



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

## Report to the Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: June 7, 2023 REPORT NO. HRB-23-021

HEARING DATE: June 22, 2023

SUBJECT: **ITEM #8 – Ocean Beach Pier**

RESOURCE INFO: [California Historical Resources Inventory Database \(CHRID\) link](#)

APPLICANT: City of San Diego; represented by Heritage Architecture and Planning

LOCATION: Western terminus of Niagara Avenue west of Ocean Front Way, Ocean Beach Community, Council District 2

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the Ocean Beach Pier located at the western terminus of Niagara Avenue west of Ocean Front Way as a historical resource.

### STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate the Ocean Beach Pier located at the western terminus of Niagara Avenue west of Ocean Front Way as a historical resource under HRB Criterion A with a period of significance of 1966-1977 and under HRB Criterion C with a period of significance of 1966-1968. The designation includes the restaurant structure and lifeguard watch tower. This recommendation is based on the following findings:

1. The resource is a special element of the historical and economic development of the Ocean Beach Community and the City as a whole and retains integrity to its 1966-1977 period of significance. Specifically, the pier immediately became a tourist attraction after its 1966 construction and attracted anglers and tourists who contributed to the economic growth of the surrounding area. Additionally, during the immediate period after the pier's construction, Ocean Beach transitioned from a predominantly single-family residential area to a dense, multi-family residential community with modern day tourist amenities.
2. The resource embodies the distinctive characteristics through the retention of character defining features of the fishing pier typology and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its 1966-1968 period of significance. Specifically, the resource extends over the deep water of the Pacific Ocean, features pedestrian accessibility, and exhibits a walking surface supported by pillars, concrete construction, fish cleaning stations, restaurant and

lifeguard tower. Additionally, the structure was the longest concrete pier on the west coast when it was completed in 1966.

## BACKGROUND

This item is being brought before the Historical Resources Board in conjunction with a preliminary review application to determine whether or not the building is historically significant as part of a constraints analysis for future development. The resource is a fishing pier that extends into the Pacific Ocean and is located at the western terminus of Niagara Avenue in the Ocean Beach Community.

The property has not been identified in any historic surveys, as the subject area has not been previously surveyed.

The historic name of the resource, the Ocean Beach Pier, has been identified consistent with the Board's adopted naming policy and reflects the name historically associated with the resource.

## ANALYSIS

A Historical Resource Technical Report was prepared by Dudek, which concludes that the resource is significant under HRB Criteria A and C and staff concurs. This determination is consistent with the *Guidelines for the Application of Historical Resources Board Designation Criteria*, as follows.

*CRITERION A - Exemplifies or reflects special elements of the City's, a community's or a neighborhood's historical, archaeological, cultural, social, economic, political, aesthetic, engineering, landscaping or architectural development.*

The Ocean Beach Pier opened to the public in 1966 after years of planning, fundraising and construction and played a pivotal role in the area's historical and economic development. At the time of its construction, the Ocean Beach Pier was the longest concrete pier on the west coast. Seven thousand people attended the pier's opening at which Governor Edmund Gerald Brown declared it to be "one of the finest fishing piers in the entire United States" that would bring "immediate economic benefits to Ocean Beach." The construction of the pier was a catalyst for the shift in Ocean Beach's development towards a more dense, multi-family residential area.

According to the 2015 [Ocean Beach Historic Context Statement](#), the area began to develop as a resort town around 1887 when the first subdivision map was filed within the limits of the current community planning area. By 1888 developers William H. Carson and Frank J. Higgins completed the construction of a resort hotel at the foot of Niagara Avenue. Transportation to the area was poor and without improvements, such as water and sewer connections, the area did not develop as anticipated during this period. By 1900 the Cliff House had burned down and the area was primarily used as a remote vacation and picnic destination with only a few scattered shacks.

In 1907 David Charles (D.C.) Collier Jr., the "father of Ocean Beach," began a new campaign to subdivide Ocean Beach. He saw potential in the area and began to grade streets, installed water, gas and electricity infrastructure, constructed a functional streetcar line and built a two-room

schoolhouse in order to entice buyers and residents. Completion of the streetcar line resulted in a sharp increase in lot sales and by 1910 there were as many as 100 houses completed and seven businesses established. Fellow developer Willson Chamberlain subdivided the northwestern portion of the current community planning area in 1909 and had already constructed a plunge or "bathing pavilion" on the sand at the foot of Voltaire Street in 1908.

