historic resource analysis
1700 webster street, oakland, ca

completed for:
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submitted by:

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I. Introduction

This Historic Resource Evaluation was prepared by architecture + history, llc (a + h) and Watson Heritage Consulting at the request of Lamphier Gregory on behalf of the project proponent, 1700 Webster, LLC, for 1700 Webster Street in Oakland, California (APN 8-625-14-1). Bridget Maley, Principal at a + h, meets the Secretary of the Interior’s Professional Qualification Standards in History and Architectural History. Shayne Watson of Watson Heritage Consulting assisted with this historic resource evaluation and she also meets the above qualifications. The site sits at the northeast corner of Webster and 17th Street in downtown Oakland. The purpose of this analysis is to evaluate the potential impacts to historic resources, as defined by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) as a result of the development of 1700 Webster Street, a proposed project for the site includes. a + h has reviewed a series of project drawings and images of a baseline scheme by Perkins + Will Architects dated January 2015.

The City of Oakland’s Thresholds of Significance Guidelines state that an historical resource under CEQA is a resource that meets any of the following criteria:

1) A resource listed in, or determined to be eligible for listing in, the California Register of Historical Resources;
2) A resource included in Oakland’s Local Register of historical resources, unless the preponderance of evidence demonstrates that it is not historically or culturally significant;
3) A resource identified as significant (e.g., rated 1-5) in a historical resource survey recorded on Department of Parks and Recreation Form 523, unless the preponderance of evidence demonstrates that it is not historically or culturally significant;
4) Meets the criteria for listing on the California Register of Historical Resources; or
5) A resource that is determined by the Oakland City Council to be historically or culturally significant even though it does not meet the other four criteria listed above.

The subject site is presently occupied by a two-story building designed by architect Harry A. Bruno in 1964 for the Title Insurance and Trust Company. This report will provide an evaluation of this building as a potential historic resource. Additionally, there are several older buildings in the immediate vicinity that are identified in the Oakland Cultural Heritage Survey (OCHS). Therefore, an analysis of whether the construction of the proposed project would “materially impair” or result in “substantial adverse change” to any of the known adjacent historic resources is also put forward.
II. Project Description

The proposed project site is located in downtown Oakland, California. The urban context is surrounded by commercial and mixed-use development. A surface parking lot is located immediately to the east, commercial mixed-uses line 17th Street to the south, and Webster Street to the west. The dominant existing land use in the area is mixed commercial and retail, mixed used apartments, and surface parking lots. The approximately 0.51-acre proposed project site contains one, two-story structure built in 1964, which is currently occupied by the American Cancer Society.

The proposed project would demolish the existing building on the site to construct a new building. The proposed project would be a 23-story, approximately 200,000 square foot, mixed-use building consisting of two-hundred and six (206) dwelling units and approximately 6,000 square feet of ground floor retail and/or restaurant space. The project would include podium level garage parking for two-hundred and six (206) vehicles.

In total, the new building would have a surface footprint of approximately 22,477 square feet (approximately 93 percent of the proposed project site), constructed at a floor area ratio (FAR) of 8.29. The building would be 23 stories tall, 250 feet in height to the top of the roof structure. Parapets, stairs, and elevator penthouses and mechanical structures (including emergency generators) would exceed this height by another 15 feet.

The ground floor would front onto both Webster Street and 17th Street, with the primary entrance and lobby space located along 17th Street. The ground level includes approximately 6,000 square feet of retail space primarily fronting onto 17th Street, but also wrapping around the corner to provide retail frontage along Webster Street as well. The residential entry and lobby, plus a stairwell, elevators and a leasing office are also located on the ground floor, with bicycle storage accessible from the lobby. The ground floor occupies nearly the entire surface of the lot, with an alley perpendicular to 17th Street along the northerly property boundary.

A podium level 4 stories tall (Floors 2-5) would provide a parking garage accessible to vehicles via a driveway on the ground floor along Webster Street. The residential tower is 18 stories tall and is set back from 17th Street by approximately 44 feet, and from the northerly property boundary by approximately 40 feet. The tower is flush with the Webster Street frontage of the podium and the easterly podium, such that the tower presents a more narrow mass to Webster Street and is aligned in an east-west direction. The tower would hold a total of all 206 residential units, including potentially two penthouse floors at the top. The project is in conceptual phase details such as materials and specific façade treatments are not available at this time.
The site is located at the northeast corner of Webster and 17th Street in downtown Oakland. Above the proposed building footprint is imposed on the lot. (Source: Perkins + Will)
III. Relevant Plans, Procedures, Policies, and Guidelines

Oakland Cultural Heritage Survey (OCHS)
The Oakland Cultural Heritage Survey (OCHS), has been a long-term project of the Community and Economic Development Department. Begun in the late 1970’s, the program is intended to provide an inventory of historic resources throughout Oakland. The OCHS uses a five-tier, A-B-C-D-E rating system for individual properties, ranging from “A” (highest importance) to “E” (of no particular interest). These ratings are incorporated in the Historic Preservation Element of the General Plan (discussed below) and are based on the following survey and inventory criteria:

- Visual Quality/Design: Evaluation of exterior design, interior design, materials and construction, style or type, supporting elements, feelings of association, and importance of designer.

