

**CITY OF LOS ANGELES**  
INTER-DEPARTMENTAL CORRESPONDENCE

Date: May 6, 2013 0220-04800-0000

To: Honorable Members of the Arts, Parks, Health and Aging Committee

From: Miguel A. Santana, City Administrative Officer *PH*  
Gerry F. Miller, Chief Legislative Analyst *HEK for PH*

Subject: **STATUS REPORT - AUTRY NATIONAL CENTER AND SOUTHWEST MUSEUM**

**SUMMARY**

In May 2012, the Council instructed the City Administrative Officer (CAO), Chief Legislative Analyst (CLA), Department of Recreation and Parks, and Department of Cultural Affairs, in cooperation with the Los Angeles Historical Society and the Los Angeles County Natural History Museum, to open discussions with the community and all stakeholders of the Autry Western Heritage Museum, the Southwest Museum of the American Indian and the adjacent Casa de Adobe (Southwest Museum) with the objective of arriving at agreed upon goals for each of the respective museums; with said goals to include, but not be limited to, renovations, expansions and exhibitions at the aforementioned museums (C.F. 11-1060). The Council further requested the CAO and CLA to provide a progress report to the Arts, Parks, Health and Aging and Budget and Finance Committees within 60 days.

**BACKGROUND**

In 1907, Charles Fletcher Lummis, one of the first City librarians of the Los Angeles Public Library, pioneered the development of the Southwest Museum in the Mount Washington area of Los Angeles and continued to raise funds until the museum's opening in 1914. Known as the City's first museum, its mission was to highlight the historical, architectural and artistic significance of the American Southwest and its inhabitants. The Southwest Museum has been designated as a City of Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument and is listed in the California Register of Historical Resources. According to the Autry National Center website, the Southwest Museum, the second largest collection of Native American objects in the United States, is widely regarded as one of the finest collections in the world. The facility is a museum, library, and archive that not only focuses on the American Indian, but also contains Spanish, Latino, and Western American artifacts.

In 2003, the Museum of the American West was formed when the Autry Museum of Western Heritage (Autry Museum) at Griffith Park and the Southwest Museum in Mount Washington merged and became dually operated by the Autry National Center (Autry Center). This merger provided that the Autry Center would take possession of the Southwest Museum and Casa de Adobe site and buildings, as well as the entire museum collection.

Currently, the City has a 50-year ground lease, executed in January 1987, with the Autry Center for over 12 acres of land in Griffith Park. Pursuant to the ground lease, the Autry

Center is required to receive approval from the Board of Recreation and Parks Commissioners (Board) prior to the construction of modifications to the Autry Museum structure if costs are estimated over \$25,000 for internal modifications or \$5,000 for external modifications. In May 2011, the Board approved the proposed renovations of existing exhibits, and outdoor area and restrooms at the Autry Museum. Subsequent to this approval (which does not require Council action), a Charter Section 245 Motion (Huizar – Reyes) was introduced to assert jurisdiction over the Board's action. The Motion indicated that several concerns from the community, including the future of the Southwest Museum operations, exhibitions and collection, had been raised regarding the Board action. On June 3, 2011 and June 20, 2011, the Arts, Parks, Health and Aging Committee considered: (1) public comment concerning Autry Museum's proposed development, and (2) an appeal filed with the City Council over the proposed development's environmental impacts and review process. The Committee recommended sustaining the action of the Board to approve the Autry Museum renovations, and on June 21, 2011, Council approved the Committee recommendation.

As community concerns regarding the future of the Southwest Museum under the leadership of the Autry Center continued, the motions to begin formal discussions about its future were approved by Council.

To date, three meetings have taken place and participants have included City staff from Council District One, CAO, CLA, Department of Cultural Affairs, Department of City Planning Office of Historic Resources, and the City Attorney's Office. In addition, representatives from the Los Angeles Historical Society, Los Angeles County Natural History Museum, Friends of the Southwest Museum Coalition and the Autry Center have been invited. The following is a summary of the meetings to date:

#### Meeting One – September 18, 2012

Topics discussed include a review of relevant Council actions, composition of the discussion group and suggestions for additional participants, schedule of meetings and overall issues that should be addressed including necessary construction improvements, exhibit schedules, and overall financial status of the Southwest Museum. The 2004 Southwest Museum Rehabilitation Study performed by Levin and Associates was introduced with plans to discuss at the next meeting.

#### Meeting Two – November 8, 2012

A summary of the 2004 Southwest Museum Rehabilitation Study (Attachment 1) was discussed. In addition, Louisa Van Leer Design, in association with San Francisco-based PLUM Architects, presented three design options which showcased the potential renovations of the Southwest Museum with costs ranging from \$23 million to \$55 million. Each of the three options addressed initial costs to bring the existing building up to code as well as ideas for expansion and modernization.

#### Meeting Three – February 14, 2013

On November 6, 2012, the Council adopted a Motion (Reyes – Huizar; C.F. 12-1707; Attachment 2) which allocated \$50,000 in Council District One AB1290 discretionary funds to the Bureau of Engineering (BOE) for an assessment of the current structural conditions of the Southwest Museum and Casa de Adobe.

BOE was present to discuss its findings upon visiting the Southwest Museum. BOE explained that due to limited City staff resources, the \$50,000 allocation would be awarded to a contractor to perform an analysis of needed renovations at the Southwest Museum. BOE reports that in March 2013, Gruen Associates was chosen through a competitive selection process to provide an update to the 2004 Southwest Museum Rehabilitation Study and prepare a Rehabilitation Report for the adjacent Casa de Adobe. It is anticipated that the contractor's final report will be completed in June 2013.