The height of Ocean Beach's resort era occurred between 1913 and 1930 when the area was a popular destination for vacationers and those seeking a weekend getaway. In 1913 Chamberlain and his business associates in the Ocean Beach Company built Wonderland Park, San Diego's first large amusement park on the site of the bathing pavilion at Abbott and Voltaire Streets. The 8 acre park was extravagant and included a grand entrance accented by two white towers, the largest roller coaster on the coast, a casino that included a large dance pavilion and café, a zoo, giant water slide and over 40 attractions. The park was incredibly successful and brought an estimated 35,000 visitors to Ocean Beach on its first day of operation. The increased popularity and development brought additional improvements to Ocean Beach including the installation of a sewer system in 1913-1914, the establishment of the first lifeguard service, the construction of a Mission Revival style Fire Station on the north side of Newport Avenue near Cable Street and the opening of a small branch library in 1916. By 1915 Wonderland was overshadowed by the Panama-California Exposition headed by Director-General D.C. Collier and the struggling amusement park closed its doors soon after a 1916 flood destroyed the roller coaster. Despite Wonderland's closure, Ocean Beach remained extremely popular with weekend visitors and the area continued to develop. Catering to those who were seeking recreation, leisure and social activity, local businessmen continued to open dance halls, plunges and other amusements. As social dynamics changed, Ocean Beach began to become a destination for young people and their friends who were visiting without their families. The surfing culture began to grow in popularity and local swimming instructor and lifeguard George Freeth became the local surfing expert. In 1925 Mission Beach's Belmont Amusement Park was completed which eventually drew visitors away from Ocean Beach. By 1930 the stock market crash contributed to the end of the resort era but improvements to the area ensured that it would continue to thrive as a year-round residential community.

In the 1920s the area had begun to transition from a seaside resort to a permanent community. Sanborn Maps from 1921 indicate that the densest area of development at this time was along the coast and in the improved subdivisions in the northern portion of Ocean Beach. Most structures were small, individual dwelling units concentrated in the areas closest to the streetcar line with some apartments and bungalow courts scattered throughout. Commercial development was found almost exclusively along Newport Avenue. The school and local churches were located near the center of the community at Sunset Cliffs and Santa Monica Avenue. World War II resulted in a development and population boom doubling the population of Ocean beach between 1940 and 1950 from 12,500 to 25,000.

Prior to the construction of the current pier, there were two earlier structures used for fishing in the Ocean Beach area. A wooden bridge constructed in 1915 to connect Ocean Beach to Mission Beach was frequently used by anglers until it was torn down in 1951. The other was a pier, built out of salvaged railroad ties, constructed in 1941 at the foot of Del Monte Avenue. By 1951 the Del Monte Avenue pier was condemned by the City and torn down two years later. After both piers were demolished there was still significant public interest in construction of a new fishing pier. In March of 1964 plans began for a proposed new pier at the end of Niagara Avenue which would cost

\$736,000. The City worked with the state Wildlife Conservation Board to finance the new structure and construction bids opened in November of 1964. Plans called for a Y-shaped pier with one mile of railing for anglers and a structure 1,800 feet from shore that would accommodate a lunch counter, live bait, fishing gear rental shop and public restrooms. Because significant private funds were needed to finance the pier, the project was highly publicized and multiple fundraising events were held. The Ocean Beach Pier finally opened to the public on July 2, 1966 with a ribbon cutting ceremony attended by Then-Governor Edmund Gerald Brown and San Diego Mayor Frank Curran and three days of community celebration.

Prior to the construction of the Ocean Beach Pier, the majority of residential properties in the surrounding area were small scale, single-family residences or bungalow courts. Between 1966 and 1972 there was an increase in development with the majority of vacant lots being developed with multi-family apartment buildings. By 1977 Ocean Beach's population density increased, particularly around the Ocean Beach Pier, with multiple single-family residences being demolished for the construction of multi-family apartment buildings. As Ocean Beach again became a tourist destination, the Pier was a major recreational activity and commercial draw to the area.

Significance Statement: The resource is a special element of the historical and economic development of Ocean Beach and the city as a whole and retains integrity to its 1966-1977 period of significance. Specifically, the pier immediately became a tourist attraction after its 1966 construction and attracted anglers and tourists who contributed to the economic growth of the surrounding area. Additionally, during the immediate period after the pier's construction, Ocean Beach transitioned from a predominantly single-family residential area to a dense, multi-family residential community with modern day tourist amenities. Therefore, staff recommends designation under HRB Criterion A.

*CRITERION B - Is identified with persons or events significant in local, state or national history.*

Research into the Ocean Beach Pier did not reveal any individuals who could be considered historically significant in local, state or national history. Furthermore, no events of local, state or national significance are known to have occurred at the subject property. Therefore, the property is not eligible for designation under HRB Criterion B.