- History/Association: Association of person or organization, the importance of any event, association with patterns, and the age of the building.

- Context: Continuity and familiarity of the building within the district.

- Integrity/Reversibility: Evaluation of the building’s condition, its exterior and interior alterations, and any structural removals.

Properties with conditions or circumstances that could change substantially in the future are assigned both an “existing” and a “contingency” rating. The existing rating describes the property under its present condition, while the contingency rating describes it under possible future circumstances, such as if the property were restored. The existing rating is denoted by an upper case letter, and is the present rating of the building. The contingency rating, if any, is shown second, and is denoted by a lower case letter. Properties are also given a Multiple Property Rating (1, 2, or 3) based on an assessment of the significance of the area in which the property is located: properties within an Area of Primary Importance (an area that appears eligible for the National Register) are rated “1”; those in an Area of Secondary Importance are rated “2”; and those outside an identified district are rated “3.” A plus (+) or minus (-) sign indicates whether the property contributes or not to the API or ASI.

An Area of Primary Importance (API) is an historically or visually cohesive area or property grouping that contains a “high proportion of individual properties with ratings of ‘C’ or higher and appears eligible for the National Register of Historic Places either as a district or as a historically-related complex.” At least two-thirds of the properties must be “contributors” to the API, reflecting the API’s principal historical or architectural themes, and must not have undergone major alterations.
An Area of Secondary Importance (ASI) is “similar” to an API, however “potential contributors to the ASI are counted for purposes of the two-thirds threshold as well as contributors; [and] ASI’s do not appear eligible for the National Register.”

Applicability to the Proposed Project: The previously identified historic properties surrounding the project site are described below and the OCHS ratings for each property are provided. Further, any historic districts in the vicinity are identified.

Historic Preservation Element of the General Plan
In March 1994, the Oakland City Council adopted a Historic Preservation Element of the General Plan (Preservation Element), which was subsequently amended on July 21, 1998. The Element provides a broad, multi-faceted strategy that seeks to promote preservation of a wide range of historically significant older properties and districts in a manner that is reasonably balanced with other concerns and consistent with other City goals and objectives. The Preservation Element also set out a graduated system of ratings and designations resulting from the OCHS (discussed above). The Preservation Element provides several policies related to understanding impacts to historic resources under CEQA.

Chapter 5 of the Preservation Element describes Historic Preservation and Ongoing City Activities. The relevant policies to the proposed project include the following:

Historic Preservation Policy 3.1 - Avoid or Minimize Adverse Historic Preservation Impacts Related to Discretionary City Actions

*The City will make all reasonable efforts to avoid or minimize adverse effects on the Character-Defining Elements of existing or Potential Designated Historic Properties which could result from private or public projects requiring discretionary actions.*

Applicability to the Proposed Project: The proposed project is significantly taller than other buildings in the project vicinity, but allowed under current zoning. No historic resources will be materially or adversely affected by the construction of the new building. Given the close proximity of the proposed project to previously identified historic resources, particularly those directly adjacent, the project sponsor should take specific planning efforts to ensure protection of these historic resources during construction.
Historic Preservation Policy 4. 1 – Archaeological Resources

To protect significant archaeological resources, the City will take special measures for discretionary projects involving ground disturbance located in archaeologically sensitive areas.

Applicability to the Proposed Project: Since the proposed project would not involve construction of an underground garage, archaeological impacts are not anticipated.

Downtown Oakland Infill Design Guidelines
The City of Oakland does not appear to have any design guidelines or specific policies relating to infill in Downtown.

Downtown Area Plan
The City of Oakland does not have a current Specific Plan or Area Plan for Downtown; the City is just beginning a process to develop such a plan.

Oakland Design Guidelines for Corridors and Commercial Areas
These guidelines focus on Oakland’s major transit including major streets with heavy transit activity such as Telegraph, College, and San Pablo Avenues, Bancroft Avenue, and International Boulevard. While these guidelines may provide some context and information for the project sponsor they do not specifically apply to the project site.

