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**Greater Griffith Park  
Neighborhood Council**  
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Certified Council #36**

September 22, 2008

Ms. Blake Kendrick  
The Los Angeles Planning Department  
Community Planning Bureau  
City of Los Angeles  
Room 667  
City Hall  
200 North Spring Street  
Los Angeles, California 90012

CPC 2008-2548-VC-ZV-CUB-SPR  
The Autry National Center  
4700 Western Heritage Way  
Griffith Park  
City Planning Commission Hearing Date: October 16, 2008

Dear Ms. Kendrick:

Thank you for your courtesy in allowing Greater Griffith Park Neighborhood Council to provide you with our advice regarding the captioned application. These comments reflect resolutions passed by the Greater Griffith Park Neighborhood Council Board at its regular meeting on September 16, 2008, specifically set forth below in Part III, items 1 through 6, inclusive.

We recognize that you have been placed under substantial pressure to obtain comments from the public and to prepare your report to the City Planning Commission ("CPC") because of the unusual speed with which this matter has been handled. (We note for example that the application, at page 24, refers to a document, the final environmental impact report for the project, which was not released until seven weeks following the filing of this application and within days of your hearing.)

As we have advised the President of the CPC we, along with neighborhood councils generally, are required to go through procedures to ensure that the advice we give city agencies is well conceived and properly vetted by the board with full public notice to stakeholders. We have now completed our process as thoroughly as the compressed time frame has permitted. Lest you are unable to fully integrate our comments and advice into your report we are sending a copy to the CPC.

Our neighborhood council has been considering this matter, in its various stages, for over one year. We have had more than six meetings of our Planning, Zoning and Historic Preservation Committee, ten meetings of our Parks, Open Space and River Committee, and one meeting of our Neighborhood Improvement Committee during that period. All meetings have been fully noticed and generally attended by representatives of The Autry National Center ("the Autry") and by a wide spectrum of stakeholders and other citizens of the City. In addition, our board has considered presentations from the Autry and reports from its two principal committees considering the matter on multiple occasions,

most recently on September 16, 2008. In the aggregate the board and its committees have had many hours of meetings on this subject. We believe that, although our review of the draft and final EIRs has been limited by time constraints and we have not been provided with all the information we have requested from the Autry or the Department of Recreation and Parks, we have given due consideration to the most relevant facts and factors available to us, and that our advice to you is well founded.

We give you here our comments with respect to the Master Land Use Permit Application. We are separately commenting on the proposed amended lease agreement between the City and the Autry, but references are made in our comments here to conditions proposed to the lease amendment.

## **I. GENERAL PRINCIPLES APPLICABLE TO THE PROJECT.**

Before we give you our specific comments we wish to address general principles which should control this application.

1. Open Space Zone. The Autry sits in an open space zone, one of the most restrictive zones under the Code. We note the permitted uses under section 12.04.05B of the Code are restricted to park and recreation facilities and preserves. The site is also subject to the additional restriction of a height limit of 30 feet.

While the Code allows, with permission, use of open space for a museum, we believe that there should not be a "double-dipping" of a conditional use permit plus a variance. That is, while it may be appropriate to allow a museum in open space, the museum should comply with the 30 foot height limit of its zone.

2. The Griffith Park Site. Griffith Park is a jewel in the crown of our Lady of the Angels. The preservation of its natural open space is something to which we are committed. Any intrusion into the open space of the park must not be allowed unless there is a very substantial benefit conferred by the loss of open space.

The Autry, at 161,000 square feet, is already by far the bulkiest and highest structure in Griffith Park, much larger than the next largest structure, the Griffith Observatory.

3. Limited Intrusion into the Park. The Autry must show that its expansion is the smallest that is required to accommodate an integration of a portion of the Southwest Museum's collection and that there is no action it can take to reduce its intrusion into the park. This is similar to the requirement under CEQA to discuss alternatives to the project.

We are not convinced that the Autry has met the burden under CEQA or that it has met any reasonable requirement of explaining why its request to expand to a pair of structures totaling well over a quarter of million square feet is necessary.

The Autry seeks to enlarge its existing museum at the expense of the open space which should be devoted to legitimate park uses. The Autry naturally wants to expand its current building and to build a second one because it is more convenient and clearly less expensive to it than the alternatives. However, we represent our stakeholders, and the cost to our stakeholders should be considered in the form of loss of valuable park land. The City is park poor as everyone recognizes, and the City has shown very little inclination to buy more park land for its citizens. Therefore, the loss of current park land must be very critically examined.