*CRITERION C - Embodies distinctive characteristics of a style, type, period or method of construction or is a valuable example of the use of natural materials or craftsmanship.*

The resource was designed in 1966 as a fishing pier by the architectural firm of Lykos & Goldhammer Architecture & Engineering. At the time of its completion the Ocean Beach Pier was the longest concrete pier on the west coast. The Y-shaped pier is located at the terminus of Niagara Avenue and extends 1,971 feet from the end of Niagara Avenue into the Pacific Ocean. At its western end the structure extends 360 feet to the south and 193 feet to the north. The pier is supported by 167 prestressed octagonal concrete pilings that extend into the ocean floor. The pier can be accessed by a concrete staircase with metal handrails on the northern side or directly from Niagara Avenue. The pedestrian walkway is clad in smooth-faced concrete with metal expansion joints placed throughout the length of the pier. Approximately 130 feet down the length of the pier is a metal security gate with the words "Ocean Beach Fishing Pier." The railings are wood with chain link fence or composition wood on the lower portion. Concrete benches, metal fish cleaning stations, water fountains, streetlights and water spickets are located throughout the length of the

pier. A rectangular structure containing a restaurant and public restroom constructed in 1966 is located approximately 1,530 feet down the length of the pier. At the far northwestern end is the rectangular lifeguard watch tower constructed in 1968.

Modifications to the resource since its date of construction are limited and include the addition of the lifeguard watch tower in 1968. Over the years, multiple repair projects have occurred and include the replacement of numerous sections of pedestrian handrails, benches, metal fish cleaning stations, water fountains, streetlights and water spickets. Additionally, the pedestrian walkway was repaved at an unknown date. These modifications do not impair integrity of design, material, workmanship or feeling as it relates to HRB Criterion C.

Fishing piers are built to provide boatless anglers with access to deeper water that would otherwise be inaccessible from the shore. A fishing pier eliminates the need to cast into deeper water and often extends farther out into the water than a pleasure pier. Character defining features of this construction typology include extension into a deep body of water over which it is raised, pedestrian accessibility, a walking surface supported by pillars and concrete construction. Secondary utilitarian features include fish cleaning stations and water spickets that convey its intended use.

Significance Statement: The resource continues to convey the historic significance of the fishing pier typology by embodying the historic characteristics associated with the typology; including extension over the deep water of the Pacific Ocean, pedestrian accessibility, a walking surface supported by pillars, concrete construction, fish cleaning stations, restaurant and lifeguard tower. Additionally, the structure was the longest concrete pier on the west coast when it was completed in 1966. Therefore, staff recommends designation under HRB Criterion C.

*CRITERION D - Is representative of a notable work of a master builder, designer, architect, engineer, landscape architect, interior designer, artist or craftsman.*

The Ocean Beach Pier was designed by the firms of Lykos & Goldhammer and Ferver-Dorland & Associates. Lykos & Goldhammer and Ferver-Dorland & Associates have not been established by the Historical Resources Board as Master Architects, Designers, Builders or Engineers, and there is insufficient information to designate either firm as such at this time. Therefore, staff does not recommend designation under HRB Criterion D.

*CRITERION E - Is listed or has been determined eligible by the National Park Service for listing on the National Register of Historic Places or is listed or has been determined eligible by the State Historical Preservation Office for listing on the State Register of Historical Resources.*

The Ocean Beach Pier has not been listed on or determined eligible for listing on the State Register of Historical Resources by the State Historical Preservation Office or on the National Register by the National Park Service. The Technical Report prepared by Dudek concluded that resource was eligible for designation under National Register and California Register Criteria A/1 and C/3 and the property could be listed or formally determined eligible for designation on either register at a later date. Therefore, the property is not eligible for designation under HRB Criterion E at this time.

*CRITERION F - Is a finite group of resources related to one another in a clearly distinguishable way or is a geographically definable area or neighborhood containing improvements which have a special character,*

*historical interest or aesthetic value or which represent one or more architectural periods or styles in the history and development of the City.*

The property is located within the boundaries of the Ocean Beach Cottage Emerging Historic District; however, it does not contribute to the district's historic significance as a seaside resort and vacation home area between 1887 and 1931. Therefore, the property is not eligible for designation under HRB Criterion F.

#### OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Designation brings with it the responsibility of maintaining the building in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards. The benefits of designation include the availability of the Mills Act Program for reduced property tax; the use of the more flexible Historical Building Code; flexibility in the application of other regulatory requirements; the use of the Historical Conditional Use Permit which allows flexibility of use; and other programs which vary depending on the specific site conditions and owner objectives. If the property is designated by the HRB, conditions related to restoration or rehabilitation of the resource may be identified by staff during the Mills Act application process, and included in any future Mills Act contract.

