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# The Future of Preservation in Los Angeles: The Next 40 Years

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Los Angeles Central Library

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**Moderator:** Larry Mantle, host, KPCC's AirTalk

## Panelists

- **Margaret Bach**, founding president, Los Angeles Conservancy
- **Christopher Hawthorne**, newly appointed chief design officer, City of Los Angeles; former architecture critic, *Los Angeles Times*
- **Luis Hoyos**, architect and urban designer; former Conservancy board member, professor of architecture at the Cal Poly Pomona College of Environmental Design, and member of the national Advisory Council on Historic Preservation
- **Michelle Magalong**, executive director, Asian & Pacific Islander Americans in Historic Preservation; associate director for the Center of Social Innovation at UC Riverside's School of Public Policy

**Wesley Phoa, Chair, Board of Directors:** The fight to save Central Library from demolition was what sparked the creation of the Los Angeles Conservancy forty years ago. There really isn't a more fitting place, then, as we celebrate the Conservancy's fortieth anniversary, to discuss the role that historic preservation might play in Los Angeles' future.

We're honored to have some of the city's brightest leaders in the fields of preservation, architecture, urban planning, and design, here to share their thoughts on that topic with you and with each other, over the next hour and a half. It is my great privilege to introduce you to the person who will be moderating this conversation, the host of KPCC's *AirTalk* and fourth-generation Angeleno, Larry Mantle.

**Larry Mantle (LM):** Wesley, thank you. It's such a pleasure to be with you tonight, and to be with a panel of true experts on architecture and design, who represent different areas of expertise, different backgrounds that they bring to our conversation tonight. I'm kind of the fan boy here, I'm not an expert on architecture or preservation. But they're issues of deep interest to me. I'm a fourth-generation Angeleno. I grew up with my great-grandfather's stories of coming to Los Angeles at the turn of the century, buying his house in South Los Angeles, buying a little plot along the canals in Venice, and with his own hands, building a couple of little shacks, moving in there so they could rent out the house and my grandfather could go to Occidental College and on to medical school and then practice medicine here in Los Angeles.

This city is one that I love deeply. I'd go with my grandfather—he was the house physician at Bullocks Wilshire. Can you believe department stores had house physicians? And my grandfather would pick me up at school [and say], "I've gotta go to Bullocks Wilshire. I've gotta see some of the employees there." We'd take the elevator in this ornate place, he had a little doctor's office in Bullocks Wilshire. He'd see the employees for a



couple of hours, maybe once a week, and then he'd go to his main office to see patients. So I was surrounded by the beauty of Los Angeles' built environment that goes back to the early and middle part of the twentieth century.

But tonight we're going to have an opportunity to hear from experts who'll talk about the tremendous challenges and the housing pressures that we face, that are going to inform critical decisions about what buildings we're able to keep, what sort of sense of community we're able to have, and what sorts of competing pressures we're going to be able to resolve.

Let me begin by introducing our panelists. We start first with the founding president of the Los Angeles Conservancy. Margaret Bach led the restoration of Irving Gill's Horatio West Court in Santa Monica. She has been a longstanding worker on the built environment and design. Please welcome, Margaret Bach. [applause]

Christopher Hawthorne, up until recently the architecture critic for the Los Angeles Times, is now Los Angeles' first chief design officer, a new position that was created by Mayor Garcetti to improve the quality of civic architecture and urban design across Los Angeles. He is also a professor at Occidental College, he's a California native, Chris Hawthorne. [applause]

Also my pleasure to introduce professor of architecture at Cal Poly Pomona, he is also an architect himself, he teaches historic preservation and urban design. He has a focus on modernist architecture and landscape design as well. And he serves on more boards than I would have time to describe. They include: the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Landmarks Committee of the National Park Service Advisory Board, President Obama appointed him to the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and he is past chair of the State Historical Resources Commission, on which he still sits. Luis Hoyos. [applause]

And our final expert panelist is the executive director of Asian and Pacific Islander Americans in Historic Preservation. She's also the associate director for the Center for Social Innovation at UC Riverside School of Public Policy, and she has served on the advisory boards for the National Park Service, the State of California, and the City of Los Angeles, particularly with theme studies and context statements on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. And this year, the National Trust for Historic Preservation named Michelle Magalong one of the Forty Under Forty People Saving Places. Michelle Magalong. [applause]

So Margaret, let's start with you. Let's go right into the history. You were there at the beginning of this organization, we're celebrating forty years of the Conservancy. Give us the quick thumbnail of what the city was like then for preservation and some of the greatest hits, the biggest battles along the way.

**Margaret Bach (MB):** Flash backward to the 1970s, and Los Angeles was fresh off the losses of very important buildings, iconic buildings—Irving Gill's Dodge House, the Richfield Building downtown—an Art Deco treasure—and there was something in the air, a feeling that L.A. did not have an organized voice for preservation. And nationally, preservation was an up-and-coming field. The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the statewide organization Californians for Preservation Action, communities in Southern California such as Pasadena, with Pasadena Heritage, really starting to stir the pot in terms of community activism.



