

## **Recommendations of the Civic Center Task Force**

**May 3, 2018**

The City Council directed the Civic Center Task Force to provide recommendations regarding the following five general topics related to the Civic Center Area:

- **Setbacks/Open Space**
- **Building Height**
- **Land Use**
- **Public Improvements**
- **Parking/Loading not addressed because it was not felt to be appropriate without a defined land use**

In order to inform our recommendations on these five topics, the Task Force unanimously agreed on the following six Guiding Principles:

### **GUIDING PRINCIPLES:**

1. Preserve/restore/rehabilitate the YWCA.
2. Preservation of public open space is a high priority.
3. Planning should be symmetrical across the YWCA and YMCA sites.
4. Bring life to the Civic Center.
5. Preserve and enhance the pedestrian experience.
6. Inspire a sense of civic pride.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

Based on these Guiding Principles we recommend the following actions:

#### **Setbacks/Open Space:**

The Task Force had divergent views on this issue. At its April 19, 2018, meeting, the Task Force took a straw poll with the following results for the recommended setback from the back of the Garfield Avenue sidewalk for any new construction east of the YWCA or YMCA buildings:

- 52.5' (based on 1923 Bennett Plan): 6 votes
- 98' – 108' (based on existing west property line of open space parcels): 3 votes
- 25' (based on 1925-1926 Bennett Plan): 2 votes

#### **Building Height:**

The Task Force unanimously agreed that the Council should limit the building heights on the west side of Garfield to the cornice height (approximately 54 feet) of City Hall wings on both sites, stepping down to a more compatible lower height next to the YWCA building.

### **Land Use:**

The Task Force unanimously recommend that the City implement Actions 3 and 18 in the 20 Actions to Achieve the Guiding Principles listed below:

3. The City should consider a mix of public and private uses in the Civic Center area to ensure rehabilitation of the YWCA, with a priority on public access.

18. The City should consider public/private amenities and land uses that go beyond a 9-5 office use to increase foot traffic to the area, including uses that draw diverse segments of the community (ages, ethnicities, races, etc.) on evenings and weekends. These could include a coffee bar, a restaurant, gatherings, art shows, farmers markets, music concerts and other civic-oriented public events. Any commercial land uses established in this area should be subordinate, supportive and ancillary to civic uses in the Civic Center.

### **Public Improvements:**

An overwhelming majority of the Task Force recommended that the City address the expanse of pavement in Centennial Plaza, which it found to be dangerous, confusing (i.e., pedestrian and automobile conflict) and unattractive. The Task Force also addressed more general suggestions for public improvements. Among the ideas discussed and voted upon at the April 19, 2018 meeting (note that some members voted for more than one of the options listed below) were the following:

- Design improvements to slow traffic, enhance ability to have public events and make safer and more attractive: 8 votes
- Close off Centennial Plaza to vehicular traffic: 5 votes
- Do nothing: 1 vote
- Install landscaped medians within Garfield Avenue north and south of Centennial Plaza: 11 votes

There was general consensus for the following improvements:

- Preserve double row of Englemann Oaks on Holly Street
- Install public art on the north side of Holly Street to balance with the Robinson Memorial
- Consider installing a central feature within Centennial Plaza, which could be low-lying landscaping (except grass) or alternative, permeable paving, with bollards to control traffic and retain usability for events

**ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDED ACTIONS TO ACHIEVE THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES:**

In addition to the recommendations related to the four topics discussed above, the Task Force further recommends that the City Council pursue the following 20 Actions to achieve the enumerated Guiding Principles.