As is the case under CEQA the Autry should be closely examined on the alternatives to this expansion. We have done so but we have not received satisfactory answers. The Autry, quite naturally,

has not considered alternatives as alternatives cost more money to the Autry than expansion in Griffith Park. Examples include the following possible alternatives:

(a) Expansion of Facilities at Arroyo Seco on property now owned by the Autry and already improved with an established institution: the Southwest Museum. The Autry has commissioned a rehabilitation study by the same person it retained to design the expansion. That study proposes expansion at the Arroyo Seco site.

(b) Offsite Closed Storage and Offices. The Autry could move storage and some offices at its Griffith Park site to a site in Atwater or Highland Park, allowing present space devoted to those functions to be converted to exhibition space.

(c) Reconfiguration of Closed and Open Interior Space. The Griffith Park facility has many spaces that could be converted into exhibition space, some of which are proposed to be so converted in the proposal and some not. This would add substantial exhibition and open storage space.

4. Southwest Museum as Integral Part of Project. The Autry is currently located both in Griffith Park and in the Arroyo Seco site of the Southwest Museum. In our view the expansion of the Autry's Griffith Park facility is inextricably bound to the preservation of the Southwest Museum.

The acquisition of the Southwest Museum site and collection are both the impetus and the justification for the application to expand. The collection of the Southwest Museum is world renowned, and its acquisition by the Autry provides the Autry with important items to expand its vision of the American West.

Because of that addition to the Autry's collection we qualifiedly support a portion of the proposed expansion.

However, we strongly believe that the preservation of the Southwest Museum as a museum, not simply as a building, is essential to the City and to the community in which is located, and we are not willing to enrich our neighborhood at the expense of another neighborhood. Thus, the condition in paragraph III.6 below.

## **II. FAILURE TO MEET THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE CODE.**

The application requests both variances under Section 12.27 and conditional use permits under Section 12.24 of the Los Angeles Municipal Code ("the Code").

We think the written application fails to provide the factual bases either for the variances or for the permits requested, and we did not hear anything at your hearing on August 18 which provided such support.

The applicant's principal failure is the lack of any showing there is an unnecessary hardship for it to comply with the Code. We assume that you will advise the CPC to explore the criteria further with the applicant.

## **III. SPECIFIC COMMENTS.**

In light of the foregoing general principles, should the City Planning Commission conclude that the prerequisites to granting discretionary permission to make some enlargement of the Autry's Griffith Park facility have been met to any degree, we believe such permission should be conditioned on each and every of following conditions:

1. The Autry's proposed Phase 1 shall be limited to a structure of no more than 108,500 square feet of footprint (including enclosed open space); The height of the existing structure as modified as part of the Autry's proposed Phase 1 shall not exceed the current height; and all additions to the existing structure shall be limited in height to 30 feet. (Requests 1 and 3 (there being no 2).)

The square footage of the footprint is that represented to us as the square footage requested in Phase 1. We do not believe that under any circumstance the intrusion into the open space, which while subject to the Autry's leasehold, is required to be kept open under the lease to preserve the park atmosphere, should be more than allowed here. Although the effect of this condition is to reduce the total square footage of the proposed expanded structure from 79,000 square feet above ground, we believe this allows a more than adequate expansion for the inclusion of a significant part of the Southwest Museum collection and other expansions consistent with the Autry's request to redesign the theme of the museum. In this regard we note the Autry's rehabilitation study of the Southwest Museum that the collection of the Southwest Museum could be effectively shown in 12,500 square feet.

Of course, Our present objection does not extend to enlarging the square footage underground if the Autry deems the approximately 39,000 square foot expansion allowed by this condition to be inadequate. Our concern relates to the visual effect on the park and its users.

While we are reluctantly willing to allow the existing portion of the remodeled building to retain its current excess height we strongly support strict enforcement of the thirty-foot limitation on all new construction in open space. Thus to the extent the proposed development is outside the footprint of the current structure it must conform to the thirty-foot maximum. There is no apparent reason why the architect currently retained by the Autry would not be able to redesign the proposed building with this limitation.

2. The Autry's proposed Phase 2 shall not be built. (Request 1.)

We believe the construction of the proposed Phase 2, a research facility and library over a parking structure, is both unnecessary and overreaching. This facility can be left at the Autry's Arroyo Seco facility or placed elsewhere either within the proposed expanded Griffith Park facility or at another location. The inclusion of any parking structure is deemed by us to be inimical to the park.

3. The Autry's request (4) to build fewer parking spaces than required by the code is supported provided:

(a) the Autry agrees that it will never charge for parking, will not restrict parking to its patrons or others having business with the Autry but its parking shall be open to all users of Griffith Park, and the Autry will not otherwise restrict parking except as required by law or restrictions imposed by the City of Los Angeles,

The Autry is in essence a guest within the park. It should be an integral part of the park and therefore there should be no charge for parking and no exclusion of any park patron from the parking on park property.