So, a small group of us, we were sort-of idealists, fresh off the protests of the Vietnam War, we were concerned about the built environment and the environment more generally, and we came together, particularly around the threat to the Central Library, the very place we're sitting right now. Where the City of Los Angeles was seriously considering selling off this land to the highest bidder and moving the library facility elsewhere. So with this iconic building, that really represents not just a great work of architecture but a great institution, a group of us came together to create a voice for historic preservation in Los Angeles and the Los Angeles area.

**LM:** And so many great structures that have been saved along the way. How much of this was in reaction to the urban renewal movements of the 1960s, where so many neighborhoods were just bulldozed?

**MB:** That's an excellent point, because Bunker Hill had essentially been redeveloped and its historic identity completely gone, we had lost Angels Flight, so there was a feeling that we needed to think in a new way about cities and about what we value. We felt that the organization, the L.A. Conservancy, was a way to begin that conversation. So in the ensuing decades, early on, we had some great leadership with our first executive director, Ruthann Lehrer, and really dedicated board members. We had a passionate convergence of individuals who cared about architecture and the city.

One of the names we considered when we were laying the building blocks of the organization was Greater Los Angeles. It was a little bit ironic in a sense, but it embodied the idea that the city could be greater if we were to value our tremendous legacy of architecture.

**LM:** Chris, I want to talk with you about the ongoing conflict between new architecture, risk taking, buildings that on their own stand as works of art, and preservation, a sense of history and community. I don't know if that's as big a battle necessarily as it used to be, but it sort-of is the backdrop for where we are now. What is that balance between allowing creative development and keeping a sense of history?

**Christopher Hawthorne (CH):** It's a really important and crucial question. Before I get to it, let me just thank you for the introduction and the Conservancy for the invitation. There are a few panels I'm doing in between jobs, I don't start at City Hall until the week after next, these invitations came to me in my old position, so I'm very grateful for the chance to stay on this panel and talk about—

**LM:** You should be vacationing—

**CH:** Exactly. There were a couple of things on the calendar that I really was looking forward to and wanted to be in town for, and this was absolutely one of them. Part of the way I answer that question is to say that I come to this with some personal connection. I grew up in Berkeley in a twenties house designed by Julia Morgan, and my mother was one of the founders of the Berkeley Architectural Heritage Association, which is the Berkeley equivalent, also founded in the 1970s coming as Margaret said out of the same concerns about what was happening, following on from the sixties political protests but also urban renewal as you suggested. So I've seen the important work that that organization has done. There are complex causes of all of the ways cities change and the housing crisis that cities are facing. But I've also seen Berkeley really foreclose the possibility of new architecture to a large degree. And I've also seen the housing prices in neighborhoods like the one I grew up in really skyrocket. Houses that homebuyers of my parents' generation bought in the 1970s aren't



worth just ten or twenty times what they bought them for, but maybe forty or fifty times what they paid. So I've been acutely aware of this tension.

And in my role as the architecture critic at the *Times*, one of the first big pieces I did was about the controversy over the Ambassador Hotel, which gets to some of these complexities. That was almost a tailor-made, perfect preservation drama to illustrate the complexities. Donald Trump did own that piece of land for a time and wanted to build the tallest building on the West Coast on that site. By the time I was writing about it, it was not a black-hat-wearing developer versus preservationists. It was a school district wanting to knock down the Ambassador Hotel to build schools in a neighborhood that desperately needed new public schools, and where kids were being bused all over the city and spending two or three hours a day getting to schools outside their neighborhoods. And that building, while a really significant piece of architecture by Myron Hunt, was also important for other reasons. It was the site of many of the early Academy Awards broadcasts, to say nothing of it being the spot where Bobby Kennedy was shot. I tried to tease out in that piece—that was in early 2005, I believe—how do you measure this calculus of some architectural importance and some political or cultural importance, versus the needs of a community in terms of educational space. These problems have only grown more complex since then.

So, you have to have conversations like this, and I credit the Conservancy for looking forward and thinking about how we balance those things, how we weigh preservation against the housing crisis, and that will be part of my new job too, is to promote this kind of discussion and conversation. And certainly the critics I looked to as models when I was coming up as an architecture critic were figures like Ada Louise Huxtable, who, as critics, balanced an interest in preservation and a desire to be a champion for historic preservation, and also supporting younger architects who were doing innovative work. She, I think more successfully than any other American architecture critic, struck that balance. That's the same balance cities are trying to strike.

**LM:** It's hard because it is, by definition, so subjective, that how you find consensus, or is that even possible, is a challenge. And you mention these very practical conflicts. There's also the aesthetic ones. I look at a city like San Francisco—beloved for its architecture, and with tourists from around the world—but it's in many ways stagnant when it comes to dynamic new architecture. It's like a museum city. And that's also its own kind of a balancing act.

