



P.O. BOX 653
SANTA MONICA, CA 90406
310-496-3146
www.smconservancy.org

September 15, 2023

Dear Carey,

We'd like to give you an update on our views on the SMMUSD Feasibility Study for the Civic and our thoughts as you move forward to make a formal proposal to the City. The Santa Monica Conservancy places a high priority on the preservation of the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium. Mothballed in 2013, it has been deteriorating in the decade since due to the need for very costly seismic and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) retrofits. Any landmark that is out of service and vacant for years risks demolition whether by redevelopment, vandalism, or seismic events.

The Civic Auditorium is an iconic work of master architect Welton Becket exemplifying a Mid-Century Modern style. As a historic resource the building has a very high degree of integrity, retaining nearly all of its original features both outside and in.

The Conservancy has identified the following critical priorities for any proposal for the rehabilitation of the Civic Auditorium:

- All of the work must be completed in compliance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards.
- The landmark must remain under the purview of the Santa Monica Landmarks Commission for design review, following to the procedures in the Landmarks Ordinance.
- The property should not be fenced or screened, limiting physical or visual access to the parcel or views toward the Civic Auditorium Center.
- The building's cultural and architectural history should be shared through historic programming, school curricula, cultural memory projects, and/or interpretive displays.

Preservation Standards as a Basis for Upgrades. Significant seismic and ADA upgrades will be required of any user just to occupy the building. Your Feasibility Study looked at those unavoidable repairs and upgrades as well as the work that would be needed for the Civic Auditorium to meet School District needs - to use the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium as a multi-purpose facility with a focus on athletic programs while planning for other community uses. Your proposal added additional features and amenities to meet modern expectations for support of those uses. The study examined ways to repair and modify the building in the context of the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Rehabilitation of Historic Properties, guided by experienced historic preservation professional consultants. After the study was released to the public, Santa Monica Conservancy representatives met with your staff and historic preservation consultants to ask questions and provide comments on the Feasibility Study. We have concerns about some yet unresolved design issues, such as how the east and west wings can be modified but still conform to the Standards, and modifications to the Auditorium interior; and we hope to continue to engage collaboratively with your design team on those issues. The

project must successfully meet the Standards and also preserve the overall historic integrity of the Landmark to gain Conservancy support.

Landmark Designation. It is important to the Conservancy that City Landmark Ordinance jurisdiction over the designated Santa Monica Civic Auditorium be retained if the School District acquires it whether through ground lease or sale. A contractual commitment between the district and the City would ensure that all plans for the Civic Auditorium will be submitted to the Landmarks Commission for design review and approval. We recognize that this would be a departure for the District because plan approvals are granted by the Division of State Architecture and no design review takes place. However, it is not unprecedented. A similar commitment has been made for Barnum Hall on the Samohi campus. We know you are well aware that the Conservancy is seeking to maintain City historic preservation protections.

Social Justice. The Civic Auditorium has played a significant role in our cultural history. The demolition of an African American neighborhood took place on the Civic site in the 1950s, and in the 1960s the Civic was host to several widely publicized events supporting civil rights. The Conservancy expects any proposal for the Civic Auditorium to acknowledge this significant history and use it as an educational opportunity for your students and the community.

The Conservancy will continue to vigilantly monitor your plans as they move forward, with a focus on protecting this cherished, iconic landmark as you work to return it to being an active part of Santa Monica life.

Sincerely,

Carol Lemlein & Ruth Lehrer
Advocacy Committee Co-Chairs