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Cultural Heritage Commission  
Office of Historic Resources, Department of City Planning  
200 N. Spring Street, Room 620  
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**Re: Monuments, Diversity and Democracy -- Revise Cultural Heritage Ordinance**

Dear Commission Members:

**I. Overview**

Cultural, historical and artistic monuments should reflect the diversity of a place and its people. People of color and women have been vital to the creation of Los Angeles throughout the history of the City and the area.

Yet with almost 900 official cultural and historical landmarks in the City of Los Angeles as of January 2008, only about 76 relate to people of color, women, and Native American tribes. Images of 60 of those diverse monuments are shown in The City Project's Monuments and Minorities set on flickr. Additional information is also available on our website. *See* [www.cityprojectca.org/blog/archives/670](http://www.cityprojectca.org/blog/archives/670).

Things are not getting any better as Los Angeles gets increasingly diverse — only about 16 out of 199 monuments added since 2000 relate to people of color or women.

Support for diversifying the cultural, historical, and artistic monuments of Los Angeles is widespread. For example, the National Latino Congreso adopted Resolution 8.04 on October 8, 2008, resolving “that the City of Los Angeles designate additional official cultural and historic landmarks that fully and fairly recognize the contributions of people of color and women to Los Angeles.”

There is no shortage of opportunities for monuments to commemorate diversity and democracy. For example, community members, activists and advocates have identified over 100 links along the Heritage Parkscape to serve as a "family album" for diverse communities. The Heritage Parkscape will stretch from the Great Wall of Los Angeles to the Rio de Los Angeles State Park, the Los Angeles State Historic Park, and El Pueblo de Los Angeles. The Latino Congreso resolved “that federal, state, and local agencies and the philanthropic community further support the creation of the Heritage Parkscape to help revive the forgotten history of Los Angeles.” The Los Angeles River Revitalization Master Plan cites the Heritage Parkscape as an example of public art to be created along the River. The Heritage Parkscape is inspired by the Chinatown Cornfield Advisory Committee report and the Olmsted plan. The City Project is working with

UCLA Prof. Judy Baca and SPARC (Social and Public Art Resource Center) to create pilot projects for the Heritage Parkscape along the Los Angeles River. *See* [www.cityprojectca.org/ourwork/heritageparkscape.html](http://www.cityprojectca.org/ourwork/heritageparkscape.html).

We submit the following comments on behalf of Prof. Judy Baca and SPARC, Mujeres de la Tierra, and The City Project. The City Project is a multicultural policy and legal advocacy non-profit organization that works with diverse coalitions in strategic campaigns to shape public policy and law, and to achieve equal justice, democracy, and livability for all. The City Project has been working with diverse coalitions to achieve equal access to public resources and appropriate cultural, historical, and artistic monuments and public art. For example, we have focused on diversifying democracy through our work with community leaders on public art at the Los Angeles State Historic Park at the Cornfield, and on protecting Native American sacred sites.

The Los Angeles Cultural and Heritage Ordinance (the Ordinance) should be revised to promote the addition of cultural, historical, and artistic monuments that reflect the diversity of Los Angeles.

## **II. Best Practice Examples**

Los Angeles is rich with best practice examples of cultural, historic, and artistic monuments and public art that reflect diversity and democracy in ways that the collection of official monuments should, but presently does not. These are the kinds of monuments that the Ordinance should promote.

### *Manzanar*

The mission statement at Manzanar – official Cultural and Historical Monument 160 -- states principles that should be reflected in the statement of purpose in the Ordinance:

Manzanar National Historic Site preserves the stories and resources of Manzanar for this and future generations. We will facilitate a park experience that weaves the stories of the various occupations of Manzanar faithfully, completely, and accurately. Manzanar Historic Site will provide leadership for the protection and interpretation of associated sites. From this foundation, the park will stimulate and provoke a greater understanding of, and dialogue on, civil rights, democracy, and freedom.

The Ordinance should be revised to reflect the following principles. The collection of monuments should faithfully, completely, and accurately depict the history and diversity of Los Angeles, including people of color, women, and workers. Monuments should stimulate and provoke a greater understanding of, and dialogue on, diversity, democracy, and freedom. The Commission should provide leadership for the protection and interpretation of such sites.

### *Great Wall of Los Angeles*

The Great Wall of Los Angeles exemplifies the kind of cultural, historical, and artistic monument that the Ordinance should be designed to celebrate.

The Great Wall is one of the city's great landmarks and one of the country's most respected monuments to multicultural harmony. The Great Wall depicts the history of people of color and other ethnic groups in California from prehistoric times to the 1950's. The Great Wall was conceived by Judy Baca, the founder and artistic director of SPARC. Begun in 1974 and completed over five summers, the Great Wall employed over 400 youth and their families from diverse social and economic backgrounds working with artists, oral historians, ethnologists, scholars, and hundreds of community members.