**CH:** Absolutely. And I think Berkeley falls into that same category. Boston, I think, has suffered from some of that as well. The cities that have had very strong preservation groups have sometimes tended—not always—have sometimes tended to be cities where it's more difficult to execute new architecture. For me, it's more interesting and useful to look at the models of cities that have struck that balance more effectively, and I think Chicago is probably the best American example. Certainly, Chicago has knocked down some important buildings—and most recently has lost a couple of important buildings in the Loop—but it has really managed to say that historic architecture is part of our civic identity and even civic brand in terms of how we understand ourselves as Chicagoans, but also promoting the idea that the innovation that drove those buildings and made them important in the first place is also something worth preserving. Not just the building but the spirit of experimentation and innovation that produced those buildings in the first place is something that's very important to preserve as well.



**LM:** You were talking earlier about the significance of buildings—even apart from architectural significance, but because of what happened there, the Ambassador auditorium being a prime example. Luis, I know you were very involved in that, heading up the Advocacy Committee for the Conservancy at the time of all that. How do you weigh those issues of community need, for example—Roosevelt High School, we’re seeing many community members saying the want a new school, a rebuilt school, and yet so much history there?

**Luis Hoyos (LH):** Well, that’s a lot. [laughter] I was lucky enough to be invited to join the Conservancy’s board—1990s or early 2000s, you can tell me later, Linda [laughter]—but it was interesting to see how many social issues played into the Ambassador fight. We had to go out into the community. It wasn’t as black and white as, Is this just simply good architecture to keep? The original client population for the Ambassador was gone, due to demographic changes. And that brings me to a really interesting topic. Because of all the different hats I wear, I had been exposed to government and I had been able to see how other people in other parts of the country see Los Angeles and see the Conservancy. And I was very gratified at various locations and in various situations, at how people looked to the west for innovation and for risk taking. Our city’s not pure. A lot of things got built here that—well, they got built here. [laughter] We get used to them, right? We love them. It was also very gratifying over the years to see how many organizations were willing to partner with the Conservancy on projects, and how the Conservancy was listened to and respected, and how the Conservancy, like other organizations, matured through the lens of diversity—through admitting that Yes, that’s who we are, that’s what the city is, and this is the pathway to keep the organization fresh, to keep the organization relevant—is to go out into the neighborhoods, the communities, the HPOZs [Historic Preservation Overlay Zones, L.A.’s term for historic districts], because we are now a global city, the changes that will happen will be very much along the topics of diversity and sustainability.

**LM:** But along with that, you’ve got big generational differences. You can have people who came up in the Chicano movement of the sixties who want to preserve a building because they or their friends walked out—

**LH:** Let’s talk about Roosevelt, alright [laughter]. A long time ago—and Michelle is going through a similar process—the landmarks [committee] at the National Park Service, which embeds most of preservation—you know that, because over the half the room I know—and you’re all in preservation [laughter]—so they said, Let’s do a theme study. What do you want to study? And right away, the four high schools where the [1968 East L.A. Chicano Walkouts, or] blowouts [took place]—that was always in the list. So, yes, I teach young people, and I try to teach them what matters, and I show them evidence, and I emphasize that buildings are important not just because of architecture, but also because of the events that happened in those buildings. At Roosevelt, and at the other three high schools we’re talking about, you have architectural merit and the events that happened. So I hope cooler heads prevail and they’re able to—

**LM:** So you believe those buildings can be adapted to deal with the modern demands of education—

**LH:** Yes. Trust me—the CSU has us teaching in buildings that are very, very old. [laughter] They call them “smart buildings”—I beg to differ. But teaching can happen in very, very old buildings. I hope they see the light. I think they should honor their history, and the history of their faculty that led them out into the streets, and keep the buildings.





**LM:** Alright. Michelle, I wanted to ask you about how you came to this, because you have an interesting story, and how younger people and people of diverse backgrounds in many cases, have come to this cause.

**Michelle Magalong (MM):** Yes, well first off, thank you Larry for your introduction and the L.A. Conservancy for inviting me here tonight. I'm truly honored. Some of my board members are here, and one of my board members—I think he's only twenty-two, twenty-three-ish—and he was like, Is there anyone under forty here? [laughter] Besides me? And I said, I am, for the next few weeks. One thing the Conservancy and I have in common is that we were both born in the spring of 1978. And we were joking about the title, The Next Forty Years, and I said, well, hopefully I'll still be working in the next forty years, to celebrate the eightieth anniversary of the Conservancy.

Margaret, you brought up Bunker Hill. That's actually how I got introduced [to preservation]. It was by a Filipino American, he would never call himself a historic preservationist, but I do call him that. His name was Uncle Roy, or Royal Morales, a Filipino-American activist and an adjunct lecturer at UCLA in the Asian American studies department. He would take every class of the Filipino-American experience class at UCLA, he would take them to Little Tokyo for a tour on the very first day, and say, Welcome to Little Manila. And they'd be like, No, this is Little Tokyo. And he was like, No, it was also Little Manila. And he would take the students to the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion and say, This is where I was born. And of course the students were like, No, and he said, No, there were Victorian houses here. When my father as a pastor came from the Philippines, he went back to the Philippines, got married, brought his wife [to L.A.], had me, and it was in a Victorian house here, at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion. And he took us to the Temple/Beaudry neighborhood and say, This is where I grew up. This is where I went to high school. I went to Belmont. I was one of his students on a tour in 1999, a year before he passed, and he said, Okay, now we're in what we call P'town, at the time, and that was the Temple/Beaudry area at Temple and Rampart. And we were at the Rampart Division police station in the nineties. So as you can tell, as young college students, going, What are you... What?