City of Oakland CEQA Thresholds of Significance Guidelines
The City of Oakland updated its guidelines for Thresholds of Significance in May 2013. The document notes that it is intended to:

help clarify and standardize analysis and decision-making in the environmental review process in the City of Oakland, the City has established these CEQA Thresholds of Significance Guidelines (which have been in general use since at least 2002). These Thresholds are offered as guidance in preparing all environmental review documents (including Initial Studies and EIRs).

Applicability to the Proposed Project: The relevant thresholds included the following:

Aesthetics, Shadow and Wind
Projects that cast a shadow on an historic resource, as defined by CEQA Guidelines section 15064.5(a), such that the shadow would materially impair the resource’s historic significance by materially altering those physical characteristics of the resource that convey its historical significance and that justify its inclusion on or eligibility for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, California Register of Historical Resources, Local Register of historical resources, or a historical resource survey form (DPR Form 523) with a rating of 1-5.
Applicability to the Proposed Project: While the proposed project will be taller than other building in the immediate proximity to the site and may cast shadows on several historic resources in the area, these shadows would not materially alter any of the historic buildings such that they would no longer convey their significance. Nor would these shadows rise to a level where the historic resources would lose eligibility for inclusion in any federal, state or local registers.

Cultural and Historic Resources
The project would have a significant impact on the environment if it would:

1. Cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of an historical resource as defined in CEQA Guidelines section 15064.5. Specifically, a substantial adverse change includes physical demolition, destruction, relocation, or alteration of the resource or its immediate surroundings such that the significance of the historical resource would be “materially impaired.” The significance of an historical resource is “materially impaired” when a project demolishes or materially alters, in an adverse manner, those physical characteristics of the resource that convey its historical significance and that justify its inclusion on, or eligibility for inclusion on an historical resource list (including the California Register of Historical Resources, the National Register of Historical Resources, Local Register, or historical resources survey form (DPR Form 523) with a rating of 1-5);

2. Cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of an archaeological resource pursuant to CEQA Guidelines section 15064.5;

3. Directly or indirectly destroy a unique paleontological resource or site or unique geologic feature; or

4. Disturb any human remains, including those interred outside of formal cemeteries.

Applicability to the Proposed Project: The proposed site is currently occupied by a building that is over 50 years in age but that, as a result of this evaluation, does not qualify as a historic resource. Therefore, the project would not materially impair any historic resources on the project site. Further, it would not materially impair any of the adjacent historic resources, either within the same block or in adjacent blocks. While the proposed project would be considerably taller than the existing building stock surrounding the site, the proposed height of the building is allowed in the current zoning of the site. The proposed project would not demolish or materially alter, in an adverse manner, those physical characteristics of any historic resources that help convey their historical significance and that justify their inclusion on, or eligibility for inclusion on an historical resource list.
IV. CEQA and Historic Resources

When a proposed project may cause a “substantial adverse change” in the significance of an historical resource, the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requires the permitting agency to carefully consider the possible impacts before proceeding (Public Resources Code Section 21084.1). CEQA equates substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource with a significant effect on the environment (Section 21084.1). CEQA explicitly prohibits the use of a categorical exemption for projects that may cause such a change in an historical resource (Section 21084). “Substantial adverse change” in the significance of a historical resource is defined as “physical demolition, destruction, relocation, or alteration of the resource or its immediate surroundings such that the significance of an historical resource would be materially impaired.” Further, that the significance of an historical resource is “materially impaired” when a project:

- demolishes or materially alters in an adverse manner those physical characteristics of an historical resource that convey its historical significance and that justify its inclusion in, or eligibility for inclusion in the California Register of Historical Resources; or

- demolishes or materially alters in an adverse manner those physical characteristics that account for its inclusion in a local register of historical resources...or its identification in an historical resources survey...unless the public agency reviewing the effects of the project establishes by a preponderance of evidence that the resource is not historically or culturally significant; or

- demolishes or materially alters in an adverse manner those physical characteristics of a historical resource that convey its historical significance and that justify its eligibility for inclusion in the California Register of Historical Resources as determined by a lead agency for purposes of CEQA. (Guidelines Section 15064.5(b)).
V. Methodology

*a + h* and Watson Heritage Consulting conducted a site visit to the building at 1770 Webster. Both the exterior and the interior of the building were inspected. The interior was inspected to view a mural located on the first floor that dates to the opening of the building. Photographs of the building were taken of the exterior and interior. The neighboring buildings were photographed and common architectural features and elements were identified. A thorough review of the documentation on the surrounding historic resources was undertaken using the Oakland Cultural Heritage Survey (OCHS) archives to understand the history and context of the immediate urban environment.

