



LOS ANGELES CONSERVANCY NEWS



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Many of L.A.'s older and historic neighborhoods are threatened by mansionization and teardown trends. Photo of Citrus Avenue in the Mid-City area by Adrian Scott Fine/L.A. Conservancy.

Conserving L.A.'s Older and Historic Neighborhoods

by Adrian Scott Fine

In June, residents of older and historic neighborhoods throughout Los Angeles received some long-overdue and good news, coinciding with the passage of the City of Los Angeles' 2014-15 fiscal budget and \$8.1 billion spending plan. The revised budget includes funding for four new neighborhood conservation positions in the Department of City Planning.

The originally proposed budget omitted funding for these critical positions, triggering a range of advocacy efforts by the Conservancy, including asking our members and neighborhood residents to contact their City Council members. We could not have achieved this positive outcome without the support of so many throughout the city.

Thank you to everyone who provided testimony before the City Council, sent emails and letters, and personally reached out to your member of the City Council. We especially want to thank Councilmember Paul Koretz, who strongly advocated for this funding in his role on the Budget and Finance Committee.

This means there is help on the way for nearly sixteen neighborhoods awaiting Historic Preservation Overlay Zone, or HPOZ, status. The same can be said for older neighborhoods seeking relief from mansionization issues, with staff soon to be available to work closely with the neighborhoods that need this type of specialized assistance. For neighborhoods such as Carthay Square, Holmby-Westwood, and others, there is finally a light at the end of the tunnel.

The City currently has four planning staff members dedicated to all thirty existing HPOZs. These staff members handle a vast range of tasks, from evaluating proposed exterior changes to HPOZ properties, to reviewing surveys for new HPOZs, working with community members on education and outreach, creating required preservation plans for each HPOZ, and more. Second

Please see NEIGHBORHOODS on page 6

Summer Evening Tours

by Annie Laskey

The Conservancy's popular "Downtown at Sunset" walking tours are back this year, with tours taking place on Wednesday and Thursday evenings from July 23 to August 28.

On Wednesdays, we will offer our tour of City Hall (the only time of the year the Conservancy tours this iconic building), as well as a slightly shorter version of our Art Deco tour, regularly offered on Saturdays.

The **City Hall** tour explores the fascinating history and magnificent architecture of Los Angeles' great 1928 civic building, and includes a visit to the 27th floor observation deck (schedule permitting). *Wednesdays, July 23 & 30 & August 13 at 5:30 p.m.*

The **Art Deco** tour highlights the architecture and ornamentation of buildings from the 1920s and '30s, featuring rich materials and classic geometric design. *Wednesdays, August 6, 20, & 27 at 5:30 p.m.*

On Thursdays, the Conservancy will reprise last year's sold-out **Modern by Moonlight** tour. In a nighttime twist on the Modern Skyline Tour, Modern by Moonlight shows the skyscrapers and plazas of Bunker Hill in the soft glow of the summer twilight. The tour will end at the BonaVista Lounge at the top of the 1978 Bonaventure Hotel for no-host cocktails, dining, and spectacular nighttime views. *Thursdays, July 24 & 31 and August 7, 14, 21, & 28 at 7:00 p.m.*

Tours are \$5 for Conservancy members and children 12 and under; \$10 for the general public; reservations are required. Space is limited, so reserve now! Visit laconservancy.org/tours or call (213) 623-2489.

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The Los Angeles Conservancy is a nonprofit membership organization that works through education and advocacy to recognize, preserve, and revitalize the historic architectural and cultural resources of Los Angeles County.

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Welcome Liz Leshin, Director of Development

The Conservancy is thrilled to welcome Liz Leshin to our staff as director of development. Liz is a longtime Conservancy member with a love of classic films, who has regularly attended Last Remaining Seats. She hails from Wisconsin and attended the University of Wisconsin-Madison, graduating with B.A. degrees in journalism and comparative literature, and going on to New York University, where she earned an M.F.A. degree in film production.



