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Submitted by email

Oliver Netburn
Environmental Analysis Section
Department of City Planning
200 N. Spring Street, 7th Floor
Los Angeles, CA 90012
Email: oliver.netburn@lacity.org

523 West Sixth Street, Suite 826
Los Angeles, CA 90014

213 623 2489 OFFICE
213 623 3909 FAX
laconservancy.org

Re: Proposed Mitigated Negative Declaration, Olivo Shopping Center at Mission Hills, ENV-2015-3424-MND

Dear Mr. Netburn,

On behalf of the Los Angeles Conservancy, thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) for the Olivo Shopping Center at Mission Hills project.

The Conservancy has had several meetings with the applicant and project team, and we commend their commitment to rehabilitating and revitalizing the historic Mission Hills Bowl building as part of a sensitive new development. Though early plans called for the building's demolition, we applaud their willingness to explore preservation alternatives and are pleased to offer our support for the proposed project.

We submit the following comments to encourage additional refinement of the proposed project in order to further reduce potentially significant impacts to historic resources. In particular, we strongly recommend the inclusion of a second mitigation measure to require nomination of the Mission Hills Bowl building for Historic-Cultural Monument (HCM) designation.

I. Historic significance of Mission Hills Bowl

Designed by distinguished Los Angeles architect Martin Stern, Jr. and completed in 1957, Mission Hills Bowl is a rare, intact example of a Googie-style bowling alley in the San Fernando Valley. Its modern glass and steel design, coupled with jutting angles and bold signage, embody the space-age optimism and imagination of postwar Los Angeles and its burgeoning car culture.

A contemporary of Googie pioneers John Lautner and Armet & Davis, Stern was known for his futuristic designs in Southern California and Las Vegas. One of



Mission Hills Bowl's most distinctive features – its exposed, boomerang-shaped steel beams – burst from the side of the brick building in a manner reminiscent of a rocket. The design reveals the excitement and technological advancements of the postwar era, as well as the popular appeal of modernism.

Mission Hills Bowl, originally Sepulveda Bowl, is one of only a few remaining Googie-style bowling alleys in Southern California, including Corbin Bowl in Tarzana, Covina Bowl in Covina, and Friendly Hills Lanes in Whittier. When it opened its doors in 1958, it became a vital recreational and social center in its community and brought the era and spirit of modernism to the masses.

In 2014, Mission Hills Bowl was identified as eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, the California Register of Historical Resources, and as a Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument through SurveyLA, the City of Los Angeles' comprehensive citywide survey of historic resources. The property was determined significant for its distinctive Googie architecture and for its role in the development of the Valley's commercial and recreational landscape.¹

II. Nominate Mission Hills Bowl building for Historic-Cultural Monument (HCM) designation to ensure continued eligibility as an historic resource

The proposed MND reflects ongoing conversations between the applicant, the Conservancy, and community stakeholders regarding the preservation and reuse of the Mission Hills Bowl building. We concur that the project, as currently proposed, will meet the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation* and that the Mission Hills Bowl building will maintain its eligibility for listing on the National Register, the California Register, and as an HCM.

We value the creative integration of the bowling alley into the larger development, including the incorporation of a new pedestrian courtyard into the area underneath the exposed beams on the building's south elevation. Though certain modifications will be made to the building – including the construction of a rear addition and the insertion of four new display windows – we believe they will proceed in a manner whereby the building's primary character-defining features will be retained and preserved. Furthermore, the adjacent new construction is appropriately setback and sensitively designed so that it will enhance, rather than detract from, the historic building.

While we appreciate the inclusion of Mitigation Measure CR-1, which states that the project will conform to the *Standards* and that a qualified preservation professional will participate in design collaboration and construction monitoring, we strongly believe that a second mitigation measure is necessary to ensure that adverse impacts are further reduced and that the Mission Hills Bowl building retains its eligibility as an historic resource.

¹ City of Los Angeles, "Historic Resources Survey Report: Mission Hills-Panorama City-North Hills Community Plan Area." Prepared by Architectural Resources Group, Inc., March 20, 2014.



Based on our conversations, we understand that the applicant plans to apply for HCM designation following the approval of its requested entitlements. Given the potential for significant impacts, we recommend that this provision be incorporated into the MND so that a clear process is outlined for the nomination to proceed.

The HCM designation is a critical tool for preserving and protecting the Mission Hills Bowl building in the future, as it would enable the City's Cultural Heritage Commission and staff to review and comment on project design and details for compliance with the *Standards*, including any proposed signage. It will also allow the applicant to apply for tax benefits through the City's Mills Act program in order to offset costs associated with the rehabilitation.

In addition, we encourage the applicant to explore opportunities for incorporating interpretive features into publicly-accessible areas, such as the pedestrian courtyard, that provide more information about Google-style architecture, Martin Stern, Jr., and postwar bowling alleys.

About the Los Angeles Conservancy:

The Los Angeles Conservancy is the largest local historic preservation organization in the United States, with over 6,500 members throughout the Los Angeles area. Established in 1978, the Conservancy works to preserve and revitalize the significant architectural and cultural heritage of Los Angeles County through advocacy and education. The Conservancy's all-volunteer Modern Committee has been at the forefront of preserving mid-century architecture since its inception in 1984.

The Conservancy appreciates the opportunity to comment on and express our support for the proposed Olivo Shopping Center project and the sensitive rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of the Mission Hills Bowl building. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at 213-430-4203 or afine@laconservancy.org.

Sincerely,



Adrian Scott Fine
Director of Advocacy

cc: City Councilmember Felipe Fuentes, Council District 7
Mission Hills Neighborhood Council
City of Los Angeles, Office of Historic Resources