Growing up in San Diego, I had this image of Los Angeles as Hollywood and the Rose Bowl and Disneyland, because that was the perception then, and I didn't believe him. He told me on the tour, My dream is for this neighborhood to have our own signage—Little Tokyo has one, Chinatown has one, Thai Town, Koreatown...He said, It's my dream [to have] a sign. He passed a year later. I came into UCLA's urban planning department as a master's student in 2001. Eric Garcetti was just elected as a Councilmember for Council District 13. Some folks had identified me in the UCLA department and said, Well, maybe she can help, because he had promised the neighborhood that he would work on the designation that had been a long-fought process for twenty, thirty years in the neighborhood.

**LM:** But you were telling me there was no procedure for this. It had to be created.

**MM:** Right. So I asked, How did Little Tokyo get [designation/a sign]? How did Koreatown, how did all these other neighborhoods get it? And [Garcetti's] staff said, There's no procedure. If you win the City Councilmember's favor and they believe it, they'll just name it. There's no fact checking [laughter], it's just—nothing.

**LM:** Sounds good to me.



**MM:** I'm not saying that Little Tokyo wasn't Little Tokyo, but it was really about those political ties and influences that you had with your Councilmembers. And also, what was seen in the landscape. But in that neighborhood, as we all know as we drive instead of going on the 101 we go on Temple, there is nothing Filipino. Also, we don't have characters like in Japanese and Chinese and Cantonese or anything like that, so some places we go to are named in English, like the Parks' Finest. You would not know it's a Filipino barbecue restaurant. You think it's an American restaurant.

**LM:** So is it now more formalized, that process?

**MM:** So Garcetti said, For this neighborhood to get a designation, we're going to create a process. And that meant community engagement. That meant researching the Community Plans that existed, even though they were outdated, to understand, when you get this designation, what does that mean to the landscape? And what does that mean, before we had the Neighborhood Councils—this was 2002—what does that mean in terms of representation? The politics of even that designation. Garcetti had created an advisory board of community folks and scholars, going and creating a process.

**LM:** So is it your sense that when you have communities that are designated as such, that that factors into development that comes afterward? Does that inform it?

**MM:** Well, that was the hope. When we had the designation of Historic Filipinotown, we did not go through the Office of Historic Resources. It was directly through the Councilmember's office. We had hopes. There was a community report, a needs assessment of not only the built environment but the cultural institutions, to identify and survey the historic buildings in the neighborhood. This was in the early 2000s, so it wasn't like developers were clamoring to come into the neighborhood. That was not a hot spot.

Fast forward to today, as we hear—and maybe I'm jumping ahead to another topic—but this proposed design district in the neighborhood, people ask me, Back in the designation of Historic Filipinotown, did you think gentrification would be an issue? Because mass redevelopment of the neighborhood is changing the character. It's not only changing the design of the neighborhood, but the people that inhabit the place. So there's not many Filipinos—there are third-, fourth-generation Filipino families living in the neighborhood who have been priced out.

**LM:** Sure. And we see this all over the city.

**MM:** Right. And the reason we chose the name Historic Filipinotown was that it was a neighborhood, in terms of a port of entry for Filipino immigrants, you landed at LAX and you knew to go that neighborhood. That's where you were going to get services, leads on employment, even temporary housing. That was the hub of social service agencies for a really long time. But now that's all been driven out. So now you see, the families are being driven out, the institutions that shaped the neighborhood are being driven out, and now you have these massive—



**LM:** Well, it's a microcosm of what's happening everywhere. Chris, let me go to you on this. We have a city now, we can't house all the people that live here, there are people priced out who are going outside the city to places that are more affordable to live, in some cases having to commute back in to jobs they have here. And there's this ambitious plan of housing tens of thousands of people. How do you proceed with a plan like this when, almost by definition, it adds to gentrification, it means that structures that might have importance to communities are knocked down to put up higher density?

**CH:** It is absolutely the most important, most crucial question facing Los Angeles at the moment. We have systematically underbuilt housing here for thirty years, almost forty years, and that is one of the many causes of the housing crisis and the homelessness crisis that we're now facing. I don't think we can talk about any question that is connected to urban design and the design of neighborhoods without confronting that housing crisis and thinking about all of the ways at every level of production that we can think about new places and new ways to create housing. And I say that as someone, as I said at the beginning, who is sensitive to issues of historic preservation.

So there's no easy answer. We have to be thinking about every possible potential site for new housing. Some economic changes will be helping us here, and some technological ones as well. Sites that used to hold important buildings that turned into surface parking lots some time last century are turning back to sites of production because of the economics—that calculus is shifting. I just came from a discussion about how autonomous vehicles, driverless cars, will affect the urban fabric of the city. And this question about a whole bunch of parking infrastructure and space that will become usable—empty because parking demand is expected to fall away.