Liz has a great track record in fundraising, with more than fifteen years of experience guiding and supporting development efforts in a variety of Los Angeles institutions, including schools, synagogues, the Greater Los Angeles Zoo Association, and youth arts organizations such as Venice Arts and The Unusual Suspects.

As director of development, Liz will oversee all contributed revenue from major gifts, membership, and special events. Please join us in welcoming Liz to the Conservancy team.

Welcome Sara Roberts, Membership Assistant

We are also excited to welcome Sara Roberts to our development staff as membership assistant. Sara is a graduate of Occidental College with a B.A. in theater. She is passionate about the arts and excited to work in the nonprofit field. Sara grew up with an appreciation for architecture, as her father is an architect.



Sara has previously worked at Harvard-Westlake Middle School and American Contemporary Ballet. Please help us welcome Sara to the Conservancy staff.

Mickie Torres-Gil Leaves Conservancy Staff

After nearly two years as the Conservancy's membership assistant (and a previous stint as a Conservancy intern), Mickie Torres-Gil left the staff in May. Mickie's dedication to preservation led her to a new intern position with SurveyLA in the Los Angeles Department of City Planning's Office of Historic Resources. She is also earning a master's degree in heritage conservation from USC. We will miss Mickie greatly but are glad she is continuing on a career path in the preservation field, and remaining with us as a Conservancy volunteer.

Joe Spencer (1923-2014)

Longtime Conservancy volunteer Joe Spencer passed away recently at the age of 90. From the mid-1980s until declining health limited his activities in the early 2000s, Joe was one of the Conservancy's most active volunteers and most requested walking tour docents. He mentored and trained many fellow docents, and was generally acclaimed by his peers to be the 'gold standard' of docents. One particular legacy of Joe's that continues to live on: he established the red name badges for volunteers, subsidizing the first rounds himself.

Preservation Issues

by Adrian Scott Fine, Manuel Huerta, and Marcello Vavala

For more information about these and other preservation issues, please visit laconservancy.org/important-issues.

John Lautner Building Threatened with Demolition

A little-known 1979 building in the Valley designed by master architect John Lautner is threatened with demolition. AbilityFirst, the current owner and operator of the property, and Oakmont Senior Living, the potential buyer, have submitted plans to demolish the Paul Weston Work Center, originally known as the Crippled Children's Society Rehabilitation Center. It would be replaced with a two-story, nearly 85,000-square-foot elder-care facility with up to forty parking spaces.

John Lautner produced some of Southern California's most visionary examples of Modernist design. His buildings have been described as sculptural and sensory and were always designed to respond to their site. The Rehabilitation Center is no exception. Much of Lautner's work was residential, making this a rare example of an institutional-based design and commission.

SurveyLA identified the Rehabilitation Center as a potential historic resource eligible for both the California Register and local listing in March 2013. Yet the Office of Historic Resources within the Los Angeles Department of City Planning was not consulted about the proposed project. In preparing the environmental review for the project, the Department of City Planning concluded that the project site contained no potential historic and/or cultural resources, preliminarily issuing a Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) in April 2014. The MND fails to note that the Rehabilitation Center was identified by SurveyLA or elsewhere.

The Conservancy called on the public to ask City Planning to deny the MND for the proposed project and instead require the preparation of a more detailed Environmental Impact Report (EIR), as clearly mandated under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). An EIR requires the consideration of a range of preservation alternatives.



Period photo of the John Lautner-designed Paul Weston Work Center in Woodland Hills. Photo courtesy of Helena Arahuete, who served as project architect for the building and spoke at a Conservancy event there last year.

Illegal Demolitions of Historic Buildings

Two historic structures in Los Angeles were illegally demolished within six months. In November 2013, a circa 1923 Spanish Colonial Revival house in the Whitley Heights Historic Preservation Overlay Zone (HPOZ) was illegally demolished. While the property owner was issued a permit for interior remodel work, the house was entirely demolished the weekend of November 9 and 10, apparently with the electricity still connected. In April 2014, the owner of the San Marino Villas in Koreatown demolished the structure without any permits. The three-story, Mediterranean Revival apartment building was designated as Historic-Cultural Monument #870.