The Great Wall is dedicated at its core to celebrating diversity and democracy, both in its artistic purpose and in the way it was created with full community participation. Yet the City has not designated even the Great Wall itself as an official cultural, historical, and artistic monument. The City should. Indeed, the Latino Congreso resolved that “the Great Wall be designated a national, state, and local cultural and historical landmark,” and that “federal, state, and local agencies and the philanthropic community further support restoring and extending the Great Wall of Los Angeles.”

The Ordinance should be revised so that its implementation results in the official recognition of many more monuments like the Great Wall that celebrate diversity and that are created through a democratic community process.

#### *Biddy Mason Wall*

The Biddy Mason Wall is a best practice example of the kind of cultural, historical, and artistic monument that the Ordinance should be designed to celebrate.

Born a slave in Mississippi in 1818, Biddy Mason walked behind her owner's wagon, first to Utah then to Los Angeles. A federal judge freed her in 1856, before the United States Supreme Court held that slaves were not people protected by the United States Constitution in the Dred Scott case. Ms. Mason became a midwife, entrepreneur, landowner and philanthropist on Spring Street in downtown Los Angeles, and a founder of the First African Methodist Episcopal Church, a major black church.

The Ordinance should be revised so that its implementation results in the official recognition of many more monuments like the Biddy Mason Wall that revive the forgotten history of Los Angeles.

#### *Central Avenue Jazz Park*

The Dunbar Hotel, the Central Avenue Jazz Park, and a tile mural created by community youths in the Park commemorate the Golden Age of Jazz in Los Angeles.

The Dunbar Hotel is official Cultural and Historical Monument 131. The Dunbar, completed in 1928, stood at the center of African-American social, musical, and artistic life from the 1920s to the 1960s. From the 1940s to 1960, jazz blossomed on Central Avenue, the center of African American business and entertainment in Los Angeles. There were over a dozen jazz clubs along Central Avenue. Established jazz musicians arrived from New York and Chicago to play or cut records in Hollywood. During the decades that Los Angeles was segregated, black jazz musicians commonly stayed at the Dunbar Hotel, next door to the Club Alabam, even when they played at white venues throughout town.

The HeArt Project linking teens, artists, and the community created the tile mural jazz tribute in the Central Avenue Jazz Park across the street from the Dunbar Hotel.

This example is noteworthy in several respects. Even though the Hotel is an official monument, there is little at the site that explains the significance of the Dunbar in the life and times of Los Angeles. Many official monuments have nothing more than a bronze plaque stating that the site is a monument, without explaining the significance of the site. Many monuments do not have even a plaque. In contrast, the tile mural in Jazz Park – like Manzanar, the Great Wall, and Little Tokyo Historic District – tells a story about diverse Los Angeles faithfully and accurately.

The Ordinance should require that every monument include interpretive elements to educate this and future generations. The Ordinance should require that the Commission publish a web site with images and the story of each monument.

For example, the book *Landmark L.A.* published by the City of Los Angeles Cultural Affairs Department in 2002 describes the 700 official monuments that had been recognized as of the year 2000. There is no systematic telling of the stories of the 199 landmarks that have been added as of January 2008. Interpretive elements at each site, and a dedicated web site, should be at least as educational as *Landmark L.A.*

#### *Little Tokyo Historic District*

The Little Tokyo Historic District is a National Historic Landmark and public art project that honors Japanese Americans, their history and neighborhood. Located on 1st Street between San Pedro Street and Central Avenue, Little Tokyo was home to the first Japanese in Los Angeles. They began arriving in the 1860s to fill the need for labor after the Chinese Exclusion Act prevented Chinese from migrating to the United States. By World War II, Little Tokyo was home to 30,000 Japanese. Most were deported in 1942 to concentration camps including Manzanar. Today the historic district features public art and a self-guided walking tour that interprets the power of the place. The sidewalk has embedded in it images, written memories of several Japanese Americans, and a listing of the businesses that used to be in the area.

The public art in Little Tokyo is as a best practice example for the kinds of monuments that the Ordinance should promote, and how a monument can creatively tell the story of a place and people.

### **III. Comments on Specific Provisions of the Proposed Ordinance**

The following comments on specific provisions of the proposed Ordinance are designed to implement the best practices cited above. The comments appear in the order of the Ordinance.

#### **Sec. 22.171 Purpose of the Commission**

The Ordinance should be revised to reflect the values at stake. The opening paragraph should be revised by adding the *italicized* language.

The purpose of this article is to promote the public health, safety, and general welfare by providing for the identification, designation, protection, enhancement, perpetuation and use of *cultural, historical, and artistic* resources that reflect

themes important in the city's history, *including but not limited to diversity, democracy, and the contributions of people of color, women, and workers*, and to:

...

### **Sec. 22.171.1 Definitions and Text throughout the Ordinance**

The Ordinance should consistently refer to “cultural, historical, and artistic monuments” and resources. The present language on a seemingly random basis refers to culture or history or both, and never to public art. *See, e.g.*, definitions 4, 7, 10, 13, and Sec. 22.171, paragraph 1.

The Ordinance should consistently refer to places or sites rather than “properties,” which connotes private property interests rather than cultural, historical, and artistic monuments and resources. *See, e.g.*, definition 14.

