

September 21, 2020

Planning Commission
City of Pasadena
175 N. Garfield Avenue
Pasadena, CA 91101

RE: Item 5B, Surplus Property Declaration on 9/23 Agenda

Honorable Planning Commission:

I learned of this meeting agenda Item when I received a copy of the staff report from a friend at the end of last week. Since then, I have carefully thought about the proposition that properties across the street from City Hall be considered unuseful and surplus to the City's needs.

Before the property on the south side of Holly Street was declared surplus a few years ago, I strenuously objected. Since then, my wife and I have reluctantly moved from Pasadena as we downsized our house and could not afford to purchase in Pasadena a third time. Nonetheless, I grew up in Pasadena, lived there for over half of my life and still consider it my home. I also spent 13 years in the Planning Department (most as a Senior Planner) and, after retirement, five years on the Historic Preservation Commission. Therefor I am still interested in what you do in the heart of my hometown, and I still devote time and study to city planning in Pasadena.

Original Purpose Remains: I cannot understand how properties that were purchased as "grounds and appurtenances" for a new City Hall could have possibly lost their use for their original purpose when our glorious City Hall still stands, especially after the \$100 million rehabilitation just 15 years ago. If the City fathers decided to purchase these properties to provide grand, landscaped approaches for the future City Hall, then they are still needed for the purpose for which they were purchased after a citizen vote in 1923.

I believe that the entire 107-foot depth has achieved historic significance over the past 97 years and needs to be preserved. However, even if the Commission takes the word of staff, about half of that depth is shown on the Bennett Plan maps of 1925 as the grounds and approaches for City Hall. That 55 feet was to be publicly landscaped in a uniform fashion all the way from Union Street to Walnut Street. If they are sold off to private parties, the glorious, uniform approaches and grounds will be destroyed. Even if parts of these grounds are kept as landscaped setbacks, the landscaping will not be uniform and will be designed, of course, to relate to the private developments on the various sites.

The City is asking the Commission to seriously damage the original Civic Center concept approved by the voters in 1923 for present financial gain to the City. The picnic areas where I spent lunchtimes studying in awe the wonderful details of City Hall will be lost to future generations.

Technical Note: Attachment C shows the 1923 Bennett Plan, which was included in the newspaper brochure sent to all residents of the City prior to their vote. That brochure was the City-prepared public relations piece arguing for the approval of the bonds. It therefore shows the purpose for which the land was purchased, one of the questions that the

Commission needs to understand. The Commission should ask staff to dimension the open space in that plan just like they did for the after-the-purchase 1925 plan.

Environmental Review: I believe that such destruction of character-defining open space needs a full environmental analysis, in spite of the staff report's contentions. It is obvious to any reader of the staff report that the reason for declaring these properties surplus is so that the City can sell or lease them to a developer of some kind of a building (affordable housing, offices, City offices, hotel, etc.) The proposed piece-mealing of the environmental review is not allowed by CEQA. I would ask that the Commission require staff to provide them with full CEQA documents regarding piece-mealing of projects.

General Plan Consistency: It was interesting to note that the staff only believes that "designated open spaces or park land" are protected by the General Plan's policies regarding preservation of open space and parks. For that reason, they have not considered those policies for your consideration in this case. However, this land was designated for open space from the moment it was purchased after the civic vote in 1923, and it has remained as such for 97 years. Certainly, the Commission should consider the spirit of a "General" Plan, and not be limited by the staff's technicalities. I recommend that the Commission ask for an evaluation from staff of how this proposal affects all policies regarding open space and parks. For one, I think staff needs to admit that the proposal does not conform to Policy 5.5 regarding Civic Center Open Space (page 4).

The General Plan established policy 8.1 to protect historic resources. The National Register nomination for the Civic Center speaks repeatedly about the importance of the grand landscaped frontages along the Civic Center's streets as a character-defining feature of the District. Its significance will be harmed if this open space is not protected. Therefore the proposal does not comply with this policy.

Thank you for volunteering to help keep Pasadena a City of which we are all proud. Thank you for taking the time to read and think about my concerns.

Sincerely,



Darrell Cozen
1011 Sandpiper Street
Palm Desert, CA 92260