The City's Department of Building and Safety intends to impose the "Scorched Earth" policy for these property owners' actions, preventing any development on the sites for up to five years. Los Angeles is one of a handful of cities in L.A. County with a policy to deter this type of illegal activity.

Economic Development and State Historic Tax Credit Act

The Conservancy is part of a coalition including the California Preservation Foundation, the AIA California Council, and other nonprofit organizations supporting Assembly

Bill (AB) 1999, an important piece of legislation that would provide incentives for historic preservation.

If passed, AB 1999 will create the California Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit. The credit would help stimulate economic development and protect historic buildings by benefiting the economic development of properties listed in, or eligible for, the California Register of Historical Resources or the National Register of Historic Places.

Authored by Toni Atkins, Speaker of the Assembly (San Diego), AB 1999 was passed by the State Assembly with a unanimous 75-0 vote. At press time, the bill was on its way to the State Senate. The Conservancy needs your support to enact this important legislation. Thank you to everyone who has already written in support of the bill's passage.



Owners of historic buildings within historic districts, such as the Broadway Theatre and Commercial District (listed in the National Register of Historic Places), would benefit from the proposed tax credit. Photo by Adrian Scott Fine/L.A. Conservancy.

2014 Preservation Awards

For project team lists, visit laconservancy.org/awards

Congratulations to the recipients of the Conservancy's 33rd Annual Preservation Awards! They reflect a range of outstanding efforts to preserve and revitalize the historic places that make Greater Los Angeles unique.

We will present the awards at a luncheon on **Thursday, July 31**, at the Millennium Biltmore Hotel in downtown Los Angeles. Our deepest thanks to **City National Bank**, the luncheon's presenting sponsor for the fourteenth consecutive year.

The luncheon is a great opportunity to network with preservation, community, and business leaders while supporting the work of the Conservancy. Individual tickets are \$125. Table sponsorships begin at \$1,250. For details, visit laconservancy.org/awards.



2014 Jury

Many thanks to the members of our independent jury, who had the difficult task of selecting this year's recipients from a very strong pool of applicants.

Alfred Fraijo, Jr. (Chair), Partner, Sheppard Mullin Richter & Hampton LLP

Jennifer Dunbar, LEED AP, Pfeiffer Partners Architects, Inc. Founding President, West Hollywood Preservation Alliance

Judy M. Horton, Board Member, The California Garden and Landscape History Society

Nicholas P. Maricich City Planner, Los Angeles Department of City Planning, Policy Planning Division

Howard Sherman, Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, The Music Center | Performing Arts Center of Los Angeles County

President's Award

Wilshire Boulevard Temple

3663 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, 90010

Built in 1929 with the support of early movie moguls, this synagogue is an architectural treasure. The sanctuary languished over the years as congregants moved to other parts of the city. In 2004, temple leaders made a commitment to restore the building and make it the centerpiece of a campus to serve the congregation and the surrounding community. Ten years later, the gleaming sanctuary has been beautifully restored and sensitively upgraded for generations of future use. This project is a textbook case of first-rate, large-scale preservation, as well as a prime example of the power of preservation in revitalizing communities.



Photo by Tom Bonner.

Ace Hotel Downtown Los Angeles and The Theatre at Ace Hotel

933 S. Broadway, Los Angeles, 90015

This 1927 Gothic Revival theatre served as the flagship for the United Artists studio, formed by legends of early Hollywood who broke from the major studio system. Though maintained by longtime owner the University Cathedral of Dr. Gene Scott, the theatre and adjacent office tower's futures were uncertain after the church moved in 2011. Ace Hotel



Photo by Spencer Lowell.

Group transformed the office tower into a hotel and upgraded the theatre for first-rate entertainment, all with complete reverence for the building's rich past. The building's revitalization brings new energy to the area and fuels downtown's ongoing revival.

Barns Area and Rancho Center, Rancho Los Alamitos

6400 E. Bixby Hill Road, Long Beach, 90815

This project culminates a more than twenty-five-year effort to conserve and interpret Southern California's rancho era. While Rancho Los Alamitos remained largely intact, historic barns had been moved, and there were no facilities for educational interpretation. As part of the site's Master Plan, the fragile barns were carefully relocated, the landscape restored, and a new interpretive education center and bookshop/classroom discreetly added. This highly significant site is now poised for many years of vibrant activity and education.