Historic Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps for the area were located to gain a sense of how the area has developed historically. OCHS survey forms were reviewed for the individual historic resources and the historic districts that surround the site. Additional research on the development of downtown Oakland was conducted at the Oakland Public Library (History Room), the San Francisco Public Library, the Mechanic’s Institute Library, and online at the City of Oakland’s website and with other repositories of information. The team reviewed relevant City of Oakland Planning Department plans, policies and documents. A list of sources is provided in the Bibliography at the conclusion of this report.

VI. Summary of Oakland’s Downtown Development

The project site is within lands that once were part of the Rancho San Antonio granted to Luis Maria Peralta for his service to the Spanish government. The over 40,000-acre rancho included the present-day cities of Oakland, Berkeley, Alameda, and parts of San Leandro and Piedmont. Peralta’s grant was confirmed after Mexico gained independence from Spain in 1822, and the United States honored the land title when California entered the Union in 1848. Soon after, squatters had begun to use portions of Peralta’s undeveloped lands. The Gold Rush and subsequent statehood brought miners, businessmen, lumbermen and other speculators to Northern California. Early settlers to the area that became Oakland include Edson Adams, Andrew Moon, and Horace Carpentier, who set up camp on what had been Peralta lands. These trailblazers soon realized the area’s potential and engaged Jules Kellsersberger, a Swiss immigrant and former military engineer, to lay out a city, which was officially incorporated as Oakland in 1852.

Originally, Oakland encompassed the area roughly bordered by the estuary, Market Street, 14th Street and the Lake Merritt Channel. Broadway served as the “Main Street,” for the growing town. Early residents, numbering under one hundred, lived near the foot of Broadway close to the estuary. Development began moving toward the Oakland hills and ultimately eastward to what would become East Oakland.
A detail from the 1888 Woodward & Gamble Map of Oakland showing the area of downtown Oakland. (Source: David Rumsey Maps)

Oakland’s size and population began to expand in 1869, when the city became the terminus of the Central Pacific Railroad. With an accessible harbor, Oakland was strategically located and easily accessible to inland agricultural products. A period of rapid population expansion and physical growth followed, including the establishment of civic and commercial buildings and improved infrastructure. By the turn of the twentieth century, Oakland was beginning to attract businesses and residents away from the more populous San Francisco. Then, the 1906 earthquake and devastating San Francisco fire resulted in refugees from the burned out city across the bay pouring into East Bay towns. By 1910, Oakland had population of 150,000, more than double the 67,000 individuals counted in 1900.
Residential and commercial development in Oakland increased during the 1910s to further accommodate displaced San Francisco residents. A number of moderately priced hotels were constructed in downtown Oakland from 1910 and 1915 to house travelers coming to the Panama Pacific International Exposition (PPIE) hosted by San Francisco. This includes the Hotel Harrison, directly across the street from the project site, and a number of other hotels in the vicinity. Also during this period, older neighborhoods became more densely populated as new apartment buildings were constructed, shopping districts expanded, hotels for visitors to the increasingly popular city were developed, and new commercial centers began to take shape along busier thoroughfares. The post-earthquake development boom defined much of downtown Oakland, with a number of landmark skyscrapers and commercial buildings constructed during this era, including the Hotel Oakland, just across the street from the project site.

World War I also increased the number of industrial establishments in both downtown and along the waterfront, which in turn contributed to increased residential construction in areas made more easily accessible by the increased popularity and use of the automobile. Downtown Oakland saw a great number of buildings constructed during the 1920s including many structures in the blocks that surround the project site, such as the Advertiser and the Pelton-Faustina Buildings, both situated along 13th Street adjacent to the project site.

The Great Depression of the 1930s followed the post World War I prosperity of the 1920s. Like most of the country, Oakland fell into a period of financial instability in the 1930s, with little to no building occurring, especially downtown. Then with the preparations for and outset of World War II, Oakland entered an era of intense industrial, commercial and economic development. From 1940 to 1945, Oakland’s population increased by one third and by 1950, the population was nearly 385,000. The Port of Oakland became a major staging area for war operations in the Pacific and a center of wartime production of goods and materials. The economic impact of World War II on Oakland, and indeed the entire Bay Area, was significant, with effects felt in almost every sector and by the increasingly diverse communities represented in Oakland. Post War commercial building in downtown Oakland was fairly steady from the late 1940s into the early 1960s.

