



**SANTA MONICA
CONSERVANCY**
Celebrating Our Architectural Heritage

May 9, 2020

Re: Suspension of the Landmarks Commission
Mayor McKeown, Mayor Pro Tem O'Day, Council Members, City Manager
Dilg and Planning and Community Development Director Martin,

We cannot tell you how surprised and shocked the Santa Monica Conservancy was to learn, from a press dispatch late Wednesday, that City staff and City Council, intend to suspend the Landmarks Commission. We studied the Plan carefully in advance of the Council meeting of May 5; nowhere was this disclosed. The Plan was candid about the ARB but evasive and secretive about the Landmarks Commission.

Our comments on the Plan were intended to help streamline the City process to reduce costs, and to offer ways to support the program by enlisting volunteer historic preservation experts to support City staff.

The Landmarks Commission was established by City ordinance in 1975 in honor of Santa Monica's Centennial, and its operations have become an established function of City governance. Unlike many other City commissions, which serve City residents in an advisory role, the Landmarks Commission has a legislative and quasi-judicial role. A glance at the roster of designated landmarks and historic districts reveals how essential this role has been to defining Santa Monica's distinctive identity and sense of place. Historic preservation is one of the core community values in the LUCE and is a valued part of our urban environment for local residents. To suspend the Landmarks Commission places qualified historic resources at risk. With the City's interest in approving new development projects to get our economy thriving again, potential historic resources may be demolished without consideration of alternatives.

The Landmarks Commission is a dedicated group of experts who serve essential functions in reviewing demolition applications, endorsing landmark and historic district status for qualified properties, and in reviewing requests from property owners for changes and additions. Without professionally qualified staff in-house, since obviously the Historic Preservation Officer position cannot be filled, the limitations proposed on these important responsibilities of City government may result in numerous adverse impacts to the City's historic resources.

The Board of the Santa Monica Conservancy remains committed to support, assist and advise City Council and Director David Martin about alternatives that may allow this program to continue within the parameters of our fiscal crisis, while maintaining a necessary legal distance from its implementation. We hope to talk to you very soon about this – digitally of course.

Sincerely,
Tom Cleys, President of the Board of Directors
Carol Lemlein, Vice President and Acting Executive Director
Ruthann Lehrer
Nina Fresco
David Kaplan