It should be noted that on the advice of the Autry Center's legal counsel, Autry staff did not attend the three meetings due to the existence of pending lawsuits filed against the Autry Center by individuals that are a part of the Friends of the Southwest Museum coalition. The City Attorney made attempts to resolve these legal concerns throughout the process. However, Autry staff has made the Southwest Museum campus, including all buildings, accessible to City staff.

#### Additional Meetings

Several smaller meetings have taken place in the last year including a visit to the Southwest Museum in which Autry Center staff was able to give City staff a tour of the facility and the extensive artifact storage process currently taking place. In addition, Council District One has met with BOE on various occasions to discuss the updated study, and BOE has visited both the Southwest Museum and Casa de Adobe. Council District One has also met with Autry Center staff on its own to discuss the future of the museum.

At this time, Council District One continues to separately meet with the Autry Center and Friends of the Southwest Museum coalition. The forthcoming report from Gruen Associates will continue to build on the progress achieved during these recent discussions, and a future for the Southwest Museum can continue to be explored.

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

Instruct City staff to continue to hold open discussions with the relevant parties regarding the future of the Southwest Museum.

#### Attachments

*GF/MAS:KEK/MDC:AMG/RS*

**Southwest Museum Rehabilitation Study 2004--Summary**

- Subsequent to the merger of the Southwest Museum and the Autry Museum, the Autry National Center commissioned a rehabilitation study of the Southwest Museum. The study was performed by Brenda Levin and Associates (Levin).
- The purpose of the study was to measure what improvements were necessary at the Southwest Museum campus, what their costs would be and how the enhancements would affect the Museum's economic viability.
- Levin developed two rehabilitation options as follows: Option A—would fulfill stated rehabilitation and program goals and emphasize the educational mission of the Southwest Museum and rehabilitate historically significant spaces and features; Option B—would accomplish all of Option A and provide enhanced user facilities and technical capacity to meet higher museum standards for artifact handling. This option would also add an underground loading dock area, an enlarged central plaza, on-site food service and additional exhibit space and parking capacity.
- The estimated cost of Option A was \$16.46 million and the estimated cost of Option B was \$22.83 million.
- The Levin study also attempted to perform a market study to measure visitor flow and determine how revenues could impact the financial viability of the Southwest Museum under its two options. Under Both Options A and B, the Levin study concluded there would be an operating gap that Autry would have to close through private donations, foundation, government grants or other sources of revenue. Under Option A, Levin found that the Southwest Museum could earn \$809,000 in revenue on expenses of \$2.1 million (a \$1.3 million gap). Under Option B, Levin found that the Museum could earn \$1.3 million on expenses of \$3.5 million (a \$2.2 million gap). These estimates do not include paying down the \$16.46 million or \$22.83 million in improvements.
- It should be noted that Levin's rehabilitation cost estimates should no longer be considered valid since they were developed almost 10 years ago. In addition, new pro-formas should be performed to update possible revenue and operating expense costs.

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TO CITY CLERK FOR PLACEMENT ON NEXT  
REGULAR COUNCIL AGENDA TO BE POSTED

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MOTION

The Council District AB1290 Fund provides funding for redevelopment and community services in various Council Districts.

The Southwest Museum, located in historic Mount Washington, houses one of the nation's premier and largest collections of Native American art and artifacts, in addition to a wide range of Southwest artifacts representing diverse cultures, including those of Latino heritage. Currently the Museum, closed to the public in 2006, is being used by the Antriy National Center to clean and catalogue more than 240,000 items in the collection in preparation to move it to another building outside the City of Los Angeles.

As a treasure of City-wide significance the Southwest Museum stands alone. Indeed, as the first museum in the City of Los Angeles it is imperative that steps be taken to actively preserve its legacy while enhancing and securing its future for generations to come. In addition to the Southwest Museum, the adjacent Casa de Adobe is also a significant cultural and historical landmark worthy of preservation and rehabilitation. Built by the Hispanic Society as a hacienda, its collections contain art, furnishings and artifacts many of which were donated for use in the Casa de Adobe by the early Mexican families of Los Angeles such as the Sepulveda and Pico families.

For the first time in more than a decade, the Southwest Museum and Casa de Adobe are both located within the boundaries of one council district. This provides a unique opportunity to address the needs of both museum structures in a comprehensive and holistic manner. Achieving this end requires an understanding and comprehensive assessment of the current conditions (structural, systems, code, etc.) of both facilities for continued museum use. An assessment is a vital and necessary step towards preserving and bringing back for the people of Los Angeles, the City's first museum as well as the Casa de Adobe.

Sufficient funds are available in the CD-1 portion of the Council District AB 1290 Fund for this purpose.

I THEREFORE MOVE that \$50,000 in the AB1290 Fund No. 53P, Account No. 281201 (CD 1 Redevelopment Projects - Services) be transferred / appropriated to the Engineering Fund 100-78, Account No. 3040 (Contractual Services) for an assessment of the current structural conditions of the Southwest Museum as well as the adjacent Casa de Adobe.

I FURTHER MOVE that the Bureau of Engineering be authorized to make any technical corrections or clarifications to the above instructions in order to effectuate the intent of this Motion.

PRESENTED BY: Ed P. Reyes  
ED P. REYES  
Councilman, 1<sup>st</sup> District

SECONDED BY: Jose Huizar

[Signature]  
OCT 30 2012

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