



**SANTA MONICA
CONSERVANCY**
Celebrating Our Architectural Heritage

May 4, 2020

Re: Item 8A: A Plan for Our Future

Mayor McKeown, Mayor Pro Tem O'Day, and Council Members,

The Santa Monica Conservancy, in response to the "Plan for the Future," acknowledges the severe fiscal limitations we are facing. We are grateful that City staff has recognized the importance of ensuring that our historic resources are preserved. However, unlike many City programs and services that can be suspended temporarily, once the City loses a historic resource it can never get it back.

During this difficult time, we would like to offer our resources, expertise, and volunteers to help the City make cost savings while avoiding placing unnecessary financial burdens on those who seek designation or alterations to designated properties. We are also very concerned that no aspect of the preservation program is mentioned as a priority for restoration. We hope you will agree that these suggestions merit further conversations with staff before the Plan is final.

The Plan for the Future makes no mention of the **Landmarks Commission**, volunteer historic preservation experts who play a fundamental role in designation and in review of alterations. **This important legislative body should continue to perform its critical role.** For the City, the question is that of staff support; without qualified historic preservation expertise in-house, the City has become increasingly dependent on outside professional consultants. This was one of the primary motivations for the request for a Historic Preservation Officer, a position now eliminated. **The Historic Preservation Officer position should be reinstated when feasible; it would be a cost savings measure significantly reducing the need for outside consultants.**

Designation of Historic Resources: The Plan proposes to place the cost of outside consultants on the applicant. This will be a significant financial hardship for many applicants, placing a burden on those benefitting the community by preserving our historic resources. Given these extreme financial circumstances, **an ad hoc group of volunteer consultants should be formed to reduce or eliminate the need for outside consultants.**

The Plan also proposes a new requirement: having applicants pay for their own assessment as part of a designation application. This is unnecessary; we recommend reducing the burden on staff by adding a section for the applicant to apply the criteria for designation. **The Conservancy is always available to help any applicant for a worthy potential landmark prepare an adequate and complete application.** City staff can direct applicants who need help to contact us.

Review of Alterations to Historic Resources: In the staff proposal, review of alternations is shifted entirely to staff and by-passes the Landmarks Commission even for major alterations and additions. **We believe that Commission review should**

continue and take advantage of the suggestions above to reduce costs to the City *and* to applicants.

Demolition Permit Review: The proposal outlined in the Plan is unclear and appears to provide the most significant risk with respect to irreplaceable losses of our historic properties. **We hope to work with staff to come up with an alternative process to ensure appropriate demo review.**

Withdrawal from the Certified Local Government Program: The rationale for this is unclear. It would have some potentially negative side effects such as losing access to grant funding and reducing the City's role in review of local projects using state or federal funds.

As an additional note regarding the **Annenberg Community Beach House Tours:** We have operated these tours in partnership with the City for over 10 years with a creative and dedicated group of volunteers. We have been discussing accommodation to social distancing requirements with staff and **we believe we would be able to offer an appropriately modified program at the Beach House at minimal cost to the City when the site is reopened to the public.** Our expectation would be that, as economic recovery takes place, this program would also be a priority for restoration to fulfill the operating agreement with the Annenberg Foundation.

Our hope is for the Conservancy to work with the City to further evaluate ways for the historic preservation program to function well, while reducing financial burdens on the City and on applicants. **We are willing and eager to help in any way that we can.**

Sincerely,

Tom Cleys, President of the Board of Directors

Carol Lemlein, Vice President and Acting Executive Director