Similarly, “character defining features” should be defined to include the elements of *place*, not just the elements of a “building, structure or object.” A monument should capture the power of place. A place can include natural elements.

### **Sec. 22.171.2 Composition of the Commission**

The Ordinance should explicitly require the appointment of commissioners with experience in and a commitment to cultural, historical, and artistic monuments and resources that celebrate diversity and democracy. The Commission in the past has not been diverse. This is reflected in the paucity of diverse monuments. The “qualifications” paragraph should read as follows.

(a) Qualifications. The Commission shall be composed of seven members who are qualified electors or residents of the City of Los Angeles. The Commission should reflect the diversity of Los Angeles. Each Commissioner shall be appointed, and may be removed in accordance with Charter Section 502. The Commissioners shall have a demonstrated interest in, competence in, or knowledge of cultural, historical, or artistic preservation. To the extent feasible and legally permissible, at least three of the Commissioners should be experts who (i) meet the qualifications for various disciplines outlined by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior, Code of Federal Regulations, 36 CFR Part 61 or other relevant disciplines, or (ii) have other relevant knowledge, education, training, or experience. Such disciplines or areas of expertise include but are not limited to history, architecture, architectural history, planning, pre-historic and historic archeology, folklore, cultural anthropology, curation, conservation and landscape architecture or related disciplines or areas of expertise, such as urban planning, American studies, American civilization, cultural geography, art, art history, racial and ethnic studies, women's studies, gender studies, Native American studies, or the history of Los Angeles, to the extent that these experts are available in the community.

The following is the same paragraph showing our revisions to the text in the proposed

ordinance, with our additions in *italics* and deletions in ~~striketrough~~ font:

(a) Qualifications. The Commission shall be composed of seven members who are qualified electors *or residents* of the City of Los Angeles. *The Commission should reflect the diversity of Los Angeles.* Each Commissioner shall be appointed, and may be removed in accordance with Charter Section 502. The Commissioners shall have a demonstrated interest in, competence in, or knowledge of *cultural, historical, or artistic preservation* ~~historic preservation~~. To the extent feasible and legally permissible, at least three of the Commissioners should be *experts* ~~professionals~~ who (i) meet the qualifications for various disciplines outlined by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior, Code of Federal Regulations, 36 CFR Part 61 or other relevant disciplines, *or (ii) have other relevant expertise, knowledge, education, training, or experience. Such disciplines or areas of expertise* ~~These disciplines~~ include but are not limited to history, architecture, architectural history, planning, pre-historic and historic archeology, folklore, cultural anthropology, curation, conservation and landscape architecture or *other relevant related disciplines or areas of expertise*, such as urban planning, American studies, American civilization, cultural geography, *art, art history, racial and ethnic studies, women's studies, gender studies, Native American studies, legal studies, civil rights, environmental or environmental justice studies, or the history of Los Angeles*, to the extent that these *experts* ~~professionals~~ are available in the community.

## **Sec. 22.171.7 Duties of the Commission**

**New paragraph 1.** The Ordinance should require as follows in a new paragraph 1:

The Commission will ensure that the collection of cultural, historical, and artistic monuments fully and fairly reflects the diversity of Los Angeles, including people of color, women, and workers. The Commission will seek and include monuments and resources that stimulate and provoke a greater understanding of, and dialogue on, diversity, democracy, and freedom. The Commission should provide leadership for the protection and interpretation of such monuments, resources, and places.

(Remaining paragraphs should be renumbered.)

**Paragraph 5.** The Ordinance should require the Commission to conduct a city-wide survey every ten years to identify significant cultural, historical, and artistic resources and adopt the survey's findings.

**Paragraph 11.** The Ordinance should provide for a plaque and interpretive material at each monument and on the web that fully and fairly tells the story of the place, people, and values at stake.

### **Sec. 22.171.8 Monument Designation Criteria**

The Ordinance should be revised to read as follows by adding the *italicized* language to the proposed text, including new section 5:

(A) Meets at least one of the following criteria:

- 1) Reflects or exemplifies significant contributions to the broad cultural, political, economic, social, *or multicultural* history of the nation, state, city, or community; or
- 2) Is identified with the lives of historic personages *or people* important to national, state, city, or local history; or
- 3) Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a style, type, period, or method of construction; or represents a notable work of a master builder, designer, or architect whose genius influenced his or her age; or possesses high artistic values; or
- 4) Has yielded, or has the potential to yield, information important to the pre-history or history of the nation, state, city or community; or
- 5) *Reflects or exemplifies the diversity of Los Angeles, including the contributions of people of color, women, and workers; or stimulates and provokes a greater understanding of, and dialogue on, diversity, democracy, and freedom.*

### **IV. Conclusion**

We look forward to working with the Commission and staff in the process of revising the Ordinance to implement the above recommendations so that the cultural, historical, and artistic monuments and resources of Los Angeles help promote equal justice, democracy, and livability for all.

Sincerely,

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