Between 1950 and 1980, Oakland’s population steadily decreased, though it again rose in the 1980s. Shifts in the economy and changes in manufacturing methods left many empty warehouses and office buildings along Oakland’s waterfront and in the downtown area. In the late 1980s and 1990s, many of these buildings were reclaimed for office and residential uses.
VII. Description of Subject Parcel and Adjacent Historic Resources

The project site is located at the intersection of Webster and 17th Street in downtown Oakland. The 1700 block of Webster and surrounding blocks were fully developed with mostly large, single-family residences in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Up until the early 1920s, 15th and 17th Streets did not cut through Harrison, Webster, and Franklin Streets, so Webster Street from 14th to 19th Streets was an unusually long, continuous block of residences. In the first decade of the 20th century, the most prominent buildings in the blocks surrounding 1700 Webster Street were the First Church of Christ Scientist at 17th and Franklin, the Federal Post Office under construction at the corner of 17th and Broadway, and the Maple Hall at the corner of Webster and 14th.2 The parcel that would eventually house a building at 1700 Webster Street contained dwellings at this time. By 1911, the area remained mostly single-family homes, with some larger apartments buildings having been constructed.3

The 1923 Sanborn Map indicates that 15th and 17th Streets were cut through Harrison, Webster, and Franklin Streets, creating space for commercial corridors in what had previously been a residential area. These changes were in response a report written by Werner Hegemann in 1915 that recommended new city plans and development for both Oakland and Berkeley.4 After the streets were cut through, the character of the area changed rapidly. Single-family homes were replaced by higher-density uses, such as large, mixed-use buildings with store-fronts at ground level and apartments or offices above (e.g., 1701-1709 Webster Street). New commercial uses included automotive-related buildings and large parking lots.

By 1950-51, all of the single-family homes in the blocks surrounding 1700 Webster had been removed and replaced by new uses, more commercial in focus.5 The east side of the 1700 block of Webster was largely dedicated to automobile parking, with the exception of the Mentone Arms apartment building at 1732-36 Webster Street. The 1951 Sanborn Map indicates that the parcels at 1700-1714 Webster Street contained a gas and oil station and surface automobile parking.
A detail of the 1951 Sanborn Map. The subject property, outlined in red, is labeled “gas and oil” and “auto parking.” The Mentone Arms apartments are immediately to the east. Across the street on Webster are a series of commercial buildings. (Source: Sanborn Map Company)
In 1964, Harry A. Bruno, architect, designed a new building for the Title Insurance and Trust Company to be located on the subject property. The Oakland Title Insurance and Guarantee Company was founded in Oakland, California in 1912. By the mid-20th century, the company had changed its named to the Title Insurance and Trust Company (Title Insurance). It was the largest title insurance company in the country, with offices throughout California and subsidiaries throughout the United States. In 1964, the company had outgrown its Alameda County headquarters at 1459 Franklin Street in Oakland and sought to expand into a new building at 1700 Webster Street. Title Insurance hired Oakland architect Harry A. Bruno, AIA, to draw up plans for the building; the builder was the Pacific Company, based in Berkeley. A building permit was filed on August 13, 1964, and construction crews broke ground at 1700-10 Webster on September 3, 1964. Title Insurance executives and local politicians and civic leaders attended the groundbreaking ceremony.

The groundbreaking ceremony, September 3, 1964 (Source: Oakland Tribune)
The Title Insurance and Trust Company building was completed for a total cost of $1.5 million and opened in September 1965. At the official opening ceremony, Title Insurance executives unveiled a 9 x 45-foot mural by nationally renowned, Oakland artist Robert C. Rishell depicting early East Bay history. The Title Insurance building served as headquarters for offices in Berkeley, Fremont, Hayward, San Leandro, and San Ramon. Offices on the first floor were used for escrow, accounting, and Alameda County management operations. The second floor was devoted to the title, plant department, and other customer services.

Harry A. Bruno, AIA – Architect of 1700 Webster Street
Harry Bruno was born in Tennessee in 1908. He attended high school in Bakersfield and graduated from the University of California, Berkeley in 1929. He practiced architecture in the East Bay for decades, commencing his career designing homes and later specializing in commercial architecture.

Bruno’s company, Mardeco (Marine Development Co.), oversaw many aspects of the revitalization of Oakland’s waterfront at Jack London Square. The project was intended to compete with San Francisco’s Fisherman’s Wharf. Bruno designed most of the original buildings in Jack London Square in the 1950s and 60s, including the Sea Wolf Restaurant, The Grotto, the Boatel, and the Port of Oakland offices. Among his many commissions throughout the Bay Area, Bruno designed the El Cerrito City Hall and Library; Santa Fe School and Jefferson School in Oakland; the Trans International Airport Building in Oakland; and dozens of residences in Oakland, Piedmont, Claremont Pines, Orinda, and Berkeley.
In 1969, Bruno received the national citation for excellence in Community Architecture from the American Institute of Architects. In 1970–71, he was president of the Oakland Chamber of Commerce. Bruno was named a member of the College of Fellows, American Institute of Architects in 1972. Other accomplishments include serving as president of the East Bay Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, and commissioner for the Bay Conservation and Development Commission for 11 years. Harry Bruno died in 2002.