So I think we have to think about connecting all of these dots, and this is one of the challenges of my new job, to think about how you search relentlessly for sites of new housing while paying attention to these important questions about architectural history and preservation.

**LH:** To step back from it—and now's my chance to affect future policy [laughter]—you can't have a city of single-family homes this big. It's just not sustainable. It's not possible to keep it that way.

**CH:** Agreed.

**LH:** And if you look at what our European friends are doing—not that Europe is always the model to follow—there are these new—colloquially they're being called “eco-districts”—pieces of the city where, by agreement, there has been building adaptation, there's cleared land, or they're occupying former industrial sites, of which we have many. Think of the rail system. These eco-districts accept density, they generate their own electricity, and they take care of their own waste. And it's happening over and over and over. Paris, oddly enough, is a leader in these new eco-districts.

We've gone past the initial steps, in terms of preservation policy. We adapt buildings, we have preservation districts, urban planning now accepts that historic preservation is one of the factors that are going to be on the table always. Look at EIRs [Environmental Impact Reports], there's always a preservation component. I think the next step starts with enlightened government and the ability to have evolving zoning policy, better





community plans, to accept these little exceptional areas that might hold the key. We have a lot of land, it's just that some of it is contaminated, some of it is—

**LM:** It's a rather profound point you made that a city of this size really can't have single-family homes—

**CH:** It can't be single-family to the extent that it is now.

**LM:** Because the implication of what you're saying is, Wealthy people can live in single-family homes, but the middle class can't. So you're saying people are going to have to accept that.

**LH:** I think so. I think to some degree we have to accept—

**LM:** So the middle class is gonna have to go to the Inland Empire, parts of Orange County—

**LH:** No, not necessarily. And I don't think—I'm gonna piss everybody off [laughter]—I think the secret is in a more enlightened, more granular zoning.

**CH:** And just quickly, the idea that the middle class can afford single-family houses hasn't been true in this city for maybe thirty years. [applause] It's certainly not true today, and it hasn't been true for a long time. I think that is an important part of this history, is thinking that there was a time when a single-family house was an engine for middle-class and even working-class arrival here, and that it was part of the L.A. dream, the California dream, that you could have a piece of this city, even as a working-class family. In many parts of this city, that hasn't been true for a long time.

**LM:** You're saying like South L.A., you wouldn't call that working-class housing?

**CH:** Single-family houses across the city are out of reach for many, many people. Look at the median—look at San Francisco. The median price for a single-family house in San Francisco is rapidly approaching \$1.5 million.

**LM:** But that's sort-of a tech perversion—

**CH:** The figures in Los Angeles are depressingly similar and moving in the wrong direction, clearly.

**LH:** And I think perception is everything. I think people quickly jump to conclusions and that most people equate density with high-rises. There's many, many gradations of building types that lead us gently to higher density, not necessarily high-rises. I can't tell you why the Sunset plan and the Hollywood Boulevard plan were rejected. I think it was people's perceptions that all of a sudden, every intersection will have high-rises. And I think that's unfortunate.

**LM:** And traffic, of course. Traffic underlies—we're a long way from autonomous vehicles, despite the discussion that I'm sure was very positive about the future of autonomous vehicles, they're a ways down the road, no pun intended.



**CH:** I'm really glad Margaret mentioned Irving Gill or that that was part of the introduction, because I think there are models of a kind of density and a really intelligent approach to architecture like Horatio West Court. I lived in an Irving Gill project in Piedmont, just up the hill from the top of Piedmont Avenue—actually, probably an Irving Gill project, Tom Hines and other experts on Gill's work are convinced that it's his. It was ten or twelve units on half an acre, all with one exception one-bedroom, single-story units. All had access to a communal garden. It was very—it was much denser than a typical single-family neighborhood but also a long way from the kind of Manhattanization that we sometimes fear.

**MB:** Los Angeles has a legacy of garden apartments, which generates a level of density that perhaps you're talking about, Luis—that perhaps there are models—to do an analysis of what a modest increase of density in designated areas that's respectful or has less impact on single-family neighborhoods—

**LH:** Absolutely. And I really like the fact that the Conservancy caused that study on garden apartments to be written. That was excellent. That's an example. And because different populations don't use cars as much as, let's say, the middle class uses cars, we could calibrate the parking requirements. We haven't done that. We haven't faced that.

**LM:** But that's a challenge when so many fewer people are riding buses now. Cars are so cheap, gas is still comparatively cheap. I do want to move on to Senate Bill 827, though, because Scott Weiner's bill would—and it was probably tweaked today—but I know it's a great cause of concern because it would override the ability of many communities to defend their local plans and to fight back against larger-scale and denser developments. Chris, let me start with you on this: your view on the bill?

**CH:** Margaret and I were talking backstage about the fact that it has prompted a very useful conversation. I think it's a blunt instrument, I think the mayor has raised some concerns about its applicability in the diversity of neighborhoods that make up Los Angeles, and I share those concerns. But I think the conversation about, What are we gonna do to produce more housing is an important one.