Photo by David Wakely.

Bob Hope Patriotic Hall

1816 S. Figueroa Street, Los Angeles, 90015

For more than seventy-five years, this County-owned building has served as a monument to, and resource for, members and veterans of the U.S. military. The highly visible building had been altered very little since its construction in 1926—which maintained original features yet led to disrepair through deferred maintenance. A full rehabilitation restored historic elements and upgraded systems inside and out. The building now offers a spacious auditorium; gymnasium; and office, conference, and meeting space. Close collaboration and creative solutions transformed an underused structure into an active, multipurpose facility to serve those who have served our country.



Image courtesy Spectra Company.

Dunbar Hotel

4225 S. Central Avenue, Los Angeles, 90011

The Dunbar Hotel was the center of L.A.'s African American community from the 1930s through the 1950s. It hosted historic events including the first West Coast meeting of the NAACP. The hotel stood vacant for over a decade and was converted to apartments in 1989, yet it languished for many years. In 2011, the Dunbar became the centerpiece of an affordable housing project that reversed years of deferred maintenance and alterations, restored original features, and upgraded systems. This jewel of the neighborhood shines again, celebrating its past, serving the community, and boosting civic pride.



Image courtesy Thomas Safran & Associates and Coalition for Responsible Community Development.

The Hercules Campus

5865 Campus Center Drive, Los Angeles, 90094

The Hercules Campus in Playa Vista is part of the property occupied by Hughes Aircraft Company from the early 1940s through the mid-1980s. Though highly significant—including serving as the birthplace of the Hercules flying boat (aka “Spruce Goose”)—the industrial site sat vacant and deteriorating for decades. The Ratkovich Company bought the property in 2010 and transformed it into creative facilities. Continuing a legacy of innovation, the former warehouses, fire station, and other buildings now house digital entertainment and creative agencies.



Image courtesy The Ratkovich Company.

CDI Early Learning Center

7260 Owensmouth Avenue, Los Angeles (Canoga Park), 91303

When the Canoga Park Library relocated in 2004, its original home—a 1959 Mid-Century Modern gem with a whimsical, folded-plate roof—languished for years. It suffered from vandalism and deferred maintenance, yet remained standing because of its status as a local landmark. An adaptive reuse project transformed the building into an Early Learning Center for the Childhood Development Institute. Creative solutions upgraded the building without compromising its distinct appearance. It now thrives as a resource for neighborhood families, its playful design a perfect compliment to the vibrant activity within.



Photo by Juan Carlos Garrido.

The Forum

3900 W. Manchester Boulevard, Inglewood, 90305

The “Fabulous” Forum has been an icon since it opened in 1967. Designed by Charles Luckman, the unique circular building served as a sports and entertainment arena for decades. The opening of Staples Center in 1999 changed the Forum’s fortunes, and the building fell into disrepair. Madison Square Garden bought the Forum in 2012, reviving and repositioning it as a high-end entertainment venue with first-rate amenities while restoring its classic, mid-century appearance. The project provides a national model for reusing large, arena-type structures. It also provides an economic benefit for the City of Inglewood and reinvents an important Southern California institution.



Photo by Adrian Scott Fine/L.A. Conservancy.

Joseph L. Starr Dairy Farmhouse

2801 S. Arlington Avenue, Los Angeles, 90018

Built in 1887 as part of a dairy, this farmhouse is the oldest house in the West Adams neighborhood of Jefferson Park and the last remnant of its agricultural history. By 2008, after decades of neglect, the house stood vacant, had been partially demolished, and was rapidly deteriorating. The City deemed the home a public nuisance and planned to raze it. A private individual rescued it from the brink of demolition, painstakingly restoring it in an effort that redefines determination. He even used the project to educate the community, providing public access then and now to promote the value of preservation.



Photo by Mitzi March Mogul.

