Section 2.63.050 (Cultural Heritage Commission) of the Long Beach Municipal Code which state that a cultural resource qualifies for designation as a Landmark if it retains integrity and meets one or more of the four findings. Staff supports the nomination, and finds that the nomination meets Criteria A and B.

The proposed nomination is complimentary to the surrounding neighborhood. The sign has been associated with VIP Records for over 40 years. Mr. Anderson and VIP Records are strongly associated with the surrounding community and have made substantial contributions to the neighborhood. The historic sign is important because it's an iconic symbol of the growth and development of West Coast Rap and Hip Hop, and specifically the gangster rap genre associated with Long Beach history. The designation of the sign as a historic landmark protects the sign from future alterations that are incompatible with the appearance and history of the sign. The nomination for Landmark status is consistent with the General Plan Land Use Historic Preservation Goal of protecting historic resources from inappropriate alterations.

CULTURAL HERITAGE COMMISSION

November 13, 2017

Page 6 of 8

Staff recommends that the Cultural Heritage Commission make a recommendation to the City Council to approve the nomination.

PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE

Public notices were distributed on October 25, 2017. Discussions regarding the merits of landmark nomination were discussed with the sign owner and the owner of the shopping center earlier in 2017. As of this date no letters have been received.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

In accordance with the 15331 Guidelines for Implementation of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), environmental review is not required for actions taken for the preservation or restoration of historic structures.

Respectfully submitted,



CHRISTOPHER KOONTZ, AICP
ADVANCE PLANNING OFFICER



LINDA F. TATUM, AICP
PLANNING BUREAU MANAGER

LFT:CK:AP

Attachments: Exhibit A – Location Map
Exhibit B – Photographs
Exhibit C – Local Landmark Evaluation Report
Exhibit D – Findings
Exhibit E – VIP Records Letter
Exhibit F – VIP Records Plan