



# SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT

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## Landmark Designation Case Report

*Hearing Date:* December 7, 2016  
*Case No.:* 2016-011052DES  
*Project Address:* 1970 Ocean Street  
*Zoning:* NCT – Ocean Avenue Neighborhood Commercial Transit  
*Block/Lot:* 3280/018  
*Property Owner:* Ricci Ventures LLC  
Greenpoint Land Co.  
1970 Ocean Avenue  
San Francisco, CA 94127  
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### PROPERTY DESCRIPTION & SURROUNDING LAND USE AND DEVELOPMENT

1970 Ocean Avenue, historically known as the El Rey Theater (1931), sits on the north side of Ocean Avenue between Lakewood Avenue and Fairfield Way. The building occupies approximately 75 percent of the rectangular parcel measuring approximately 183 x 192 feet (APN 3280/018). The lot slopes uphill toward the north in the direction of Mt. Davidson Manor, a 1920s era streetcar suburb of single family dwellings. The El Rey Theater is located near the west end of the Ocean Avenue commercial district, which is dominated by a combination of older, small-scale commercial buildings and much later mixed-use developments containing commercial storefronts on the ground floor and residential units above. To the east of the El Rey Theater, on the opposite side of Fairfield Way, are several one-story commercial buildings constructed between 1928 and 1939. To the west of the El Rey Theater, on the opposite side of Lakewood Avenue, is a one-story strip mall constructed in 1980. On the south side of Ocean Avenue is Ingleside Terraces residence park, a streetcar suburbs constructed between the First and Second world wars.

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The case before the Historic Preservation Commission is the consideration of the initiation of landmark designation of 1970 Ocean Avenue, historically known as the El Rey Theater as a San Francisco landmark under Article 10 of the Planning Code, Section 1004.1, and recommending the Board of Supervisors approve of such designation.

## ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW STATUS

The Planning Department has determined that actions by regulatory agencies for protection of the environment (specifically in this case, landmark designation) are exempt from environmental review, pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15308 (Class Eight - Categorical).

## GENERAL PLAN POLICIES

The Urban Design Element of the San Francisco General Plan contains the following relevant objectives and policies:

- OBJECTIVE 2: Conservation of Resources that provide a sense of nature, continuity with the past, and freedom from overcrowding.
- POLICY 4: Preserve notable landmarks and areas of historic, architectural or aesthetic value, and promote the preservation of other buildings and features that provide continuity with past development.

Designating significant historic resources as local landmarks will further continuity with the past because the buildings will be preserved for the benefit of future generations. Landmark designation will require that the Planning Department and the Historic Preservation Commission review proposed work that may have an impact on character-defining features. Both entities will utilize the *Secretary of Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties* in their review to ensure that only appropriate, compatible alterations are made.

## SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING CODE SECTION 101.1 – GENERAL PLAN CONSISTENCY AND IMPLEMENTATION

Planning Code Section 101.1 – Eight Priority Policies establishes and requires review of permits for consistency with said policies. On balance, the proposed designation is consistent with the priority policies in that:

- a. The proposed designation will further Priority Policy No. 7, that landmarks and historic buildings be preserved. Landmark designation of 1970 Ocean Avenue, historically known as the El Rey Theater, will help to preserve an important historical resource that is architecturally significant as one of the only remaining movie theaters originally designed in the Art Deco style by master architect Timothy Pfluger.

## BACKGROUND / PREVIOUS ACTIONS

The El Rey Theater was added to the Landmark Designation Work Program on August 17, 2016. The landmark designation report was prepared by VerPlanck Historic Preservation Consulting at the request of the Art Deco Society of California. A final draft of the report was submitted to the Department on October 18, 2016.

## OTHER ACTIONS REQUIRED

If the Historic Preservation Commission adopts a resolution to initiate designation of the subject property as an Article 10 landmark at its December 7, 2016 hearing and directs staff to finalize the landmark designation report, a second Historic Preservation Commission hearing will be scheduled for the

Commission's recommendation of approval of the designation. At the second hearing, if the Historic Preservation Commission recommends approval of the designation, its recommendation will be sent by the Department to the Board of Supervisors. The nomination would then be considered at a future Board of Supervisors hearing for formal Article 10 landmark designation.

