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Sept. 27, 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
Email: melissa.jones@lacity.org

Re: Beneficial Plaza and Liberty Park, 3700 Wilshire Boulevard

Dear President Barron and Members of the Commission:

As an architect and historian of Los Angeles architecture, I support the consideration of the Beneficial Life Building (1967) at 3700 Wilshire as a city landmark.

Among many factors that make the Beneficial building significant, I will highlight two:

1. The distinguished pedigree of its design architects, Gordon Bunshaft and Edward Charles Bassett of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM), and of its landscape architect, Peter Walker, a co-founder of Sasaki Walker Associates.
2. Its generous contribution to the high quality of architecture, landscape architecture, and urban space which have been integral to the success of Wilshire Blvd. as typified by the innovative standards of the Miracle Mile since its inception by A. W. Ross in the 1920s.

Skidmore, Owings & Merrill was one of the largest and most influential high-end architecture firms in the United States in the midcentury. They were known for setting a standard for Modern design that satisfied the demand for both functionality and prestige for many of the country's largest corporations. The Beneficial building is an excellent example of this.

Architects of the caliber of Bunshaft and Bassett assured SOM's leading status.

Gordon Bunshaft is known for major cultural and corporate landmarks, including Lever House in New York, the Beinecke Rare Book Library at Yale University, the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington, DC, Manufacturers Hanover Trust Branch Bank in New York, and the Lyndon Johnson Presidential Library in Austin, Texas.

Edward Charles Bassett was responsible for the Oakland/Alameda County Coliseum, the Mauna Kea Beach Hotel in Hawaii, the Louise M. Davies Symphony Hall in San Francisco, the

Bank of America tower in San Francisco, and the Weyerhaeuser headquarters in Washington state.

In keeping with Bunshaft and Bassett's other buildings at SOM, the Beneficial Building is elegantly expressive of its structure, handsomely proportioned, and well detailed. This can be seen, for example, in the graceful curve of the structural columns as they meet the ground.

Peter Walker's long landscape architecture career has been just as distinguished, including his recent design for the high profile National 9/11 Memorial in New York. Among many other significant projects, Walker was the landscape architect for the original villages of Irvine, CA, the largest master-planned community of the midcentury.

The Beneficial building is beautifully complemented by the large landscaped park and plaza fronting Wilshire, a generous and well-designed contribution of open space to the city. It displays all the hallmarks of high art Modernist landscape design. Of course Bunshaft, Bassett, and Walker worked together closely to achieve this design.

Beneficial Life's decision to choose such sophisticated architects matches A. W. Ross' original intention that Wilshire Blvd. would rise to a high standard of architecture and planning. The building is beautifully complemented by the large landscaped park and plaza (known as Liberty Park) fronting Wilshire, an extraordinarily generous and well-designed contribution of open space to the city. Its design shows the same high level as SOM's building. With the park's U-shaped promenade, asymmetrical plantings, podium, stairs, and corner sign/markers, the park and building form a unified, distinctive, and exemplary Modern spatial design.

Open space such as this cannot be considered wasted space. As Beneficial's president and his architects intended, well-designed green spaces are essential in urban areas. They are the lungs of the city, an antidote to urban claustrophobia. Note, for example, how the pairing of the Beneficial building and park and the Ahmanson Center's towers and courtyard directly across Wilshire forms a notable, even grand, urban open space.

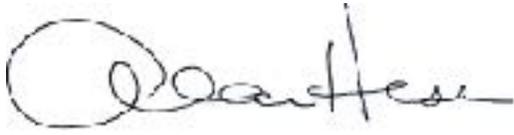
It is useful to note that this high level of quality was carried throughout the Beneficial design. For example, the original interiors for one tenant were designed by noted Los Angeles architect Paul Laszlo, and the Liberty Bell feature of the plaza was designed by Harper Goff, one of the chief designers of Disneyland.

With the neighboring Wiltern Building by Morgan, Walls & Clements, and the Ahmanson Center by Edward Durell Stone across the street, the Beneficial Building and Liberty Park forms an architecturally distinguished district. They establish a model for good urban design that future architecture and planning decisions can follow with confidence.

I write this as author of nineteen books, most dealing with the history of Modern architecture in California and the West. I have written on architecture for *PlacesJournal*, *the Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, *Architectural Digest*, *The Architects Newspaper*, and other journals. I have received awards for my work from the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Los Angeles Conservancy, and Docomomo-US.

As Los Angeles moves forward, it can maintain the standards of quality urban design that this building and the historic Miracle Mile embody.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alan Hess". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, circular initial "A" and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Alan Hess