From a political point of view, the premise of your question is a good one, that the lack of local control is what may doom it, because the City Council in Los Angeles has already voted against it, the Board of Supervisors in San Francisco this week did the same. So there's opposition at the level of local government and also a lot of concern about how blunt an instrument it is. Some of the changes and amendments that Senator Weiner has made have been helpful, but I think there needs to be more of a conversation. But my sense is that if we say as a city that we think it's too blunt an instrument, the follow-up question needs to be, What are the measures we're going to take to produce more housing?

**LM:** How far do you go? If you've got a community that says, We don't want more density, we don't want to have the character of our neighborhood changed, When do you force that community, despite what it wants, to take on greater density?

**CH:** Really good question. Two quick things. One is that if you were really to get a cross-section across the city—and this is a majority-renter city, not a majority of homeowners—there's a much wider diversity of opinion about whether that is a good or bad thing—density and more housing options. So part of the question is



expanding the conversation. And that leads to my second point, which is, we have too long in this city allowed the people who have secure housing—who are homeowners, who run Neighborhood Councils—to kind-of control the debate about who has access to housing and how much, as a society, we are producing housing. And that conversation—from my point of view, as someone who's written about this for many years—is that it's been dominated by those who are homeowners and those who are very secure in their housing. And I think we need to change that. [applause]

**LM:** So they've made the financial investment in those communities. So how do you tell 'em, Well, that's tough. You made an investment, and a three-story apartment building is going up next to your house, destroying its value by twenty-five percent.

**CH:** I'm well prepared to answer this question because I have this discussion with my parents all the time, who still live in that house I grew up in in a single-family neighborhood in Berkeley. I say to them, If your house has gone up in value by forty or fifty times, you have a responsibility to think about how you're going to share that great good fortune. And you have a responsibility to think about the greater good. I have that conversation with them, and with people like them, in the neighborhood I grew up in, and neighborhoods like that, all the time. So I think we need to be having a conversation about the collective good. The generation of homeowners in Los Angeles who now have been in their houses for twenty or thirty years have been among the most fortunate real-estate investors in the history of capitalism. And that's not an exaggeration. Because of that, I think we need to say, How do we have a broader conversation about what the collective good is, when we are facing a homelessness crisis and a housing crisis of this degree. [applause]

**LM:** And you think the City can handle the political backlash to that?

**CH:** I think the political backlash will be significant. And I'm certainly not naïve, having covered this politics. But my sense is that maybe the applause is a sign of that. That the diversity of opinion is greater than sometimes we give it credit for.

**MB:** I think it's no accident to the run-up to this panel that there have been a slew of articles in the *Los Angeles Times*, and I think that certainly the most profound and touching one for me was Part Two of the Lincoln Heights series on gentrification. The statistic of seventy-three percent renters in that area who are now feeling very housing-insecure. I think there are structural changes that are going to need to happen. But we have very few incentives in our system thus far for generating housing that is also going to meet the needs of the majority of our citizens. I think the second part of this is this sort-of fear factor of visualizing high-rises. So an analysis of opportunity sites—what would the city look like, even built up a modest ten or fifteen percent on various parcels? How much housing would that generate?

**LH:** I can't say anything in my job that's not backed up by research. That's just teaching. I think what we have in L.A. now is a city that knows itself a lot more now. After SurveyLA, we have an incredible tool. We know everything about the city—about the built environment, at least. We know where the historic buildings are. We know where the likely historic districts are. I think we can ballpark where aging industrial areas are that could easily be proposed for new areas of growth. We have an instrument that had not been properly used—the



community plans. If you pick up your average, garden-variety community plan, you'll see a fairly aged document that hasn't been refreshed—

**LM:** We keep getting told that they're going to be updated, but I don't think it's happening.

**LH:** No. It's general language, with general aims and no specificity, and I think it's time to put those to use. I would not support the bill that's currently being discussed because it's such a sledgehammer of an instrument. With research—with, Here's where we could do it in these districts—

**LM:** So what keeps that from happening? Why aren't there these new plans? People look at the tradeoffs, come up with, Here's the sense of our community, here's how we can create more housing in a sensitive way. Why isn't that happening?

**LH:** I don't know. I don't have an answer for you. I think the development community is much more intelligent. They probably have plans or have options to purchase this and that. But I don't know why government lacks the—

**MM:** But you also have neighborhoods like Historic Filipinotown where people want to revisit and update the community plans—because it straddles two, actually—that's also very complicated—the communities are not being engaged. And they're just watching their neighborhoods transform. Every time I go into Historic Filipinotown, I'm like, Great—what else is gone? And what else is here? Same in Little Tokyo—You're like, My favorite restaurant is gone, 'cause that building is gone. Or they can't afford—that Mom and Pop restaurant that I loved, that's been there for forty years, is now gone, and it's like a hip, whatever, Umamiburger. For communities, this state bill, the response is, Again? You're just going to keep destroying these buildings and creating these policies that are a catchall, and for the communities that are most vulnerable—particular communities of color and low-income communities—who have no voice.