## APPLICABLE PRESERVATION STANDARDS

### ARTICLE 10

Section 1004 of the Planning Code authorizes the landmark designation of an individual structure or other feature or an integrated group of structures and features on a single lot or site, having special character or special historical, architectural or aesthetic interest or value, as a landmark. Section 1004.1 also outlines that landmark designation may be initiated by the Board of Supervisors or the Historic Preservation Commission and the initiation shall include findings in support. Section 1004.2 states that once initiated, the proposed designation is referred to the Historic Preservation Commission for a report and recommendation to the Board of Supervisors to approve, disapprove or modify the proposal.

Pursuant to Section 1004.3 of the Planning Code, if the Historic Preservation Commission approves the designation, a copy of the resolution of approval is transmitted to the Board of Supervisors and without referral to the Planning Commission. The Board of Supervisors shall hold a public hearing on the designation and may approve, modify or disapprove the designation.

In the case of the initiation of a historic district, the Historic Preservation Commission shall refer its recommendation to the Planning Commission pursuant to Section 1004.2(c). The Planning Commission shall have 45 days to provide review and comment on the proposed designation and address the consistency of the proposed designation with the General Plan, Section 101.1 priority policies, the City's Regional Housing Needs Allocation, and the Sustainable Communities Strategy for the Bay Area. These comments shall be sent to the Board of Supervisors in the form of a resolution.

Section 1004(b) requires that the designating ordinance approved by the Board of Supervisors shall include the location and boundaries of the landmark site, a description of the characteristics of the landmark which justify its designation, and a description of the particular features that should be preserved.

Section 1004.4 states that if the Historic Preservation Commission disapproves the proposed designation, such action shall be final, except upon the filing of a valid appeal to the Board of Supervisors within 30 days.

### ARTICLE 10 LANDMARK CRITERIA

The Historic Preservation Commission on February 4, 2009, by Resolution No. 001, adopted the National Register Criteria as its methodology for recommending landmark designation of historic resources. Under the National Register Criteria, the quality of significance in American history, architecture, archaeology, engineering, and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, feeling, materials, workmanship, and association, and that are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history;

or that are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or that embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or properties that have yielded, or may likely yield, information important in prehistory or history.

## PUBLIC / NEIGHBORHOOD INPUT

There is no known public or neighborhood opposition to designation of 1970 Ocean Avenue as an Article 10 landmark. The Department will provide any public correspondence received after the submittal of this report in the Historic Preservation Commission's correspondence folder.

## PROPERTY OWNER INPUT

Staff met with the property owners on October 18, 2016 and shared the landmark designation report with them. A site visit was conducted on November 18, 2016 with the property owners present at the meeting.

## STAFF ANALYSIS

The case report and following analysis was prepared by Department staff. The Department has determined that the subject property meets the requirements for Article 10 eligibility as an individual landmark. The justification for its inclusion is outlined below under the Significance and Integrity sections of this case report.

The subject building appears to meet two the Historic Preservation Commission's priorities for designation which are:

- The designation of underrepresented Landmark property types including landscapes*  
There are five landmarked movie theater buildings built during the same time period as the El Rey Theater (1931). They are Alhambra Theater (2320 Polk Street, 1926, Moorish Revival style, Landmark No. 217), Castro Theater (429 Castro Street, 1922, Beaux-Arts style, Landmark No. 100), El Capitan Theater (2353 Mission Street, 1928, Mexican Baroque, Landmark No. 214), Metro Theater (2055 Union, 1924, Spanish Colonial Revival/Art Deco remodel in 1941, Landmark No. 261), and New Mission Theater (2550 Mission Street, 1916, Beaux-Arts/Art Deco exterior remodel 1932, Landmark No. 245). The Castro, Alhambra, and New Mission Theaters were also designed by Timothy Pflueger. However, the El Rey is the only theater in San Francisco by Pflueger originally designed in the Art Deco style.
- The designation of buildings of Modern design*  
The subject building is not a Modern style building; rather it is an Art Deco style building.
- The designation of buildings located in geographically underrepresented areas*  
There is only one other existing landmark located nearby at 90 Cedro Avenue. It is Landmark No. 213, the Joseph Leonard/Cecil F. Pool House, a single family Craftsman style home constructed by builder Joseph A. Leonard in 1911 and later occupied by Judge Cecil F. Poole, the first non-white property owner in Ingleside Terrace. As an Art Deco style movie theater building, 1970 Ocean Avenue is a very different property type from 90 Cedro Avenue.

4. *The designation of properties with strong cultural or ethnic associations.*

The subject building does not appear to have specific cultural or ethnic associations.

SIGNIFICANCE

*Significant architecture*

The El Rey Theater is architecturally significant as one of the only remaining movie theaters originally designed in the Art Deco style by master architect Timothy Pflueger.

The Art Deco style emerged on the world stage at the 1925 *Exposition des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes* in Paris. Art Deco style was inspired by a variety of sources, in particular the ancient ziggurat-building cultures of the pre-Islamic Middle East, including Assyria, Babylon, and Persia. Signature details of the style included geometric shapes, including chevrons, zig-zags, diagonal rays, stylized papyrus leaves, pulvinated moldings, and horizontal “speed lines” The Art Deco style evolved in a different direction in California than it did in Europe or on the East Coast. In California, architects and designers relied on the pre-Columbian architecture of Mexico and Central America instead of Middle Eastern or African sources. With its stepped, soaring tower, horizontal speedlines at the parapet, and Mayan inspired entrance grille and metal and cast plaster interior ornament, it embodies the distinctive characteristics of the Art Deco style.

The building is also significant for its association with master architect Timothy Pflueger, one of San Francisco’s top architects of the twentieth century and the leading practitioner of the “Mayan Deco” style in Northern California. Pflueger defied the dominant conservative aesthetic of the *École de Beaux Arts* by embracing a daring modernist aesthetic all his own, an aesthetic that relied in part on exotic architectural styles, in particular Mayan, Aztec, and other Meso-American traditions. He also embraced technology and modern materials and used them to make his buildings seem more richly appointed than they actually were. Pflueger is best known for his theater designs, including the Castro (1922), Alhambra (1926), and New Mission (1932) theaters in San Francisco; the Paramount Theater(1931) in Oakland; and the Alameda Theater (1932) in Alameda. Other notable designs by Pflueger include the Pacific Telephone & Telegraph Building (1925), Medical-Dental Building (1929), and San Francisco Stock Exchange (1930). Pflueger also designed Roosevelt Junior High School (1930) and George Washington High School (1936).

PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE

The El Rey Theater has a period of significance of 1931, the year it was completed.

INTEGRITY

Despite alterations to the storefronts and main entrance, the El Rey Theater retains sufficient integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, setting, feeling, and association to convey its significance.

CHARACTER-DEFINING FEATURES

Whenever a building, site, object, or landscape is under consideration for Article 10 landmark designation, the Historic Preservation Commission is required to identify character-defining features of the property. This is done to enable owners and the public to understand which elements are considered most important to preserve the historical and architectural character of the proposed landmark.

As described in the Landmark Designation Report, the following is a list of exterior and interior character defining features of the El Rey Theater.

The character-defining *exterior* features of the building are identified as all exterior elevations, including but not limited to form, massing, structure, architectural ornament, and materials. In the case of the former El Rey Theater, its character-defining features are:

- The building's T-shaped footprint and four-part massing and volume consisting of the central gable-roofed theater, 146'-9"-high tower, and two flanking one-story retail wings.
- The building's primary façade facing Ocean Avenue, including its cement stucco finish, cast-concrete grille, incised speed lines, zig-zag ornament, raised parapet (retail wings only), gable outlined with red clay tile (theater volume), and pylon-capped tower.
- East and west (secondary) façades, including their general massing and articulation with deeply recessed "blind" openings, and painted board-formed concrete walls. The windows on the west wall of the west retail wing are also character-defining, though they are missing their original metal screens.
- The tower, including its height, massing, and surviving cast cement ornament.
- The building's combination gable (theater volume) and flat (retail wings and stage area) roof.

