



## Autry National Center

August 10, 2009

The Honorable Janice Hahn  
The Honorable Bernard Parks  
The Honorable Bill Rosendahl  
The Honorable Ed Reyes  
The Honorable Tony Cardenas  
Board of Referred Powers  
City of Los Angeles  
City Hall  
200 N Spring Street  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Honorable Councilmembers:

On June 30, the Board of Referred Powers held a hearing on our proposed \$175 million expansion plan for the Autry National Center in Griffith Park. After a lengthy hearing and at the request of Councilman Huizar, you asked the Autry to consider making certain financial and programmatic contractual commitments to the Southwest Museum facilities located in Mt. Washington. In the many months leading up to the Board of Referred Powers hearing, Councilman Huizar never informed us that such a demand was forthcoming. At the hearing, we indicated we simply could not make any such commitments. Nevertheless, you asked that we meet with Councilman Huizar and continued the matter for four weeks.

We considered the matter at length and met with Councilman Huizar in early July. In addition, our Board of Trustees met with Councilman Huizar on July 15. At that time, the Board of Trustees advised Councilman Huizar that it cannot make a long-term financial commitment to the City with regard to the Southwest facility in Mt. Washington. Because the Autry, like all cultural institutions, depends on grants, annual fundraising and other revenue sources that are not consistent year to year, we cannot responsibly make commitments that are not secured by pledges, grants or other specified funding. As fiduciaries, we must not commit what we do not have, nor can we make commitments to programmatic models that have already proved to be unviable. Our letter of July 24 to you reflects our final decision on Councilman Huizar's request.

Subsequently, we learned that the Board of Referred Powers does not intend to hold a hearing on the proposed lease amendment within four weeks of the June 30 meeting, as was set forth in the adopted motion. In fact, from an email sent by a group called the "Friends of the Southwest," we have learned that Councilwoman Hahn has "accepted the request of Councilman Huizar" to continue our matter to some undefined date after August 31. We were neither informed of this continuance nor asked to agree to it.

Frankly, we are dismayed that the adopted motion of the Board would be disregarded, especially since we made it clear at the June 30 meeting and in our last letter that we were running out of time and needed a decision. We are now out of time.

We have worked with the City for years to secure approval for our plans. Beginning in 2006, before the EIR process for Griffith Park even began, the Autry engaged in a lengthy public process which included, at the Mayor's office's request, public meetings chaired by the Human Relations Commission for stakeholders in Mt. Washington. After five meetings and feedback from the community, the Autry presented a detailed and viable vision for the future of the facilities in Mt. Washington. This plan included exhibitions of the Southwest collection in the two most historic and beautiful galleries in the Mt. Washington building, as well the provision of another two major art galleries that would also be used for community meeting rooms and event spaces. Approximately 50% of our collection would be stored and conserved in Mt. Washington, an archeology learning laboratory would be created and the Braun library would be converted into an educational facility. We have been working hard to secure funding with the Los Angeles Community College District to include a satellite campus at the Mt. Washington facility, which also would bring many more people into the museum.

We have put forth an ambitious plan that would save the museum for future generations, if it could be implemented. This plan was supported by Councilman Huizar, and through our concrete achievements, we have demonstrated, more than any other group has ever done, that we could make great things happen at the Mt. Washington site. Unfortunately, though, our plan has been met with constant attacks, all based on the premise that the Southwest Museum should be returned to an old, failed operating model, which would be financially impossible and ethically indefensible. You cannot exhibit one of the world's great collections, and honor the many cultures of America, with a 19<sup>th</sup>-century style cabinet of curiosities. And yet incessant attacks, made by those who refuse to accept the reality, have hampered us in our fundraising for the Mt. Washington site. Organizations that might otherwise have considered creating partnerships that would have benefited the Mt. Washington site are no longer interested, after encountering bitter opposition for being outside a narrow definition of "museum use." The unfortunate result is that we have been unable to implement our vision for the Mt. Washington facility, and our ambitious plan is now in grave danger.

The EIR process for the Griffith Park project also has dragged on for years. Since the Notice of Preparation for the EIR was released in May 2007, the Autry has agreed to extended comment periods and has spoken at or hosted many dozens of community meetings. Yet the finalization of the EIR was delayed. The preparation of the staff report was delayed. The original hearing before the Board of Referred Powers was delayed. And now the follow-up hearing by the Board of Referred Powers is delayed.

More than three years have passed since we started this process, and, unfortunately, there is no end in sight. We have the prospect of several more months of hearings before the Council finally considers our lease amendment. We then can expect many months of hearings for the planning approvals—perhaps a year or more, given further delays. Unfortunately, even if we are lucky enough to obtain all of the approvals, we are told we will be sued and will have to litigate the validity of those approvals for two years or more. In the meantime, we are precluded from raising further funds for the Griffith Park expansion because the project's status is indefinite and we are being derailed from raising necessary operating funds because of a political process that is without end.

We truly believe that we proposed a great project in Griffith Park, one that would have provided significant benefits to the City and its residents. We have been moved by the broad, heartfelt support for our plans from a diverse cross-section of Los Angeles. We are particularly proud of the support of the Native American community.

Our perseverance through this exceedingly lengthy, arduous process demonstrated our steadfast commitment to this City and to both of our sites. Sadly, though, we have come to learn over the past month that the City of Los Angeles does not offer the broad support that we must have to proceed. At a time when the economic downturn makes every cost that we incur harder to support, it is no longer possible for us to spend money on an interminable approval and political process.

We have therefore concluded that any further attempt to proceed with the proposed expansion project in Griffith Park would be an ill-advised diversion of our financial resources and an insupportable distraction from our work in serving the community. We come to this decision with reluctance and deep regret—but the constant delays, the past and future costs, the unyielding insistence on financial and programmatic commitments which we cannot responsibly make, and the prospect of future expensive and debilitating litigation all demand that we fulfill the Autry's vision under different circumstances. Despite this unwanted change in plans, we remain constant in our vision of honoring all the diverse peoples of the American West, in our commitment to our existing buildings, and in our determination to create another treasure for Los Angeles.

Accordingly, this letter constitutes the Autry National Center's withdrawal of our request for a lease amendment. We further withdraw our applications on file with the City Planning Department for the expansion project in Griffith Park.

Best regards,



John L. Gray  
President & CEO

cc: The Honorable Antonio Villaraigosa  
The Honorable Tom LaBonge  
The Honorable Eric Garcetti  
The Honorable Jose Huizar  
Mr. John Mukri  
Ms. Gail Goldberg  
George J. Mihalsten, Esq.