| ACTION  |
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| 1. Comply with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards. The City should commission a Cultural Landscape Report for the Civic Center area to work in concert with the National Register nomination.  |
| 2. Appropriate adequate funds to complete stabilization (i.e., "mothballing") of the building while new uses are being contemplated. This would include ensuring the building is weathertight, secured and that further deterioration is halted.  |
| 3. Recommend the City look at a mix of public and private uses in the Civic Center area to ensure rehabilitation of the YWCA, with a priority on public access. The City should consider housing for the homeless, transitional housing, housing for emancipated youth and other populations of need within the YWCA, the parking lot adjacent to the YWCA, and/or the vacant lot adjacent to the YMCA, taking into account the priority for public access to the YWCA.   |
| 4. Before a project is proposed, the City should commission an independent "rough order of magnitude" cost study to determine the cost of preserving and seismically upgrading the YWCA, as-is, independent of a proposed new use. This would include addressing the building structure, fire/life safety issues as well as mechanical systems.   |
| 5. The City should commission an independent analysis of the cost of developing any new project that may be proposed, including both rehabilitation and new construction costs, to verify cost estimates provided by a developer.   |
| 6. The City should commission an independent study or studies of the cost of developing the YWCA building for use as (i) City offices, (ii) community recreational use, or (iii) such other uses as may be recommended, to determine what the City may be able to fund under its own power and identify other funding sources for any shortfall. If an independent study is commissioned to evaluate developing the YWCA as city offices, that should be evaluated through an independent analysis of facility space needs and current leasing costs, with the goal of improving efficiency and making City services more accessible to the public. |
| 7. Maintain view corridors to Hale building and back of Post Office within open space areas.  |
| 8. To determine appropriate modifications to this area, an Urban Design Plan should be prepared by a team of professionals, including landscape architects and urban designers with historic expertise, to address both the potential historical significance of the existing open space and setting surrounding City Hall as well as future issues of climate change, sustainability, pedestrian experience and safety, preserving the grandeur of City Hall, continued ability to host events and identifying potential areas for additional landscaping.   |
| 9. The setbacks from Garfield Avenue should be equal on both the YWCA and YMCA sites. Development on the sites should be balanced, but not required to match in architectural character or height.  |

| ACTION   |
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| 10. If anything is built on the Garfield Avenue side of the YMCA or YWCA sites, they should have entrances that faces Centennial Square and City Hall. City Hall should face a building front, not a building back as it does now. Any entrance and facade across from City Hall should reflect City Hall in scale and a sense of monumentality. These entrances should not take away from existing historical entrances to the YWCA or YMCA buildings, which should remain the primary entrances to the buildings and should be restored and preserved. |
| 11. Any architect, landscape architect or urban designer for any changes to or new construction within the Civic Center should be chosen with great care. Outside professionals/experts with design expertise should be included in the review/selection process for the both designers and the proposed designs developed.  |
| 12. New buildings must be of superior design and materials and reflect the high quality of existing historic buildings in the Civic Center.  |
| 13. Ask Pasadena Heritage or other groups to provide tours of the Civic Center with its history.   |
| 14. Keep the public informed as any new plans for the Civic Center develop. This includes selection of developers, architects and design plans.  |
| 15. There should be a high level of maintenance of the public landscape in the Civic Center.   |
| 16. The rehabilitated YWCA should allow for it to be open to the public, on some basis, to areas of note so the public can appreciate one of Pasadena's architectural gems.  |
| 17. Reduce the expanse of concrete in front of City Hall, without detracting from the setting of City Hall. This may include enlargement of the sidewalk area directly in front of the entry steps. Any removal or replacement of hardscape should consider use of environmentally friendly and water-permeable materials and water collection systems.  |
| 18. Consider public/private amenities and land uses that go beyond a 9-5 office to increase foot traffic to the area, including uses that draw diverse segments of the community (ages, ethnicities, races, etc.) on evenings and weekends. These could include a coffee bar, a restaurant, gatherings, art shows, farmers markets, music concerts and other civic-oriented public events. Any commercial land uses established in this area should be subordinate, supportive and ancillary to civic uses in the Civic Center.                          |
| 19. Plan more city/private functions in the plaza.   |
| 20. Study the concept in the Bennett Plan of installing two fountains in the center of Garfield Avenue flanking Centennial Plaza.  |

If desired, upon completion of the recommended studies the Task Force is available to reconvene to review the studies and offer additional comments.