



Legislation Text

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Report to Mayor and City Council

Tuesday, September 19, 2023

Consent

SUBJECT:

CONSIDER A GRANT AGREEMENT WITH THE NATIONAL TRUST FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION IN THE AMOUNT OF \$150,000 FOR THE PRODUCTION OF A HISTORIC STRUCTURE REPORT FOR CARSON CITY HALL (CITY COUNCIL)

I. SUMMARY

In October 2022 the City of Carson was invited to apply for a \$150,000 grant under the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Conserving Black Modernism program under its African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund Grant program. The scope of the \$150,000 grant, which was announced in June 2023, will focus on producing a Historic Structure Report which will assess the current physical condition of Carson City Hall and prepare a historical context and framework for the preservation of the building's architectural elements, including guidance for future projects. The Grant Agreement is included as Exhibit 1. The Report will provide the context of the development of Carson City Hall in 1970's Los Angeles County and the works of civic modernism built during that time, the architectural style, and the cultural and social significance of the structure, including other significant works designed by the architectural team. It will also provide a detailed description of the building, highlighting its unique architectural features and materials, as well as the current condition of the structure, including any damage or deterioration.

A Request for Proposals (RFP) for qualified firms to produce the report was released by the City in July. The RFP is included as Exhibit 2. Six firms responded to the RFP, three were interviewed, and Architectural Resources Group (ARG) of Pasadena was selected as the strongest proposer. The contract with ARG will be presented to the City Council for approval at the October 17 meeting.

II. RECOMMENDATION

1. APPROVE a Grant Agreement with the National Trust for Historic Preservation under its Conserving Black Modernism Program, in the amount of \$150,000.

2. AUTHORIZE the Mayor to sign the Agreement and all related documents.

III. ALTERNATIVES

TAKE another action the City Council deems appropriate.

IV. BACKGROUND

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of the Historic Structure Report (HSR) Project is to develop a public educational program focused on Carson City Hall and its significant role in Black Modernism in the 1960s and 1970s through its lead architect, Robert Kennard. An HSR will provide the research and framework for the public education program and architectural guidance on future construction projects.

This research is needed before the public education campaign can commence, which would assess the building's condition, significant architectural elements, and appreciation of its architectural and historical significance. The elements of the HSR would include:

- a. An overview of the purpose of the report and the history of Carson City Hall and the historical context of the development of City Hall in the 1970s. It would place the building in the context of the works of civic modernism built during that time in the Los Angeles region, the architectural style, and the cultural and social significance of the structure and the architectural team who designed it, including Robert Kennard.
- b. The report would provide a detailed description of the building, highlighting its unique architectural features and materials including its naturally lit open interior and simplified but graceful outside forms and the use of a garden and landscaping to accentuate the inside-outside feel of the building. While the building materials are stucco and tile, an examination of the design influences would be part of the report, including the City's Spanish Rancho history and the elements of the design that feel nautical. These may reflect the City's relationship to the nearby ports and the importance of shipping to the region's history, but the report will study that.
- c. The report will provide an assessment of the current condition of the building, including any remaining damage or deterioration. The City has recently undertaken significant improvements, some of which were to replace aging building systems and others to address water damage and mold, and to respond to changing laws and regulations (ADA, drought regulations). The report would identify other areas which may need specialized attention soon and also propose recommendations for the preservation of the structure, including any necessary repairs or restoration work. Guidance on how to replace aging building elements and a framework for accommodating future office space, either in the building or on the campus, will be included. A management plan for the ongoing maintenance and preservation of the structure would also be included.
- d. Finally, the report would assess the historic significance of the structure,

including its cultural, social, and architectural significance and the significance of its architectural team in Modernism. The three primary architects - Robert Kennard, Robert Alexander, and Frank Sata -- each have individual accomplishments in the profession which make them noteworthy, and their collaboration on this building should be extra noteworthy. Some of the context for Modernism in Carson is the A. Quincy Jones-designed campus of Cal State Dominguez Hills and the former Nissan headquarters campus.

- e. Appendices: Additional information, such as photographs, maps, and historical documents, may be included in the appendices.

City Hall Architects/Grant Eligibility

In developing its City Hall in the early 1970s the City contracted with Robert Kennard to design City Hall with his former colleague from the noteworthy Richard Neutra firm, Robert Alexander, and landscape architect Frank Sata. One of Alexander's most notable projects was the redesign of the LA County Museum of Art in the 1980s. Sata's notable projects include the Japanese Garden at the Tillman Water Reclamation Plant in Van Nuys and the Garden of the Phoenix at the Chicago Botanic Garden. As a multi-racial team, they reflected the demographics of the new city.