#### CONCLUSION

Based on the information submitted and staff's field check, it is recommended that the Ocean Beach Pier located at the western terminus of Niagara Avenue be designated under HRB Criterion A as a special element of the historical and economic development of the Ocean Beach Community and the City as a whole with a period of significance of 1966-1977 and under HRB Criterion C as a good example of the fishing pier typology with a period of significance of 1966-1968. The designation includes the restaurant structure and lifeguard watch tower.



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Suzanne Segur  
Senior Planner/ HRB Liaison  
Development Services Department

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Attachment(s):

1. Draft Resolution
2. Applicant's Historical Report under separate cover

RESOLUTION NUMBER N/A  
ADOPTED ON 6/22/2023

WHEREAS, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego held a noticed public hearing on 6/22/2023, to consider the historical designation of the **Ocean Beach Pier**(owned by City of San Diego Department of Real Estate and Airport Management, 1200 3rd Avenue, Suite 1700, San Diego, CA 92101) located at **The western terminus of Niagara Avenue west of Ocean Front Way, San Diego, CA 92107**, further described as in the City of San Diego, County of San Diego, State of California; and

WHEREAS, in arriving at their decision, the Historical Resources Board considered the historical resources report prepared by the applicant, the staff report and recommendation, all other materials submitted prior to and at the public hearing, inspected the subject property and heard public testimony presented at the hearing; and

WHEREAS, the property would be added to the Register of Designated Historical Resources as **Site No. 0**, and

WHEREAS, designated historical resources located within the City of San Diego are regulated by the Municipal Code (Chapter 14, Article 3, Division 2) as such any exterior modifications (or interior if any interior is designated) shall be approved by the City, this includes but is not limited to modifications to any windows or doors, removal or replacement of any exterior surfaces (i.e. paint, stucco, wood siding, brick), any alterations to the roof or roofing material, alterations to any exterior ornamentation and any additions or significant changes to the landscape/ site.

NOW, THEREFORE,

BE IT RESOLVED, the Historical Resources Board based its designation of the Ocean Beach Pier on the following findings:

(1) The property is historically significant under CRITERION A as a special element of the historical and economic development of the Ocean Beach Community and the City as a whole and retains integrity to its 1966-1977 period of significance. Specifically, the pier immediately became a tourist attraction after its 1966 construction and attracted anglers and tourists who contributed to the economic growth of the surrounding area. Additionally, during the immediate period after the pier's construction, Ocean Beach transitioned from a predominantly single-family residential area to a dense, multi-family residential community with modern day tourist amenities. This finding is further supported by the staff report, the historical research report, and written and oral evidence presented at the designation hearing.

(2) The property is historically significant under CRITERION C as a resource that embodies the distinctive characteristics through the retention of character defining features of the fishing pier typology and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its 1966-1968 period of significance. Specifically, the resource extends over the deep water of the Pacific Ocean, features pedestrian accessibility, and exhibits a walking surface supported by pillars, concrete construction, fish cleaning stations, restaurant and lifeguard tower. Additionally, the structure was the longest concrete pier on the west coast when it was completed in 1966. This finding is further supported by the staff report, the historical research report, and written and oral evidence presented at the designation hearing.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, in light of the foregoing, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego hereby approves the historical designation of the above named property. The designation includes the parcel and exterior of the building as Designated Historical Resource **Site No. 0**.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the designation shall include the restaurant structure and lifeguard watch tower.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the Secretary to the Historical Resources Board shall cause this resolution to be recorded in the office of the San Diego County Recorder at no fee, for the benefit of the City of San Diego, and with no documentary tax due.

Vote:

BY: \_\_\_\_\_  
TIM HUTTER, Chair  
Historical Resources Board

APPROVED: MARA W. ELLIOTT,  
CITY ATTORNEY

BY: \_\_\_\_\_  
LINDSEY SEBASTIAN,  
Deputy City Attorney

RECORDING REQUESTED BY  
CITY OF SAN DIEGO  
DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DEPARTMENT

**WHEN RECORDED MAIL TO**

HISTORICAL RESOURCES BOARD  
ATTN: HRB SECRETARY  
1222 FIRST AVENUE, MS 501  
SAN DIEGO, CA 92101

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SPACE ABOVE THIS LINE FOR RECORDER'S USE

RESOLUTION NUMBER **N/A**

HISTORICAL DESIGNATION OF PROPERTY ON

**Ocean Beach Pier, San Diego, CA**

ASSESSOR PARCEL NUMBER **-00**

HISTORICAL RESOURCES BOARD NUMBER **0**