At the time of designation, non-character-defining exterior features include all post-1931 alterations, including the folded-plate canopy, all storefronts, and infilled fenestration on the south and east façades. None of these features has gained significance in their own right.

The character-defining features of the interior of the former El Rey Theater include:

- Main lobby, auditorium, balcony, stairs, and mezzanine volumes,
- All extant sheet metal and cast-plaster Art Deco ornament in the lobby, auditorium, balcony, and mezzanine.
- All extant doors, hardware, and light fixtures in the lobby, auditorium, balcony, and mezzanine.
- Potentially extant murals at auditorium ceiling and mezzanine as shown in historic photographs but currently overpainted.

At the time of designation, non-character-defining interior features include all spaces affected by extensive post-1931 alterations, including the remodeled bathrooms and interior of retail stores, and all utilitarian interior spaces, including the basement, tower, backstage area, former projection room, offices, and storage.

#### INTERIOR LANDMARK DESIGNATION

According to Article 10, Section 1004(c) of the Planning Code, only those interiors that were historically publicly accessible are eligible for listing in Article 10. Article 10, Section 1004(c) of the Planning Code states,

(c) The property included in any such designation shall upon designation be subject to the controls and standards set forth in this Article 10. In addition, the said property shall be subject to the following further controls and standards if imposed by the designating ordinance:

- (1) For a publicly-owned landmark, review of proposed changes to significant interior architectural features.
- (2) For a privately-owned landmark, review of proposed changes requiring a permit to significant interior architectural features in those areas of the landmark that are or historically have been accessible to members of the public. The designating ordinance must clearly describe each significant interior architectural feature subject to this restriction.

The interior of the lobby and auditorium was historically publically accessible to the public; therefore it is eligible for protection under Article 10 of the Planning Code.

## BOUNDARIES OF THE LANDMARK SITE

The boundaries of the landmark site encompass all of and are limited to lot 018 in Assessor's Block 3280.

