

Natural History Museum  
of Los Angeles County  
900 Exposition Boulevard  
Los Angeles, CA 90007  
tel 213.763.3301  
fax 213.746.7538  
www.nhm.org



March 10, 2020

**ADOPTED**

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS  
COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES

**Dr. Lori Bettison-Varga**  
President and Director

The Honorable Board of Supervisors  
County of Los Angeles  
383 Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration  
500 West Temple Street  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

36 March 31, 2020

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Celia Zavala'.

CELIA ZAVALA  
EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Dear Supervisors:

**MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY  
AUTHORIZE FUNDING AGREEMENT WITH THE NATURAL HISTORY  
MUSEUM FOUNDATION AND APPROVE RELATED ACTIONS FOR  
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NHM COMMONS RENOVATION BUILDING  
PROJECT  
(ALL DISTRICTS)  
(3 VOTES)**

**SUBJECT**

Approval of the recommendations will find the proposed Natural History Museums of Los Angeles County's (NHMLAC) – Natural History Museum (NHM) Commons Renovation Building Project (NHM Commons Project or Project) exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and approve a funding agreement with the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History Foundation (Museum Foundation) for implementation of the NHM Commons Project located at Exposition Park.

**IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT THE BOARD:**

1. Find that the proposed NHM Commons Renovation Building Project exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act, for the reasons stated in this Board letter and in the record of the Project.

2. Determine that in accordance with Section 26227 of the Government Code, the proposed actions will serve public purposes by funding programs necessary to meet the social needs of the population of the County.
3. Approve the project and authorize the Chief Executive Officer or her designee to execute a funding agreement with the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History Museum Foundation in the amount of \$15.0 million and take any other actions necessary and appropriate to implement the NHM Commons Project.
4. Authorize the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History Foundation to proceed with implementation of the NHM Commons Renovation Building Project.

### **PURPOSE/JUSTIFICATION OF RECOMMENDED ACTION**

Approval of the proposed NHM Commons Project will find it exempt from CEQA and will allow for the replacement and construction of a new, immersive theater for science, education, and community programs, including films, NHM Dinosaur Encounters puppet performances, lectures, satellite-transmitted scientific expeditions from around the world, and a variety of community gatherings; and a glass façade on the museum's southwest end, showcasing specimens from NHMLAC's collections, dynamic media, and vibrant dimensional imagery of museum content; and the renovation of existing museum space for a new welcome center and casual "front porch" areas along the museum's southwest exterior perimeter, improvement of existing galleries, and the creation of a new gallery focusing on NHMLAC's collections and the intersection of nature and culture.

#### Background

NHMLAC, including some of the most important natural history museums in the world, is the steward of over 35 million artifacts and objects, creating new knowledge through research about our natural and cultural worlds, including the biodiversity of Los Angeles. NHMLAC is the only County of Los Angeles (County) Department focused on science education, and as such, is educating millions of Angelenos of all generations with a special emphasis on children.

The County is a critical partner through its continued support of museum operations and facilities, and through our partnerships with County departments, extending our reach to diverse communities with onsite and offsite programs. As the first publicly accessible museum in Los Angeles (opening in 1913), and thus the historic anchor of Exposition Park, NHM has undergone extensive renovations improving 60 percent of public space from the east side to the north, which has resulted in the doubling of our attendance since 2008.

As the revitalization of Los Angeles continues south from downtown to Exposition Park, and with the future opening of the Lucas Museum of Narrative Art, now is the time to extend our plan from the east to the west, renovating the western end of our 1929 building.

NHMLAC continues its commitment to engage the public by bringing nature, culture, and history to life, and to share intriguing scientific discoveries from the past as well as the present-day, exploring the diversity of the natural environment of Los Angeles. Through exhibitions such as *Becoming Los Angeles*, the Nature Lab, and Nature Gardens, and robust urban nature and community science programs, NHMLAC invites the broadest possible audience to explore how culture and the natural environment in this region shaped each other over time and offer insights for the future.

NHMLAC adopted three strategic goals through its yearlong strategic planning process completed in FY 2017-18: expand our role as museums of, for and with L.A.; create a new interdisciplinary model for understanding and connecting to urban nature; and strengthen and activate research and collections to create and communicate new knowledge about our worlds.

#### Proposed Project

The proposed NHM Commons Project will provide expanded programming in 75,000-square-feet of replaced and renovated building spaces that will deliver on our vision to inspire wonder, discovery and responsibility for our natural and cultural worlds with new vibrancy and transparency. The proposed 53,000-square-feet of renovation and 22,000-square-feet of new construction will occur in tandem, while the vast majority of NHM remains open to visitors.

The proposed NHM Commons Project will demolish the existing Jean Delacour Auditorium on the southwest corner of the 1929's building. The proposed NHM Commons Project would also demolish the exterior landscaping and access features and a plinth located at ground level in front of the southern entrance. Demolition activities would involve the removal of interior features including support columns, walls, ceilings, floors, partitions, windows, and doors in order to renovate portions of the current west portion of the museum building.