NEIGHBORHOODS continued from page 1

only to New York City, Los Angeles has the second-largest program of historic districts in the U.S., where HPOZs currently encompass more than 25,000 parcels throughout the city.

Several years ago, the Department of City Planning reached full capacity and could no longer serve the needs of potential or pending HPOZs and neighborhoods seeking help from teardowns. Without funding to expand services and staff, neighborhoods have remained in limbo, awaiting conservation and protection, all the while continuing to experience inappropriate alterations and overdevelopment pressures. Some have been in the pipeline for as long as twelve years.

Saving Neighborhood Character

Securing the funding for these planning positions begins to address a series of issues that are affecting Los Angeles' neighborhoods. As the economy continues to rebound, we are already beginning to see increased development pressures on older and historic neighborhoods. This is a problem, as these neighborhoods help define the city, and each has its own very distinct physical identity that is important to retain and celebrate.

While the character of a neighborhood is not always easily defined, it is often made up of a collection of buildings, architectural styles, and a similar scale and massing that, when combined, work together to help impart a specific look and feel of a place. Community character is particularly fragile and can be easily damaged or destroyed. Los Angeles neighborhoods have a long history of experiencing trends such as maxing out on a home's square footage, expanding a home "up and out," filling in any open space on the lot, and of course, tearing the home down altogether.

As part of the larger teardown trend, mansionization can be particularly damaging. This is not a new issue, and it continued even during the recession. Mansionization occurs as existing homes are seen by some as "underdeveloped." A house is purchased, subsequently demolished, and then replaced by a new, larger house. The results are often massive and out of scale with neighboring homes. National trends indicate that replacement houses are often nearly three times the size of the demolished homes.

Playing out much like a domino effect where one teardown sparks another, mansionization destroys more than just houses. Neighborhood livability is diminished as trees are removed, backyards are eliminated, and sunlight is blocked.

This is a controversial topic, with no easy answers or a one-size-fits-all approach. While mansionization is essentially about impacts on older and historic neighborhoods, it is really much more. It involves private property rights, smart growth, environmental issues and sustainability, economics and the tax base, demographic shifts, and ever-changing housing preferences. However, at the heart of it all, it is about losing community character and neighborhood livability.

When the City passed its Baseline Mansionization Ordinance in 2008, it appeared as if nearly every neighborhood was experiencing some loss of character and privacy that follows the arrival of the "McMansion."

In 2011, the City followed up with the Baseline Hillside Ordinance. Both measures attempted to curb the appetite for, and the size of, new houses, and each followed a lengthy public review process and debate. Previously the City did not regulate oversized homes in the context of their impacts on community character.

Neither measure was designed to entirely stop mansionization, prompting some neighborhood residents to press for additional tools and relief. The Beverly Grove neighborhood in the Mid-City area is a good example, where a Residential Floor Area (RFA) District was created in 2013.

Covering approximately 700 homes, the RFA limits the maximum residential floor area ratio (FAR) to roughly 3,000 square feet. That is still about fifty percent larger than the average existing older home in the neighborhood, yet more restrictive than currently allowed citywide.

One unique aspect is that the FAR includes attached (not detached) garages in the overall calculation. This provides an incentive to build a garage at the rear instead, maintaining the character and buffer that a driveway provides for neighbors.

New Tools to Help

The City of Los Angeles is in the early stages of re:code LA, a comprehensive revision of L.A.'s outdated zoning code. Described as "one of the most ambitious projects of its kind ever attempted," re:code LA is a five-year, \$5 million project intended to rewrite the current code, which dates to 1946.

In March, the City and the re:code LA team released a report outlining some of the issues to be addressed, including the need to promote and preserve distinct neighborhood character. The report specifically mentions out-of-scale development and residents' concern that it does not match the look of their community or their vision for the future. The need to continue to protect historic resources and established neighborhoods is also specifically identified. The report suggests some streamlining measures for new HPOZs and new tools to better align with the underlying zoning for an area, including introducing a neighborhood conservation district tool.