## PLANNING DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION

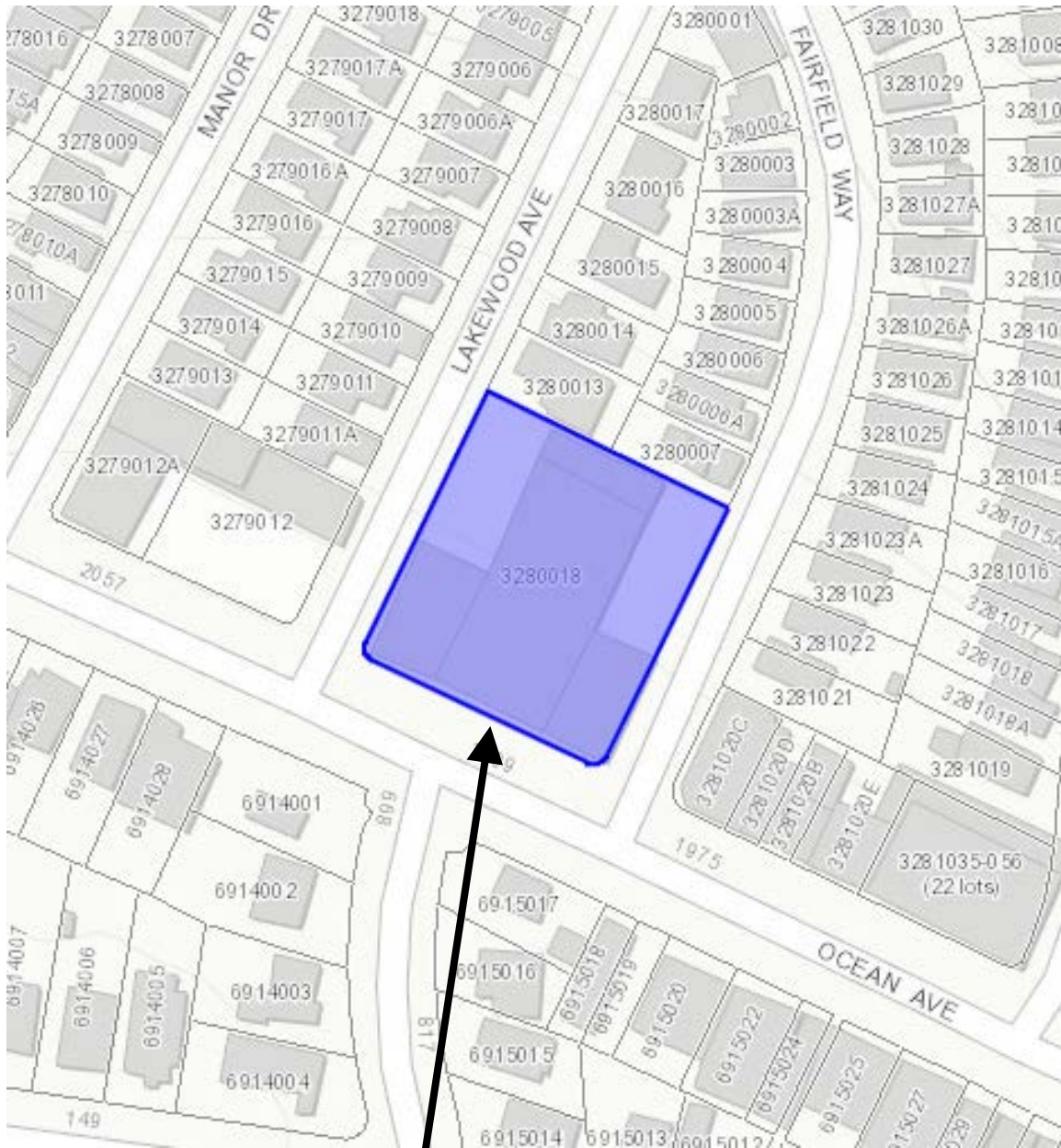
Based on the Department's analysis, the El Rey Theater is individually eligible for Article 10 Landmark designation as it embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction; and was designed by a master architect. The El Rey Theater is architecturally significant as one of the only remaining movie theaters originally designed in the Art Deco style by master architect Timothy Pflugger. Designation of the El Rey Theater also appears to meet two of four of the Historic Preservation Commission's priorities for designation. Staff recommends approval of the proposed landmark designation of the El Rey Theater.

The Historic Preservation Commission may recommend approval, disapproval, or approval with modifications of the proposed designation of 1970 Ocean Avenue as a San Francisco landmark under Article 10 of the Planning Code to the Board of Supervisors pursuant to Planning Code Section 1004.1. If the Historic Preservation Commission approves the designation, a copy of the motion of approval is transmitted to the Board of Supervisors, which holds a public hearing on the designation and may approve, modify or disapprove the designation (Section 1004.4). If the Historic Preservation Commission disapproves the proposed designation, such action shall be final, except upon the filing of a valid appeal to the Board of Supervisors within 30 days (Section 1004.5).