Detailed description of new construction and renovation activities by floor, following completion of demolition activities, includes new construction of a new 9,600-square-foot basement for cryo-collection, exhibition and operation storage spaces, café support and building infrastructure spaces.

The ground floor renovation and new construction of approximately 30,800-square-feet includes a replacement theater, new additional entrance lobby and café to welcome visitors. The new theater will be constructed for science education and community programs, satellite-transmitted scientific expeditions from around the world, NHM Dinosaur Encounters puppet performances, lectures, films, and a variety of community gatherings and special events; a glass facade on the

museum's southwest end, will showcase specimens from NHM's collections, dynamic media, and vibrant dimensional imagery of museum content. The proposed lobby and café will further community engagement with casual "front porch" areas along the museum's southwest perimeter.

The first floor approximately 19,900-square-foot renovation of existing museum spaces will return the historic south entrance to its original configuration and create a connector to a new welcome center and a theater lobby space. The new welcome center, an area free to the public, will feature two prominent works from our collection representing nature and culture: the Barbara Carrasco mural, *Sin Censura*, L.A. History a Mexican Perspective, and Gnatalie, a green fossilized 70 foot-long sauropod dinosaur excavated and prepared by our scientists. In addition, the welcome center will include ticketing stations, displays of artifacts and collections, and staff and volunteers to assist a visitor in planning their journey through the museum spaces, and other related visitor experiences and amenities. The proposed theater lobby space will allow ingress and egress into the new theater but also space for waiting guests to further explore museum collection content.

The approximately 14,700-square-foot second floor renovation re-envision an existing collections hall, closed to the public for 2 decades, focusing on the NHM's collections currently located in four off-site warehouses and not accessible to the public and other related building circulation areas.

The last capital improvement project in the amount of \$151.0 million improved 60 percent of the public space with the County contributing \$35.0 million. Furthermore, both NHMLAC and the County have addressed infrastructure and deferred maintenance issues with a building that is, in part, over 100 years old.

In 2018, NHMLAC and its Trustees began meeting with potential private and public donors to discuss funding participation and opportunities for the NHM Common's Project. The most consistent and overwhelming response was great enthusiasm for the NHM Commons Project and the greatest opportunity for the County as the historic anchor of Exposition Park. The clear demonstration of the County's support for the NHM Common's Project continues to serve as a critical catalyst for additional significant foundation and private contributions.

### **IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS**

The County Strategic Plan directs the provisions of Strategy II.2, Expand Access to Recreational and Cultural Opportunities, and Promote Active and Healthy Lifestyles. The recommended actions will allow NHMLAC to maintain and increase accessibility to the quality and diversity of programs and exhibit spaces inside and outside the museum for the broadest possible audience.

## **FISCAL IMPACT/FINANCING**

### Proposed Project

The total NHM Commons Project cost, including consultant services, construction, change order contingency is currently estimated at \$60.0 million. Twenty-five percent of the previously incurred design and construction costs were able to be reused with the right sizing of the project.

The estimated \$60.0 million project cost is funded equally by the Foundation and the County. Any expenditures exceeding the \$60.0 million estimated NHM Commons Project cost will be paid by the Foundation from available sources.

The Foundation fundraising of \$30.0 million includes \$9.0 million State Budget allocation, \$15.5 million funding commitments, and \$5.5 million (9%) in private funding sources, foundations and other donor commitments anticipated by June 2020. In addition, NHMLAC has adequate and available assets, including any required bridge financing, to fulfill any fundraising shortfall to reach its commitment of \$30.0 million.

The County cash contribution includes \$15.0 million approved in the FY 2019-20 Supplemental Budget Resolution and \$15.0 million is requested for FY 2020-21 Proposed Budget and awaiting County's review and approval. Upon approval of appropriate recommendations, action will be taken to transfer the funds to the Museum Foundation.

Upon approval of appropriate recommendations, funding agreements will be executed in the total amount of \$30.0 million with the Museum Foundation. The first funding agreement in the amount of \$15.0 million will be executed in FY 2019-20 and the second funding agreement in the amount of \$15.0 million anticipated to be executed in the future fiscal years.

It is anticipated that the construction of the proposed project will begin in July 2020 and substantially completed in June 2022.

## **FACTS AND PROVISIONS/LEGAL REQUIREMENTS**

Pursuant to California Government Code Section 26227, the County of Los Angeles Board of Supervisors may expend money from the general fund for projects and/or programs which the Board of Supervisors determines necessary to meet the social needs of the population of the County, and the County may contract with other entities for those projects and/or programs which will serve public purposes. The purpose of the proposed NHM Commons Project, as described, is to contribute funding to serve the social needs of the County in the area of education, particularly education about the natural world.

The Museum Foundation, through its 1994 Agreement between the County and the Museum Foundation, operates and maintains Natural History Museum in Exposition Park, La Brea Tar Pits and Page Museum in Hancock Park, and the William S. Hart Museum in Newhall (collectively the Museums).

