



May 25, 2020

Re: May 26 Agenda Item 8A – An Update on the City Restructuring....

Chair McKeown and Councilmembers,

As you continue to give direction to staff on your priorities for FY 2020-2021 and beyond, we urge you to keep in mind the essential role the Landmarks Commission performs for the City. The Commission, established by City ordinance in 1976, is an integral part of the City's key planning documents: the General Plan (with a Historic Preservation Element), the LUCE, the DCP, and is recognized in the EIRs that affect our historic resources. *In fact, the continued suspension of the Commission is itself a potential CEQA issue, as this discretionary action would make adverse impacts to the City's historic resources much more likely.*

We urge you to support reinstatement of the Landmarks Commission to exercise its core functions:

- To review and decide upon applications for landmark/structure of merit designations
- To review and approve major Certificate of Appropriateness applications (minor changes are handled by staff under current procedures)
- To review demolition permit applications and consider preservation options for qualified properties.

We understand that reductions in the cost of the preservation program are necessary. On May 19 we met with Interim City Manager Dilg and Planning Director Martin to make recommendations regarding changes to streamline the processes, reduce the costs of consultant reports and required staff time, and also reduce costs for applicants. The Conservancy is committed to work with staff and with applicants to make this possible. *Your support for that effort would be very helpful.*

In addition, we are very concerned about the Budget Taskforce proposal for fee changes in the preservation program. *We ask you to request that any changes to the current fee structure adhere to the precedent set by the proposal on Community Services fees, specifically recognizing that preservation is, in fact, a community benefit recognized in the LUCE and other plans, and not merely a benefit to the owners of historic properties. As such, continued partial subsidy of these fees is justified because they address a longstanding City priority which contributes to the welfare of our residents. Cost reductions such as those we have recommended to staff are essential to making this feasible.*

Finally, we request that you put the professionally-trained Historic Preservation Officer position on the list for restoration as soon as the budget permits. Having this expertise in house will provide additional cost reductions by further reducing the reliance on consultants.

We look forward to continuing to work with you and City staff to make the continuation of our exemplary historic preservation possible as you realign our budget priorities to deal with today's extraordinary challenges.

Sincerely,

Carol Lemlein and Ruthann Lehrer
Santa Monica Conservancy Board of Directors