**LM:** If you had the power to craft a way of including that and other communities, how would you do it?

**MM:** Luis and I were both able to sit on our respective National Park Service advisory boards for historic preservation in our communities. And that had never happened on the federal level. They'd never asked community folks, scholars, to tell them what's going on on the ground. It's sticky, it's messy, ours hasn't been launched yet after I don't know how many years, and maybe under this administration it'll just be deleted—we don't know if there's a Park Service after this [laughter]. But the City of L.A. has now done something similar, the State of California, there are states and cities that are now saying, Wait—we actually have to ask the communities that are affected what matters to them—

**LM:** But what does that asking concretely look like?

**MM:** It's actual engagement in formalized committees, studies—we all sit on committees all the time.

**LM:** So is that going door to door? What are the actions the City takes to make that happen?



**MM:** Well, like SurveyLA, they went to the communities and had these engagement sessions where they're like, Come to your local library and we're gonna talk about what's going on, what's at stake, what's important. With SurveyLA, one of the great innovative approaches was, neighborhoods like Historic Filipinotown, were like hey, we live in Historic Filipinotown but no one's ever asked me what's important to me in this neighborhood.

**LM:** So people just have to be invited and they will show up? It's that straightforward?

**MM:** In the field of urban planning, participation can go from one extreme of tokenism—we all deal with City bureaucracies that say, We have one meeting where the community's allowed to show up—but they don't translate it into different languages, and they don't post it in places where people would actually see it, so many cities, not just L.A., can say, We did our part. We did our outreach, our token one. What I want is the other extreme, where we are engaged from the beginning to the end, and even after that—constant engagement is important in the work we do. Although we do have elected officials represent us, in the work we do in communities of color, you have to always be engaged, especially where places are at risk.

**LM:** It seems like—I don't know if you'd disagree with it—but the communities I see that are empowered, it's not typically the City going to them and saying, Please tell us... It's people in that community who are so upset about the issues you're talking about—the restaurant's gone—who have some sort of a vehicle to take that grievance to the City and bring about change.

**MM:** One sensitive issue in the API community in L.A. was Parker Center in Little Tokyo. It was contentious in the preservation field. There were folks saying, Architecturally, it's significant. We should save it. And then there were communities of color going, That is the least favorite building in the City of L.A. [laughter], culturally speaking, for the Little Tokyo community, particularly driven by Japanese-American leaders who have been doing work since the sixties of saving the neighborhood, they fought. It was very contentious. But one of the strengths, the reason we were able to fight that, was because we were always engaged—not that we were invited, but we've always been on the ground listening and making sure the neighborhoods we love, and that we actively preserve, that we defend that.

**MB:** I actually have a question for Michelle. You mentioned SurveyLA and how you turn around and buildings have disappeared—beloved buildings in Historic Filipinotown and elsewhere—but I'm interested in your view of, in that area, what buildings have been identified in SurveyLA and what tools you have been able to employ to ensure the continuation of this urban fabric that is beloved by the community.

**MM:** Well, one great thing in the City of L.A. with Ken's leadership is the Asian-American context statement, which I think is gonna be launched next month. One of the things they did with this advisory board of each of the neighborhoods, Historic Filipinotown was one of them, they had scholars, historians, urban planners, community folks in general, come and talk and identify [places]. So it was really grassroots—what are some places we may have already covered or identified in SurveyLA, or have not? So in the process of creating these context statements, they also asked us to identify some key places that maybe we want to nominate to the National Register. And for many of the groups, we were like, What? That's such a far-fetched dream for many of us. Are we eligible for the National Register? Do we fit the standards? So it was a lot of education within and acknowledgment of the great resources we have.



Uncle Roy Morales' father started the Filipino Christian Church, which is the first in the United States. It's a Historic-Cultural Monument—

**LM:** Where is it?

**MM:** It's on Union Street, I think 301 North Union, at Temple. And that was designated in the late nineties. And we've been revisiting it. Even though we know it's been designated locally, we were also able to identify it as a priority nomination for the National Register. That would be only the second Filipino-associated site on the National Register. So it's a huge deal for us. I haven't really talked about it so much because we're waiting to announce things like this. But in the daily battles of our landscapes and our neighborhoods, that's one of those rare gems that we can actually celebrate. It was because of SurveyLA, it was because of the community outreach. When they told me they were looking to nominate the Filipino Christian Church, I actually called some of my longtime friends who knew Uncle Roy, and I said, "I think today is a great day. Uncle Roy would be really proud. This was beyond any of our dreams—

**LM:** And it probably energizes other people for future projects. Our time's getting limited. I want to go back to this idea of designing a new Los Angeles. Are people coming out of school with the kind of design expertise, the creative ideas to do what's the next generation of the garden apartments, the bungalow courts writ large, or whatever that is. Are those folks coming out? Luis?

**LH:** Yes. Because it has gotten so profoundly technical. I can't get into the school now. I teach there, but I can't get in. [laughter] They're learning so much software that describes the performing aspects of buildings, so they can tweak a design to make it perform better for sustainability purposes. So the courses now—at least at Cal Poly—they're courses in what's called the "net zero" building that does not consume energy. It generates its own energy and manages its own waste.

