

Agenda Report

TO: CITY COUNCIL

DATE: OCTOBER 27, 2003

FROM: CITY MANAGER

SUBJECT: CERTIFICATION OF FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT FOR CITY HALL SEISMIC RETROFIT PROJECT

CITY MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommend that the City Council:

- 1) Certify the Pasadena City Hall Seismic Retrofit Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) (Attachment A—Volume I);
- 2) Adopt the Findings of Fact and the Statement of Overriding Considerations (Attachment B) confirming that the benefits of the project outweigh the significant unavoidable effects on cultural resources (the need to rebuild the east arcade), biological resources (the need to remove trees), and traffic (the need to close traffic lanes and a portion of Garfield Avenue during construction).
- 3) Adopt the mitigation monitoring and reporting program (ATTACHMENT C) and adopt a de minimus finding as required by California Fish and Game Code 711.4(d)(1) and Title 14, California Code of Regulations Section 735.5(a)(3); and
- 4) Direct the City Clerk to file a Notice of Determination with the County Clerk.

RECOMMENDATION FROM CITY HALL RESTORATION OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE:

At its meeting on October 8, 2003, the Oversight Committee recommended that the City Council certify the FEIR with Findings of Fact and a Statement of Overriding Considerations.

BACKGROUND.

In October 2002, the City awarded a contract to EIP Associates to complete an environmental impact report (EIR) for the seismic retrofit of City Hall. Working with sub-consultants, EIP Associates then completed six technical studies analyzing the effects of the project on air quality, traffic, landscaping, historic resources, asbestos, and noise. They submitted a draft of the EIR to City staff in April 2003.

City staff released the draft EIR for public review and comment on June 12, 2003. The required 45-day review period for public comment ended on July 28, 2003. During this time, the staff presented the draft EIR to the Transportation Advisory Committee, the Historic Preservation Commission, the Design Commission, the City Hall Restoration Oversight Committee, the Urban Forestry Advisory Committee, and the Planning Commission. In addition, the Planning Commission held a public hearing on July 23 to receive comments from the public on the document. The draft EIR was also posted on the City's Web site and printed copies were available in the Central Library and in the Permit Center.

In August, the consultants drafted responses to the comments received during the 45-day review period and inserted these responses (chapter 9) in the final EIR. Accompanying these changes were additional edits and revisions to the project description, the analysis of environmental impacts, the alternatives, and the selection of the environmentally superior alternative (chapter 8). The City Hall Restoration Oversight Committee reviewed the final EIR at its meeting on October 8, 2003 and recommended that the Council certify the document.

The rehabilitation and base-isolation project analyzed in the final EIR (chapter 2) corresponds to the scope of work authorized by the City Council on April 22, 2002. It includes a new usable basement at the east end of the courtyard with raised foundation walls for future construction of an east wing. One of the alternatives analyzed in the FEIR is the "limited basement" project recommended by the City Hall Restoration Oversight Committee and approved by the City Council on August 11, 2003. This alternative, with a minimal basement connecting the north and south wings, is the "environmentally superior alternative" to the original project (chapter 8). This alternative reduces—but does not eliminate—the number of significant unavoidable effects. It eliminates the significant effect on aesthetics by removing from consideration the possibility of raised basement walls. It and the original project described in the FEIR, however, both require a statement of overriding considerations for the effects on trees, the arcade, and traffic circulation.

Under the CEQA Guidelines (§15162), the City Council may certify an EIR for a revised project with fewer significant effects on the environment than the original project. A supplemental EIR or an addendum to an EIR is required only if the effects of a revised project substantially increase the severity of previously identified effects.

Purposes of an EIR.

An EIR is a full-disclosure informational document, intended to advise public-agency decision makers and the public about the significant environmental effects of a project. State law (§15121 CEQA Guidelines) requires an EIR to:

- identify ways to minimize the significant effects of a project;
- identify and evaluate reasonable alternatives;
- propose mitigation measures to lessen the adverse effects of a project;
- solicit public review and comment of the proposed mitigation measures and alternatives; and

- identify a feasible “environmentally superior” project.

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines require a public agency to consider the information presented in an EIR and to respond to each significant effect. They also require public agencies to adopt mitigation measures to lessen the adverse effects. In cases where a project creates significant unavoidable effects on the environment—even with mitigation measures—the agency may certify (approve) an EIR only by adopting findings of fact and a statement of overriding considerations.

Alternatives & Mitigation Measures.