The Museum Foundation is a 501c (3) not for profit entity, which supports the Museums and is authorized to carry out a number of duties and responsibilities, including construction of various additions and improvements to the Museums buildings and galleries. It is proposed that the Museum Foundation have the responsibility for contracting for and managing the proposed NHM Commons Project.

Upon substantial completion of the replacement and renovation, the proposed NHM Commons Project will become an asset of the County. Implementation of the proposed NHM Commons Project will be completed in compliance with the Americans with Disability Act (ADA) and Building Codes.

The proposed NHM Commons Project is located within the County's long-term ground lease footprint between the County and the State in Exposition Park. The recommendation for the funding and improvements to the County's Natural History Museum are consistent with the agreement between the Museum Foundation and the County.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTATION**

The proposed NHM Commons Project is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The proposed NHM Commons Project, to replace and/or renovate 53,000-square-feet of current building spaces, including the demolition of the existing Jean Delacour Auditorium with a new replacement theater for science education and community programs, satellite-transmitted scientific expeditions from around the world, NHM Dinosaur Encounters puppet performances, lectures, films, and a variety of community gatherings and a glass facade on the museum's southwest end, showcasing specimens from NHM's collections, dynamic media, and vibrant dimensional imagery of museum content; a new welcome center and casual "front porch" areas along the museum's southwest perimeter; improvements to existing galleries and creation of new galleries focusing on NHM's collections currently located in four off-site warehouses and not accessible to the public. In addition, the Project would include construction of 22,000-square-feet that will focus on visitor amenities of a cafe, on-site collection storage, and other building circulation. The NHM Commons Project is therefore within a certain class of projects that has been determined not to have a significant effect on the environment in that it meets the criteria set forth in Section 15332 of the State CEQA Guidelines with which applies to in-fill developments that meet the following criteria:

- The project is consistent with the applicable general plan designation and all applicable general plan policies as well as the applicable zoning designation and regulations.
- The proposed development occurs within city limits on a project side no more than five acres substantially surrounded by urban uses.
- The project site has no value as habitat for endangered, rare or threatened species.
- Approval of the project would not result in any significant effects relating to traffic, noise, air quality, or water quality.
- The site can be adequately served by all required utilities and public services.

In addition, based on the records of the proposed NHM Commons Project, it will comply with all applicable regulations, it is not in a sensitive environment, and there are no cumulative impacts or unusual circumstances, damage to scenic highways, listing on hazardous waste lists compiled pursuant to Government Code Section 65962.5 or indications that the NHM Commons Project may cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource that would make the exemption inapplicable.

The Museum Foundation entered into an agreement with SWCA Environmental Consultants (SWCA) to prepare environmental documentation for NHM Commons Project. SWCA confirmed that the proposed NHM Commons Project will not impact the 1913 Natural History Museum building and the proposed renovations to portions of the 1929 Natural History Museum building will return portions of the historic building materials back to public view that currently are not accessible.

Further, SWCA Environmental Consultants completed an Architectural Evaluation of Exotic Mammal Hall (Unit II Addition) and Jean Delacour and Addendum Architectural Evaluation for the South Entrance Renovations to the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, 900 West Exposition Boulevard, Los Angeles, Los Angeles County, California. The Architectural Resource Assessment concluded that neither the Exotic Mammal Hall nor the Jean Delacour Auditorium Building meet the California Register of Historic Resources eligibility significance criteria and that the proposed NHM Commons Project would not result in significant impacts to these buildings nor to the nearby structures listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Upon the board's approval of the recommended actions, NHMLAC will file a Notice of Exemption with the County Clerk in accordance with Section 21152 of the California Public Resources Code.

### **IMPACT ON CURRENT SERVICES (OR PROJECTS)**

During construction of the NHM Commons Project, NHMLAC historic facilities, including the 1913, 1925 and 1929 buildings, butterfly pavilion, nature gardens and car park will remain open. In addition, NHMLAC will continue to organize and engage touring exhibitions, education programs for children, families, students and adults at the museum site and throughout the County.

**CONTRACTING PROCESS**

NHMLAC has discussed the proposed NHM Commons Project with a few general contractors, including the general contractor who was hired to implement the extensive renovations improving 60 percent of public space from the east side to the north. As part of the decision process, NHMLAC reviewed the most cost effective and construction efficient implementation method, through the Museum Foundation, engaging with a general contractor who is knowledgeable about an historic building facility, the incredibly complicated infrastructure and remaining open during the construction of the NHM Commons Project.

The Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History Foundation will manage and deliver the proposed NHM Commons Project within its existing construction policies and procedures.

**CONCLUSION**

It is recommended that the Executive Office, Board of Supervisors, return two certified copies of the Minute Order, and the adopted and stamped Board letter to NHMLAC for further processing.

Respectfully submitted,



Dr. Lori Bettison-Varga  
President and Director

LBV:DKM:mg

- c: Executive Office, Board of Supervisors
- Chief Executive Officer
- County Counsel
- Auditor-Controller
- President, Natural History Museum Foundation
- President, Board of Governors