Robert Kennard was part of the second generation of African American architects, inspired by Paul R. Williams and A. Quincy Jones. Kennard was born in Los Angeles and founded his firm there in 1957. One of his first residential projects, the Zeiger Residence, has been designated as a City of Los Angeles Cultural-Historic Monument. Mr. Kennard's firm, Kennard Design Group, is the oldest African American architecture firm in Los Angeles. In the mid-1960s he shifted his practice to public work and by the end of his career, Kennard's firm designed more than 700 projects in Southern California, including the Van Nuys State Office Building, Parking Structures 1, 3 and 4 at the Los Angeles International Airport, a new trauma center for LA County's Martin Luther King Jr./ Charles R. Drew Medical Center, the 77th Street police facility for the City of LA, and a new entrance to the Hollywood Bowl. These Modernist projects in the core of LA represented significant public investment in those communities during a turbulent period in a form that was open and inviting to the public, a departure from traditional "solid" civic architecture.

He was a founding member of the National Organization of Minority Architects and was a board member of the national and state AIA groups. He received awards from the AIA and California Preservation Foundation for work in the redesign and expansion of Los Angeles' Central Library and in 1993 its distinguished service citation for lifetime achievement. Gail Kennard, Robert Kennard's daughter and the person who still runs the Kennard Design Group, is willing to assist with and participate in the project.

About the African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund

The City has been awarded a grant by the National Trust for Historic Preservation through its Conserving Black Modernism Program, which is associated with the African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund.

Grants from the African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund advance ongoing preservation activities for historic places such as homes, museums, and landscapes that represent African American cultural heritage. To date, the program has supported 242 historic African American places and invested more than \$20 million to help preserve significant sites imbued with Black life, humanity, and cultural heritage.

With amounts ranging from \$50,000 to \$150,000, these Action Fund grants support preservation work in four primary areas: Capital Projects, Organizational Capacity Building, Project Planning, and Programming and Interpretation. There were over 600 Letters of Interest to these programs this year. This year included three grant programs: the largest of the programs, the National Grant Program, was awarded to 26 applicants, and the Historically Black College and University (HBCU) program made 6 awards. The Conserving Black Modernism Program, which is the program which made the award to Carson, is new, with 8 awards nationally. Two of the eight awards were for Robert Kennard-designed buildings.

The RFP Process

In July, the City requested proposals from a qualified consultant or consulting team to develop a public educational program and a Historic Structure Report (HSR), which would provide a foundation of documentation and information about City Hall and its architectural team, notably Kennard, and also architectural guidance on future construction projects.

In the future, the City could use the HSR as a comprehensive planning tool for the proactive maintenance of and future restoration and rehabilitation of the building. Carson recognizes the significant and unique character and architectural history of its City Hall and is committed to ensuring it will be enjoyed and used by future generations. The HSR will include a current condition assessment and plan for future maintenance and restoration that are appropriate for the architectural style, historic character, and period materials originally associated with the building.

Proposers were required to meet the Secretary of the Interior's "Professional Qualifications Standards" (36 CFR Part 6) in the fields of Architecture and/or Architectural History and that meets the approval of the National Trust for Historic Preservation's "Conserving Black Modernism" program guidelines. This project will be based on the following standards and recommended approaches:

1. The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties;
2. The Preparation and Use of Historic Structures Reports, Preservation Brief 43;
3. The Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Architectural and Engineering Documentation;
4. The Secretary of Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitating, Restoring and Reconstructing Historic Buildings.

Carson does not have a Local Register, nor has the City applied for County or State landmark designation. The main aim of completing the Historic Structure Report on City Hall is that it is necessary to undertake the public educational campaign to raise the awareness of historic preservation in the community, with the goal of potentially creating a local landmarking process. The public educational materials will come directly from the HSR. It would only be with significant local community support (from Carson residents, not just preservation advocates from West LA) that serious consideration of a historic designation could occur.

V. FISCAL IMPACT

The Conserving Black Modernism grant from the National Trust for Historic Preservation is \$150,000. It is anticipated that the contract with ARG will be approximately \$148,000.

VI. EXHIBITS

1. Grant Agreement with National Trust for Historic Preservation (pgs. 6-11)
2. RFP NO. 23-025 (pgs. 12-23)

1.

Prepared by: John S. Raymond, Assistant City Manager