The final EIR (chapter 4 and chapter 8) identifies five alternatives to the proposed project:

- 1) no project (a required alternative in all EIRs);
- 2) base-isolation seismic retrofit with a low-profile basement (i.e., limiting to 8 feet the floor-to-ceiling height of new basement at the east end of the building so that the foundation walls for the basement will not be exposed above grade);
- 3) life-safety alternative (no base isolation but achieve seismic bracing through additional steel-framing and support columns and shotcreted walls);
- 4) limited disruption (no base isolation but achieve seismic bracing through additional concrete shear walls and supporting buttresses); and
- 5) limited basement (a structural linkage between the north and south wings with no usable office/storage space and no exposed foundation walls).

The chapter on alternatives also identifies five alternatives that would be infeasible (e.g., suspending the arcade on site during construction, moving the arcade off site in large sections and returning it to its original location at the completion of the project, relocating cooling towers off site). It concludes that the “limited basement” is the environmentally superior alternative.

Significant and unavoidable effects and mitigation measures.

The report (chapters 3, 5, and 8) concludes that the project—even with mitigation measures—would cause significant and unavoidable effects in four areas:

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| 1. AESTHETICS | <i>Potential for elevated basement walls—and podiums—in the existing landscaped setback along Euclid Avenue (based on the original scope of the project).</i> |
| 2. BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES | <i>Loss of 31 (or as many as 37) of the existing 85 trees on the site (including the floss silk trees in the courtyard).</i> |

3. CULTURAL RESOURCES

Demolition of the existing arcade; elevated basement walls obscuring pedestrian-level views of the arcade.

4. TRAFFIC, PARKING & CIRCULATION

Short-term impacts (during 36 months of construction) resulting from closure of Garfield Avenue and reduction of traffic lanes and capacity along Union Street adjacent to City Hall. Traffic volume is anticipated to shift elsewhere and adversely affect the level of service at the intersection of N. Euclid Avenue and Thurgood Marshall Street and N. Euclid Avenue and Union Street.

The report also identifies other “potentially significant impacts” and “less-than-significant” impacts that may be addressed through a series of mitigation measures. These impacts involve hazards and hazardous materials, hydrology/water quality, noise and vibration, public services, air quality, and geology/soils. These impacts also extend to items involving aesthetics, biological resources, and cultural resources, which are separate from the significant and unavoidable effects.

The mitigation measures (ATTACHMENT C, Table 4-1) involve nine areas. They concern in greatest detail cultural resources (historic preservation) and require, for example, a historic preservation consultant to participate in on-site monitoring of construction through all phases of the project. They also require photographic documentation of the building and protection of historic features and surfaces. The mitigation measures also specify protections for the oak trees in the courtyard and require ongoing reviews of the landscaping plan for the courtyard and perimeter areas with the Urban Forestry Advisory Committee and the Design Commission. Under aesthetics, the measures detail landscape treatments for the perimeter moat and courtyard and propose possible reintroduction of historical landscape plantings and design features. To mitigate the effects on traffic and circulation, the measures include a construction layout plan and management of truck deliveries.

Findings of Fact and the Statement of Overriding Considerations

When—as in this case—the effects of a project cannot be substantially mitigated, the CEQA Guidelines (§15091) require a public agency to balance the benefits of the project against the unavoidable effects on the environment. It requires the lead agency to issue written findings (findings of fact) to describe significant impacts and the reasons for rejecting or approving project alternatives. It also requires a rationale (statement of overriding considerations) for approving a project with significant unavoidable effects citing the benefits that outweigh the adverse environmental effects. The conclusions in this report are that the overriding benefits are: installation of a base isolation system,

restoration and rehabilitation of City Hall, and code upgrades of the building. (ATTACHMENT B, pp. 42-43).

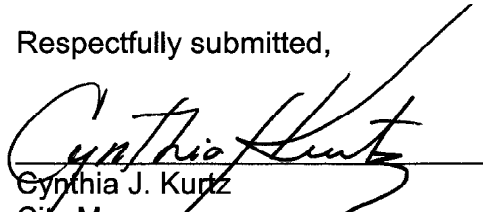
The findings of fact also document that the limited basement alternative supports the current objectives of the project, as defined by the City Council on August 11, 2003, and produces fewer significant effects than the original project. They conclude that this alternative is feasible and the project that should be approved with certification of the FEIR.

The final EIR—with the mitigation monitoring program, findings of fact, statement of overriding consideration, and technical appendices—fulfills the requirements in the CEQA guidelines for an environmental impact report. A comprehensive study, it demonstrates a commitment by the City to consider all of the environmental effects involving a major project affecting a historic resource of exceptional distinction.

Fiscal Impact.

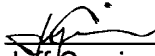
The budget for the seismic retrofit project includes costs (e.g., historic preservation consultant) for compliance with the environmental mitigation measures in the FEIR.

Respectfully submitted,




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