**Robert Clifford Rishell**

Artist Robert Clifford Rishell was born in Oakland, CA on February 14, 1917. He received his B.A. and M.A. from the California College of Arts and Crafts where he was a protégé of Bay Area bohemian artist Xavier Martinez. Rishell helped organize the first exhibit of the Society of Western Artists in 1949. He was a member of the Bohemian Club. In 1974, Rishell was commissioned to paint the official portrait for Governor Ronald Reagan. He painted official portraits of Gene Autry for the National Cowboy Hall of Fame, and Clifford E. Rishell, his father and Oakland’s mayor from 1949 to 1961. Rishell was also commissioned to paint murals for prominent private and institutional buildings throughout the country. Rishell and his wife, artist Dorothy B. Rishell, were instrumental in the founding of the Oakland Museum. The Rishells painted murals together, including one for the Children’s Hospital of Oakland. Robert Rishell died in 1976.

**1700 Webster Street - Description**

The building at 1700-10 Webster is rectangular in plan and measures 163 x 150 feet. It is a two-story structure composed of steel beams and the exterior walls of concrete block masonry with a smooth plaster finish. The roof is flat. The interior includes 35,000 square feet of office space and 15,000 feet dedicated to a parking garage for 35 vehicles.

The main façades face Webster Street to the west and 17th Street to the south. Vertical panels of textured stucco stretching across the wall planes dominate the exterior façades. The panels are broken up at the first floor by a series of tall and narrow fixed metal sashes spaced evenly between columns sheathed in marbled stucco; these windows and columns span almost the entire west façade, and wrap around the corner, continuing along a portion of the south façade. At the second floor, pairs of small, square, fixed windows are inserted into the top of some of the vertical panels. Directly above the panels is a continuous ribbon of fixed, metal, clerestory windows spaced evenly between short columns sheathed in marbled stucco. Above that is a continuous, flat roof that wraps around the south and west façades. There are two pedestrian entrance at the west façade: one at the far right near the corner of the building, and one near the center of the façade. Each entrance contains metal doors and fixed windows. An overhanging flat roof (awning) that wraps around the corner protects the entrance at the southwest corner of the building. A vehicular entrance to the parking garage is at the left side of the west façade. At the east end of the south façade, there is a secondary pedestrian entrance and another vehicular entrance; a flat, projecting roof covers both entrances.
Above: The Webster Street (west) façade. (Photograph Shayne Watson, April 2015)
Below: The 17th Street (south) façade. (Photograph Shayne Watson, April 2015)
Above and left: Views of Rishell’s mural for the Title Insurance Company. (Photographs Shayne Watson, April 2015)
Description of Immediate Surroundings & Previously Identified Historic Resources

The project site is located at the northeast corner of 17th and Webster Streets in downtown Oakland. The project site is located across the street from the 17th Street Commercial Historic District. The 17th Street Commercial District encompasses a portion of 17th Street between Harrison and Franklin Streets. It is characterized by long, narrow commercial buildings constructed of brick or reinforced concrete with long bands of storefront windows at the ground level. The buildings within the historic district were constructed between 1923 and 1927. In 1984, the district was determined eligible for listing in the National Register as an “extremely cohesive group of low-rise commercial structures” that represents a “monument to the 1920s speculative building boom.”

The historic district map for 17th Street Commercial Historic District  
(Source: Oakland Cultural Heritage Survey files)
The block on which the project site is located (bounded by Webster, 17th, Harrison, and 19th Streets), as well as the blocks across the street, are developed with a mix of buildings ranging from one to four stories in height. Buildings immediately adjacent to the project site or within view of the project site are described below.

**East Side (even) 1700 Block of Webster**

Constructed in 1926–27, the building at 1732–36 Webster is Renaissance Revival apartment building called the Mentone Arms. It is four stories in height and I-shaped in plan. It is constructed of a reinforced concrete frame with tile curtain walls. The architect is Charles W. McCall, and the builder is C.H. Lawrence. The OCHS Local Historic Property Category is Local Register. The OCHS Rating is B+3.

![1732-1734 Webster – Mentone Arms Apartments](Photograph Shayne Watson, April 2015)
West Side (odd) 1700 Block of Webster

The Elvin Building at 350-370 17th Street is a 1926 store and office building. It is three stories in height and rectangular in plan. Exterior walls are reinforced concrete with terra cotta decoration. The architect is T. Marcel Chovin, and the engineer is Pierre Zucco & Co. The OCHS Local Historic Property Category is Potential Designated Historic Property. The OCHS Rating is Cb-1+. The building is located with an Area of Primary Importance (17th Street Commercial District).

