



June 11, 2009

Honorable Members
City of Los Angeles Planning Commission

Re: Support Cultural Heritage Ordinance Revisions –Diversity, Democracy, and Freedom

Dear Members of the Commission:

I. Overview

The National Latino Congreso, UCLA Prof. Judy Baca and SPARC, League of United Latin American Citizens, Mujeres de la Tierra, The City Project and others join together to enthusiastically recommend adoption of the proposed revisions to the Cultural Heritage Ordinance.

We support in the strongest possible terms: (1) the criterion for recognizing monuments that are significant because they reflect or exemplify the diversity of Los Angeles or promote diversity, democracy, or freedom; and (2) the provision on protecting Native American sites. The City Project's Robert García is proud to serve on the Cultural Heritage Ordinance Working Group.

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 950 official cultural and historical landmarks in the City of Los Angeles as of June 2009, only about 100 relate to people of color, women, and Native American tribes. Images of those diverse monuments are shown in The City Project's Monuments, Diversity and Democracy gallery on the web at www.mapsportal.org/thecityproject/monuments.

Until now, things have not been getting better as Los Angeles has grown increasingly diverse — only about 40 out of 250 monuments added since 2000 relate to people of color or women.

The proposed revisions would help remedy this situation. The proposed revisions provide that a monument may be designated if it meets the following criterion – The monument:

Demonstrates historic significance because it reflects or exemplifies the diversity of Los Angeles, including, but not limited to, the important contributions of people of color, women, and workers; or because it stimulates and promotes a greater understanding of diversity, democracy, and freedom.

Sec. 22.171.8.A.5. *Accord*, 22.171.7.14. This language reflects the principles in the Mission Statement for the Manzanar National Historic Site, as discussed below.

Support for diversifying the cultural, historical, and artistic monuments of Los Angeles is widespread and growing.

For example, the National Latino Congreso has resolved (1) “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;” and (2) that the “the Los Angeles Cultural Heritage Ordinance should be revised . . . so that the collection of monuments faithfully, completely, and accurately depict the history and diversity of Los Angeles, including people of color, women, and workers, and so that monuments stimulate and provoke a greater understanding of, and dialogue on, diversity, democracy, and freedom.” Resolution 8.04 (October 8, 2007, amended July 19, 2008). The National Latino Congreso is the politics and policy convention of the Latino community.

SPARC (Social and Public Art Resource Center) produces, preserves and conducts educational programs and community based public art works. SPARC is particularly committed to producing and promoting work that reflects the lives and concerns of America’s ethnically and economically diverse populations including: women, the working poor, youth, the elderly and newly arrived immigrant communities.

LULAC has been helping Latin American Citizens for over 80 years.

Mujeres de la Tierra is a community action organization that supports the building of a healthier and sustainable community environment through community engagement and individual participation.

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.

II. Best Practice Examples of Monuments, Diversity and Democracy

Los Angeles is rich with best practice examples of cultural, historic, and artistic monuments and public art that reflect diversity, democracy, and freedom. The collection of official monuments should too, but presently does not. The following are the kinds of monuments that should be celebrated as official monuments under the Ordinance.

Heritage Parkscape

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 that have shaped Los Angeles. “This is a wonderful opportunity. Los Angeles is hungry for its history,” Robert García told the Daily Breeze. Gordon Smith, *Refurbishing L.A.’s Soul*, Daily Breeze, Dec. 6, 2006. The City Project is working with Prof. Judy Baca and SPARC to create pilot projects for the Heritage Parkscape along the Los Angeles River. The National 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.” Resolution 8.04. 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 State Park Advisory Committee Recommendations Report¹ and the Olmsted plan *Parks, Playgrounds, and Beaches for the Los Angeles Region* (1930).² 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. “They should not be treated as isolated, separate parks but as one continuous parkway system,” Robert García told the Daily Breeze. Gordon Smith, Refurbishing L.A.’s Soul, Daily Breeze, Dec. 6, 2006. More information about the Heritage Parkscape is available on the web at www.flickr.com/photos/cityprojectca/collections/72157600872649830/.

Great Wall of Los Angeles

The Great Wall of Los Angeles is a paradigm example of the kind of cultural, historical, and artistic monument that should be celebrated under the Ordinance.

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 UCLA Professor Judith F. 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 the Great Wall itself as an official cultural, historical, and artistic monument. The City should. Indeed, the National 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.” Resolution 8.04.

The proposed revisions should result in the official recognition of many more monuments like the Great Wall that celebrate diversity and that are created through a democratic community process.

Manzanar

The proposed Ordinance reflects principles from the mission statement at Manzanar:

¹ Cornfield State Park Advisory Committee Recommendations Report is available at www.parks.ca.gov/pages/21491/files/RecommendationsReport.pdf.

² Visit www.cityprojectca.org/ourwork/olmsted.html.

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 Mission Statement is published on The City Project flickr gallery at www.flickr.com/photos/cityprojectca/616104463.

The collection of monuments in Los Angeles 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. Manzanar is the City of Los Angeles Cultural Historical Monument 160.

Biddy Mason Wall

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

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 proposed revisions should result in the official recognition of many more monuments like the Biddy Mason Wall that revive the forgotten history of Los Angeles and celebrate diversity, democracy, and freedom.

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 proposed revisions encourage public information, educational and interpretive programs pertaining to the monuments. Sec. 22.171.7.10, -.11. The Cultural Heritage Commission should provide interpretive material at each monument, in books and other hard copy publications, and on a dedicated web site.

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.

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 proposed revisions promote, and how a monument can creatively tell the story of a place and people.

III. Protecting Native American Sites

The City Project supports the proposed revisions that would protect Native American sites and rights through tribal consultation:

Consult with local tribes before the Historic-Cultural Monument designation of a tribal cultural resource, including a Native American sanctified cemetery or burial ground, place of worship, religious or ceremonial site, sacred shrine or sacred site, historic, cultural, or artistic site, historic or prehistoric ruins, and archaeological sites under Public Resources Code sections 5097.9 and 5097.995. The City and the Commission shall follow SB 18 and State of California Tribal Consultation Guidelines, Supplement to General Plan Guidelines, or successor laws and documents as applicable.

Sec. 22.171.7.18.

IV. Conclusion

We support the proposed revisions to the Cultural Heritage Ordinance, Los Angeles Administrative Code Chapter 9, Division 22, Article 1, Section 22.171.7, so that the cultural, historical, and artistic monuments of Los Angeles help promote equal justice, democracy, and livability for all.

Very truly yours,

Robert García
Executive Director and Counsel