The Conservancy is watching the re:code LA process closely and is working to engage neighborhood residents throughout the city to ensure that preservation issues are fully vetted, considered, and addressed through the new code process. We will keep you posted in this newsletter and on our website at laconservancy.org/recode.

On October 18, the Conservancy will co-sponsor the L.A. Historic Neighborhoods Conference, in partnership with the Los Angeles Department of City Planning and its Office of Historic Resources. With a continued focus on established HPOZs, we are expanding our reach to broaden the audience and support the preservation and conservation of older and historic neighborhoods. Look for more details soon.

Ultimately, neighborhood conservation is about deciding what we want Los Angeles to look like in the future. From a community character perspective, it is about residents coming together to truly consider all the short-term gains as well as factoring in the long-term implications that come with change, both good and bad. The Conservancy welcomes the opportunity to engage stakeholders and further this discussion.

MARCH 22 / JUNE 9

MEMBERSHIP REPORT

The Los Angeles Conservancy would like to acknowledge the generous contributions of our new Supporting members, and the new and renewing members of our Sustaining, Benefactor, and Cornerstone groups.

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MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

Your membership provides the Conservancy with crucial operating funds, as well as strength in numbers to maintain a powerful voice for preservation. Thank you!

READY TO UPGRADE?

Consider deepening your commitment to the Conservancy by upgrading your membership to the Benefactor (\$500) or Cornerstone (\$1,000+) level.

You'll provide leadership financial support and enjoy increased benefits, such as (for Benefactors) an invitation to the opening night reception for the Last Remaining Seats film series and private group walking tours.

Cornerstone members receive all Benefactor benefits, plus invitations to Cornerstone receptions at architecturally or historically significant venues. At higher Cornerstone levels, you'll also receive a commemorative miniature historic building, reserved seats with your Last Remaining Seats ticket purchases, and more.

Corporate Cornerstone memberships include company name acknowledgment in the program for the Conservancy's annual Preservation Awards Luncheon, attended by approximately 600 professionals in fields including business, architecture, law, real estate, banking and finance, government, and preservation.

For more information about becoming a Benefactor or Cornerstone member, including benefits at the various membership levels, please contact Adrienne Kisson at (213) 430-4204 or akisson@laconservancy.org.

CONSERVANCY WALKING TOURS

Walking tours begin at 10 a.m. except where noted. Tours are \$5 for Conservancy members and children twelve and under; \$10 for the general public. Walk-ins are accepted on most tours. Pre-payment is required on Angelino Heights, Biltmore Hotel, and Broadway.

For details and reservations, visit laconservancy.org. Questions? Call the Conservancy office at (213) 623-2489.

WEEKLY TOURS

- Art Deco
Every Saturday
- Biltmore Hotel
Every Sunday, 2 p.m.
- Broadway: Historic Theatre & Commercial District
Every Saturday
- Historic Downtown
Every Saturday

BI-WEEKLY AND MONTHLY TOURS

- Angelino Heights
First Saturday
- Downtown Renaissance: Spring & Main
Second and Fourth Saturdays
- Modern Skyline
First and Third Saturdays, 2 p.m.
- Union Station
Third Saturday

Youth, family, and group tours by arrangement; call (213) 623-2489 for information.



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For the latest information about issues and events, visit laconservancy.org.



Photo by Larry Underhill

SUNSET TOURS

Wednesday Evening Downtown
Walking Tours
July 23 – August 27

Join us on Wednesday evenings for tours of City Hall or Art Deco architecture in downtown Los Angeles. See page 1 for details.



Photo by Flora Chou/L.A. Conservancy

MODERN BY MOONLIGHT

Thursday Evening Downtown
Walking Tours
July 24 – August 28

On Thursday evenings, we'll reprise last summer's popular Modern by Moonlight tours, exploring the skyscrapers of Bunker Hill in the early evening. See page 1 for details.



Photo by Gary Leonard

PRESERVATION AWARDS LUNCHEON

Millennium Biltmore Hotel
Thursday, July 31

Join us at our 33rd Annual Preservation Awards Luncheon to honor outstanding historic preservation projects across Los Angeles County. See page 4 for details and recipients.