1711-39 Webster is a 1924 decorative brick garage and store building. It is two stories in height and rectangular in plan. The ground floor contains a series of storefronts and a vehicle entrance for an interior parking garage. The architect is unknown; the builder is Marshall & Burks. The OCHS Local Historic Property Category is Local Register. The OCHS Rating is D3.
East Side (even) 1800 Block of Webster
The building at 1830 Webster/337-343 19th Street is a 1928 store and office building. It is two stories in height and rectangular in plan. Exterior walls are reinforced concrete. The ground floor contains a series of storefronts. The architect and builder are unknown. The OCHS Local Historic Property Category is Potential Designated Historic Property. The OCHS Rating is Dc3.
West Side (odd) 1800 Block of Webster
351-61 19th Street is a 1946 Art Deco store building. It is one story in height and rectangular in plan. Exterior walls are concrete. The architect is unknown, and the builder is Lewis Construction Company. The OCHS Local Historic Property Category is Local Register. The OCHS Rating is F3.

North Side (even) 300 Block of 17th
The A.B. Noffsinger Building 300-320 17th Street/1701 Harrison is a 1924 decorative brick store building. It is one story in height and rectangular in plan. Exterior walls are brick with decorative brickwork. The ground floor contains a series of storefronts. The architect is East Bay Planners, and the builder is F. Muller. The OCHS Local Historic Property Category is Potential Designated Historic Property. The OCHS Rating is Cb-1+. The building is located with an Area of Primary Importance (17th Street Commercial District).
South Side (odd) 300 Block of 17th
The Robert A. Howden Building at 325-43 17th Street/1628-30 Webster is a 1925 commercial building. It is two stories in height and rectangular in plan. Exterior walls are reinforced concrete with hollow tile curtains sheathed in glazed ceramic tiles. The architect and builder was McWethy & Greenleaf. The OCHS Local Historic Property Category is Local Register. The OCHS Rating is A1+. The building is located with an Area of Primary Importance (17th Street Commercial District). The building is also an Oakland Landmark.

329-337 17th Street / 1628-1630 Webster (Photograph Shayne Watson, April 2015)

The W.G. Gilmour Building at 351-73 17th Street/1635 Webster is a 1924 Mediterranean Revival store and office building. It is two stories in height and rectangular in plan. Exterior walls are stucco and hollow clay tile. The architect and builder is McWethy & Greenleaf. The OCHS Local Historic Property Category is Potential Designated Historic Property. The OCHS Rating is C1+. The building is located with an Area of Primary Importance (17th Street Commercial District).

351-373 17th Street (Photograph Shayne Watson, April 2015)
VIII. Criteria of Evaluation

Under that California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) resources that meet the criteria of the California Register of Historical Resources are considered historical resources for the purposes of CEQA. Determinations of historical significance require that several factors are considered including: the property’s history (both construction and use); the history and context of the surrounding community; an association with important persons or uses; the number of resources associated with the property; the potential for the resources to be the work of a master architect, builder, craftsman, landscape gardener, or artist; the historical, architectural or landscape influences that have shaped the property’s design and its pattern of use; and alterations that have taken place, and lastly how these changes may have affected the property’s historical integrity.

These issues must be explored thoroughly before a final determination of significance can be established. To be eligible for the California Register historic resources must possess both historic significance and retain historic integrity. The following are the four significance criteria of the California Register. Upon review of the criteria, if historic significance is identified, then an integrity analysis is conducted. To be eligible for the California Register, an historical resource must be significant at the local, state, or national level under at least one of the following criteria:

Criterion 1: Event or Patterns of Events
It is associated with events or patterns of events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of local or regional history, or the cultural heritage of California or the United States.

Historical research has determined that the building at 1700 Webster Street in downtown Oakland does not qualify individually under Register Criterion 1: Event/Patterns of Events. While the building possesses an association with the development of downtown Oakland, it does not appear to be individually significant within this context. It does not possess an association with an important event that rises to a level of significance that would justify individual eligibility for the California Register.

Criterion 2: Important Person(s)
It is associated with the lives of persons important to local, California, or national history.

Historical research has determined that the building at 1700 Webster Street in downtown Oakland is not associated with any individuals who have had an important role in local, California or national history. While Robert Rishell was an important artist, his association with this property and his work displayed inside the building do not rise to a level of individual significance under this criteria of evaluation. Further, no important persons appear to have had a long-term association with the Title Company that constructed the building. As a result, this building does not qualify under California Register Criterion 2: Important Person(s).
**Criterion 3: Design/Construction**

*It 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.*

The building at 1700 Webster Street in Downtown Oakland is associated with Harry A. Bruno, architect. While Bruno’s work appears to have been significant within the development of Jack London Square, this building does not have the same level of significance within his career. Bruno does not appear to rise to a level of master architect or designer in association with this particular building. While the building has a modern aesthetic it does not have the qualities of a mid-century modern building that would elevate it to individual eligibility under Criterion 3.