**LM:** Sounds like a perpetual motion—

**CH:** Rube Goldberg as the architect—[laughter]

**LH:** Yeah. Yeah. So you can leave the lights on, run that Christmas tree all year—so I don't believe in just one solution for everything. And I think preservation—not just preservation but sustainability is being studied now as a district, so it's now truly percolating down into urban design. What does a sustainable district look like now? So areas where energy is produced, water—even wastewater—is managed locally and cleansed and not allowed to go into the bay—all these things are being taught. And my students are being hired, which is really nice.

**MB:** It's very interesting to hear Luis talk about this high level of expertise—the technical aspect of it—because I would say in the past forty years, just in terms of preservation, preservation really began as just a passion and a fire in the belly, without the whole professionalization of the field, which has really emerged over the past several decades. So that, plus all these extraordinary tools—I noticed on the National Trust website that they've launched this initiative called Reurbanism—





**LH:** Oh yes—

**MB:** And this kind of mapping technology, which is really quite fascinating, helping to identify areas in which there is potential for preservation and reurbanization, revitalization. They haven't tackled L.A.—they did Long Beach, but they haven't tackled L.A. yet, for obvious reasons. But I think you're talking about the R&D, the research and development piece of this, which is something I think is a challenge for preservation in the future. This is really going to drive a lot of the successes in what we preserve, what is it that we preserve, and for whom? Those kinds of questions are ones that the movement, in the next forty years—I'm not sure I'll be around forty years from now, it would be nice—

**LM:** We're already inviting you back for the eightieth anniversary [laughter] —

**MB:** But where preservation is going, and that's what we're grappling with as well, the intersection of preservation and these vital urban issues that are on the front page of the *L.A. Times* every day.

**CH:** My perspective is slightly different. My sense is that the technical expertise in the schools is quite strong, and what's lacking is a discussion of the political, and zoning, and policy issues that are at play when you talk about the complexity of designing and executing a new generation of courtyard apartments, let's say, for Los Angeles, looking back to those earlier models.

And I'm glad Michelle mentioned Parker Center, because we're entering a period—and I hope we can talk a little bit about individual buildings and how we think about protecting them—of real complexity in terms of how the public views them. And Parker Center's a great example. So the buildings that are at risk have been, for the last decade or so, products of urban renewal or at least a modernist ideal about city-making that in many cases, razed without much thought neighborhoods that were there before. So that makes the question of whether to preserve those buildings really tricky.

I would say on top of that, the forty-year anniversary is a really apt one, not just because the organization is forty—and not just because Michelle's almost forty [laughter] —but also because forty is really the marker, the point at which important buildings fall into the greatest danger in terms of individual landmarks—

**LM:** Not yet beloved enough to be saved—

**CH:** Exactly. Margaret mentioned the Richfield Building across the street—a building we lost before the preservation movement really got started in Los Angeles. Built in 1929 I believe and demolished in 1969, I think that's right, so that's a forty-year period. And also, those cycles of taste are spinning faster now because of the access we have to digital culture, the back catalogue of every artistic medium, including architecture. So I would say that buildings really begin to fall into that shadowy area as early as age twenty-five.

So preservation—and all of the L.A. Conservancy folks have heard me say this before, who read my pieces arguing this—we really need to be thinking—not just in L.A., in cities all over the country—more proactively



about education. Having discussions about the buildings that are between twenty-five and fifty years old or forty years old. So, right now, that means buildings from the late seventies to the early nineties—

**LM:** You have some prime examples—

**CH:** If you look at pieces I've been writing about this year, the Thompson Center in Chicago, the Illinois State Building by Helmut Yan [sp], from the 1980s, barely even thirty years old, and now threatened with demolition, and the AT&T Building by Philip Johnson in New York, also barely over thirty years, having its ground-level spaces remade without much thought to the original design, in my point of view. So as the late-sixties urban renewal buildings have their own complexities in terms of historic preservation, so too do the buildings, in different ways, from the seventies, eighties, into the nineties.

In L.A. that means postmodern or L.A. School buildings that were sometimes ironic, sometimes cheeky, sometimes challenging conventional notions of beauty—so maybe even trying to be ugly, or challenging what a beautiful building was—so they're not beloved in quite the same way. Measuring their architectural value can be trickier. Eric Owen Moss once said to me that at one point their goal in the eighties and nineties was to make the ugliest building possible—that was the challenge. [laughter] And he said it tongue-in-cheek of course, but in the same way that painters who are really talented artists don't just want to paint a beautiful sunset—they're trying to do something more challenging. Plenty of architects feel that way as well.

So the particular group of postmodern buildings across the country and L.A. School buildings, let's say, from the eighties and nineties, are going to be vulnerable if they're not already. So my only suggestion, my only plea, is that we have a conversation about what made those buildings important and the ones that are maybe about to be threatened, so we can have a more sophisticated conversation about which ones are worth saving.

[questions from audience]