## ATTACHMENTS

- A. Draft Landmark Designation Report
- B. Draft Motion initiating designation

# Parcel Map



**SUBJECT PROPERTY**



Article 10 Landmark Designation  
Case Number 2016-011052DES  
El Rey Theater  
1970 Ocean Avenue



# Zoning Map

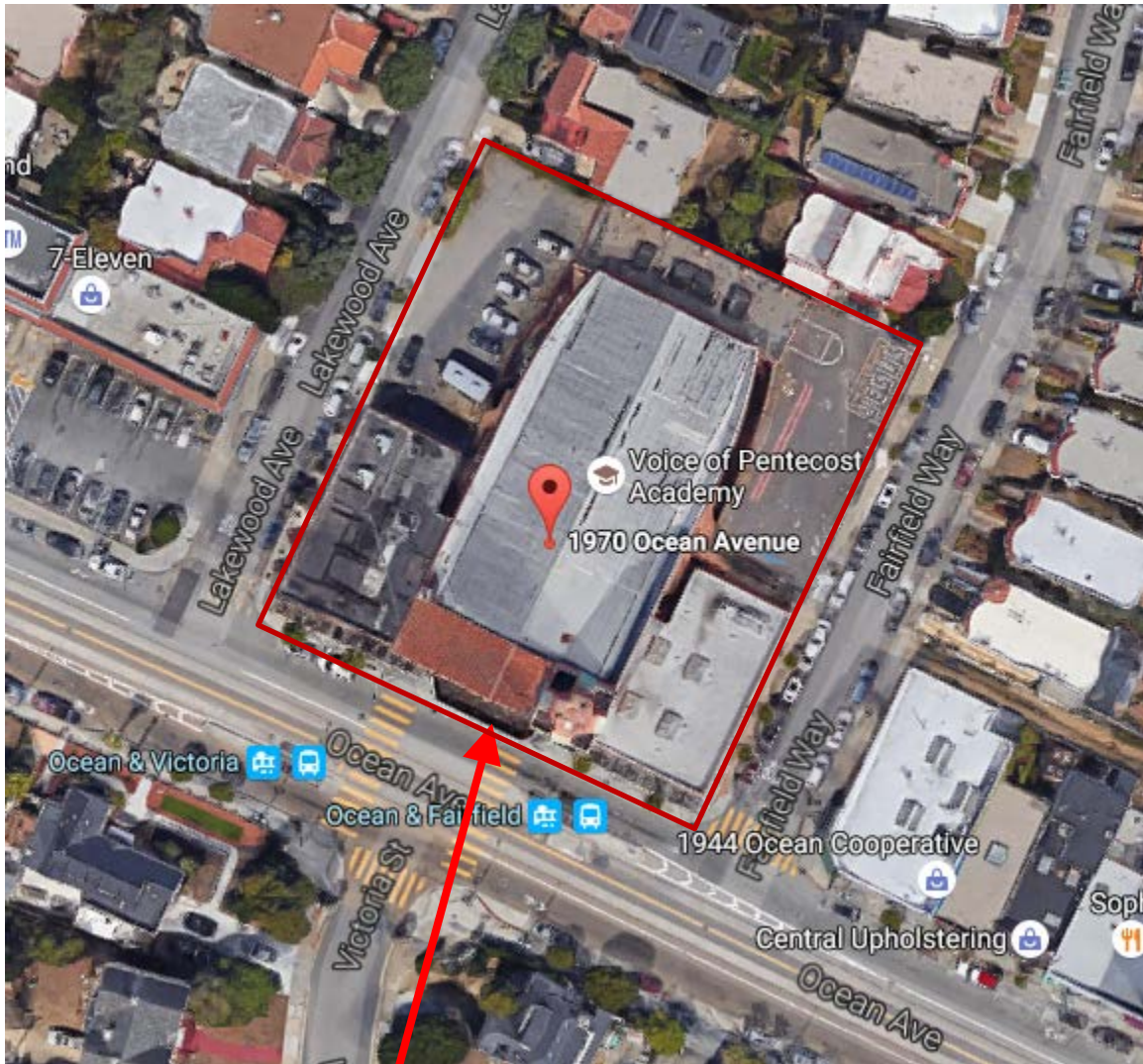


**SUBJECT PROPERTY**



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1970 Ocean Avenue

# Aerial Photo

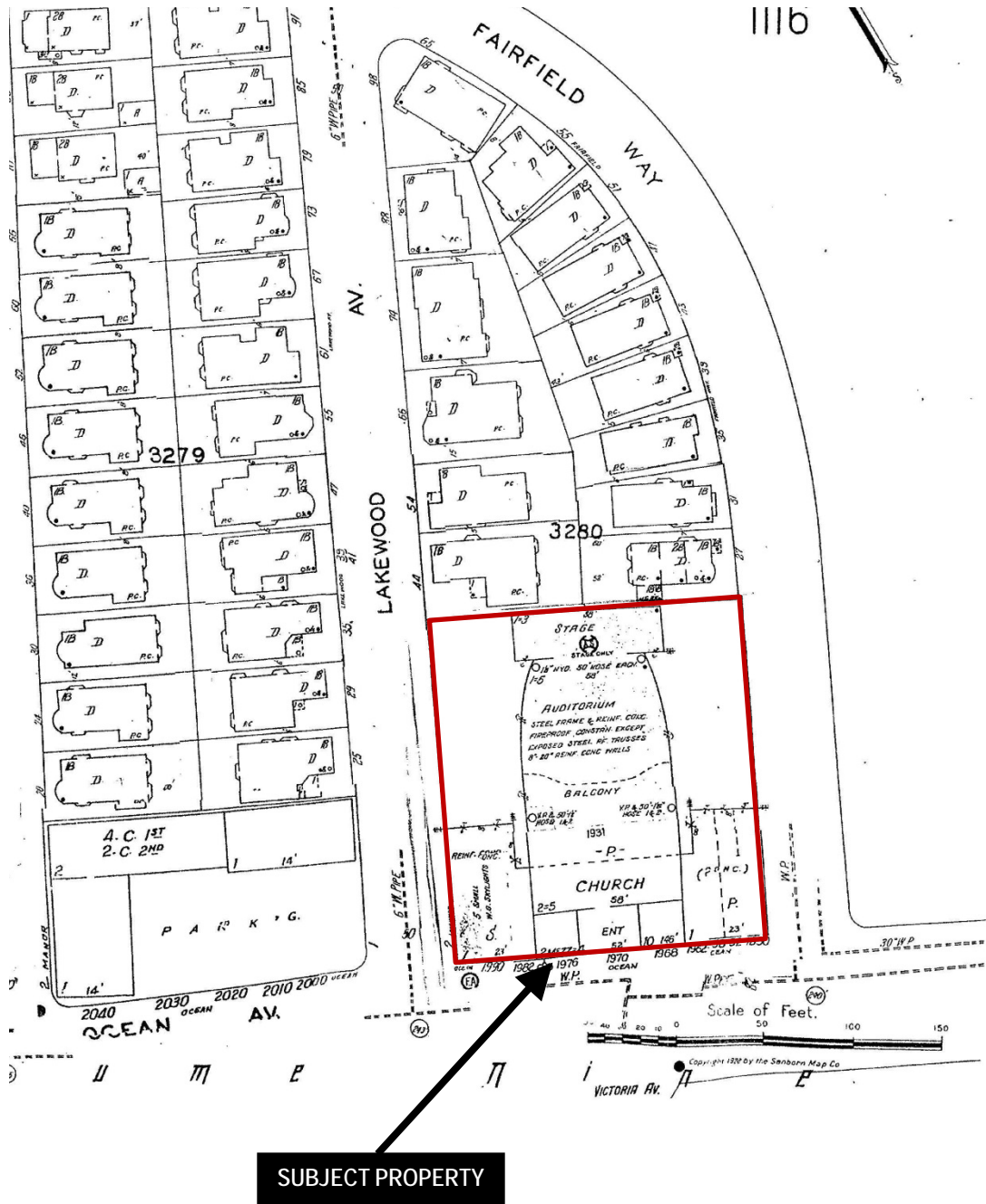


SUBJECT PROPERTY



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1970 Ocean Avenue

# Sanborn Map\*



\*The Sanborn Maps in San Francisco have not been updated since 1998, and this map may not accurately reflect existing conditions.



Article 10 Landmark Designation  
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 El Rey Theater  
 1970 Ocean Avenue

# Site Photo



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