It is our understanding from discussions with the Autry that the Autry does not oppose this condition

(b) the Autry implements plans to encourage its staff, volunteers and patrons to carpool or to take public transportation to the Autry, including implementation of the parking management mitigation measures proposed by Fehr & Peers in the Final EIR (except to the extent those measures are inconsistent with there being only free parking at the Autry available to all park users),

Our concurrence in the Autry's request to reduce its parking is based upon the Autry's historic attendance records which are less than presumed by the Code. However, the attendance may increase by reason of the expansion, and separately we are asking that the lease be modified to require the Autry to comply with the Code provisions if the reduced parking is inadequate. To avoid that, the Autry should make great efforts to encourage carpooling and the use of alternate means of access such as public transport and bicycles. The easiest audience to convince is employees and volunteers.

The Autry has indicated that it does not object to this condition.

(c) the lease amendment provides that the Autry will be required to provide additional parking (none of which shall be in a parking structure) to the full extent required by the Municipal Code (without re-characterizing storage space as requested by the Autry) should the demands for parking by patrons and staff (including volunteers) exceed the reduced number of parking spaces.

The project requires an amendment to the present lease. One of the conditions of any approval by the City Planning Commission should be a lease provision consistent with correcting any parking problems which might arise during the term of the lease. As an alternative there might be a periodic review of the Autry's activities by the Planning Department.

4. The total square footage of signage after completion of any approved expansion of the Autry shall not exceed the current square footage of signage (represented by the Autry to be 2,043 square feet), without regard to the character of signage. (Request 6, the first request by that number.)

The Autry is in Griffith Park, an open space devoted to recreation. It is not in a commercial area. Therefore, the signage should be consistent with its location. Other structures in the park have very modest signage. Note for example the very modest signs at the Griffith Observatory.

5. The conditional use permit for the service and sale of a full line of alcoholic beverages be denied, provided that a permit to sell only beer and wine be granted on conditions including that (a) there be no advertising of the availability of such beverages (and such beverages shall not be on the café menu) and (b) service other than in the café be only in connection with functions sponsored by the Autry or other nonprofit institutions and be directly related to the educational functions of the Autry, be no more often than 26 times a year nor more often than 3 times a month and cease no later than 10 p.m. (A request found in an amendment to the application not provided in a timely fashion to the neighborhood council.)

We understand that the Planning Department has determined that this request by the Autry will not be considered at this time. We are advised by the Autry that they have objected to your refusal to consider the matter now. We give you our comments only should the City Planning Commission decide to consider the matter, and our comments should not be considered as an endorsement of the Autry's position.

We believe the Autry should function solely as a museum and not as a rental facility as it has done on several occasions recently. This is the subject of comment which we will make with respect to the amendment of the lease.

Moreover, we believe the site of the location, in a public park from which liquor is excluded generally to the public, needs to be considered.

The fact that the Autry has now a conditional use permit should not be considered as the process by which that conditional use permit precluded notice to the public or an opportunity for the public to be heard, and is infected by such absence of transparency and regard for the public's rights.

We believe given the site and the educational nature of the applicant, it is appropriate to strictly limit the availability of alcohol at the site.

We are advised by the Autry that the restrictions mentioned in clause (a) of our proposed condition are currently imposed by it upon its concessionaire, allowing wine or beer with a meal as that is the common custom of its European visitors who will ask for it, while not suggesting it to the public generally.

The conditions in clause (b) are those accepted by the Department of Recreation and Parks for the concessionaire at the Griffith Observatory, and we believe they represent a reasonable balance between the needs of the park users and the legitimate desires of the institution which seeks to have benefits to support its own operations. We note that alcohol stronger than beer and wine might be served under a caterer's permit as often as 24 times a year.

Any conditional use permit should also limit the area in which any alcoholic beverage is served on a regular basis to the size of the current café.

6. The Autry definitively commit to maintain and to improve the Southwest Museum facility in Arroyo Seco as a fully functional museum, displaying significant items from the Southwest Museum collection as it existed prior to the merger with the Autry, that the exhibition space be not less than 12,500 square feet at that facility and that the Autry fund the necessary improvements to that facility as envisioned by option B in the Southwest Museum Rehabilitation Study prepared under the direction of Brenda Levin for the Autry subsequent to its merger with the Southwest Museum.

As mentioned above, we strongly support the citizens of our city living in the Arroyo Seco area and throughout the city who seek to preserve the Southwest Museum as an institution (and not simply as a building).

Again, thank you for considering our comments.

Very truly yours,

Philip Gasteier, President

By Kenneth E. Owen  
Chair, Planning, Zoning and Historic Preservation Committee

Cc: Jane Usher, President, City Planning Commission