Robert Rishell mural, depicting the history of the East Bay, inside 1700 Webster Street is a departure from his more well known works, as it does not display the distinctive stark contrast of light and shadow for which much of Rishell’s work is known. However, the mural should be considered a significant piece of art, and possibly an historic object under the California Register criteria. The mural is significant in the cultural annals of California as representing the work of a master artist, and possessing high artistic values. It is an important representation of the range of his projects.

**Criterion 4: Information Potential**

*It has yielded, or has the potential to yield, information important to the prehistory or history of the local area, California or the nation.*

Evaluation of potential archeological resources was outside the scope of this report.

**IX. Assessment of Potential Project Impacts to Historic Resources**

The building at 1700 Webster was assigned an Oakland Cultural Heritage Survey (OCHS) rating of F3 in 1997, which means that the property was less than 45 years old and not located in a historic district when it was originally surveyed. The building is now 50 years old. The building is not currently a Designated Historic Property (local landmark or Heritage Property). It is not within the boundaries a Designated Historic District. Furthermore, the building is not located within Areas of Primary or Secondary Importance. It is not listed in the California Register of Historical Resources or the National Register of Historic Places.

Section 15065 of the CEQA Guidelines mandates a finding of significance if a project would eliminate important examples of the major periods of California history or pre-history. The proposed project would not involve demolition, destruction, relocation or alteration of any known historic resources. Since the current building on the project site does not meet the criteria for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources nor is a
resource previously identified in Oakland’s Local Register of Historic Resources, it is not a historic resource under CEQA, therefore there would not be any impacts to historic resources if the building were demolished to accommodate new construction on the site.

Based on the potential that the Robert Rishell mural inside the building at 1700 Webster Street may be an historic object, the Project applicant has committed to preserving the mural by donating it to the Oakland Museum or other appropriate public or art institution. The mural appears to be painted on canvas, and then was applied to the wall. Removal of the mural without incurring damage appears quite feasible based on initial inspection by an art conservator. The mural’s historic characteristic relates only to the artist and is not associated with the building in which it was placed. Relocation of the mural would not materially damage it and would not result in “substantial adverse change” to the significance of this art object. With the applicant’s commitment to preserve the mural, the proposed project would not cause a “substantial adverse change” in the significance of a historical object and the exception under CEQA Guidelines §15300.2(d) regarding impacts to historic resources would not apply.

Further, the proposed project would not materially impair any of the adjacent historic resources, either within the same block or in adjacent blocks. While the building would be considerably taller than the existing building stock surrounding the site, the proposed height of the building is allowed in the current zoning of the site. Although the building would likely cast shadows on nearby historic resources, the extent of the shadows would not render those historic resources ineligible for inclusion in any federal, state or local registers. Further, the proposed project would not impair the significance of those historic resources surrounding the site.

X. Conclusion & Recommendations

The proposed project for 1700 Webster Street in Downtown Oakland would not result in “substantial adverse change” in the significance of any known historic resources. The Robert Rishell mural should be removed from the building prior to demolition and this should be a condition of approval for the project and verified in writing by the project proponent.

The construction of the proposed new building near designated historic resources would not impair either individually significant or historic district contributors such that the significance of these resources would be materially impaired. While the proposed project would include new construction located adjacent to individually significant historic resources and near, but not within the boundaries of historic districts, it would not result in the removal of any character-defining features of the nearby historic districts. While the new construction is larger in scale than the buildings in the surrounding area, the design of the lower levels of the taller structure is generally compatible with the overall character of the area. As the project design progress, City Planning Staff should review the proposed design of the building base for compatibility with the neighboring historic structures.
XI. Bibliography


California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Chapter 3, Article 5. California Environmental Quality Act.


City of Oakland, Oakland Cultural Heritage Survey. Files and Inventory Forms. Also, specifically interview notes with Harry A. Bruno.


City of Oakland. Zoning Map.


Sanborn Map Company. Insurance Maps of Oakland, California, various years.


XII. Endnotes

1 Summary of Downtown Oakland Development summarized from Beth Bagwell, *Oakland: The*
2 Sanborn Fire Insurance Company Map, 1903.
3 Sanborn Fire Insurance Company Map, 1911.
6 Oakland Cultural Heritage Survey, Building Permit #018293, August 13, 1964.
13 Information on career of Harry A. Bruno extracted from interview notes in the collections of the Oakland Cultural Heritage Survey Office.
14 Information on Rishell was compiled from: www.highnoon.com - website of Western Americana; bodegabayheritagegallery.com; and askart.com.