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City of Los Angeles
Department of Cultural Affairs

MASTER PLANNING REPORT

Cultural Quarter Project

February 10, 2015

SUPPORT

This project supported in part by a grant from ArtPlace America.



About ArtPlace America

ArtPlace America (ArtPlace) is a ten-year collaboration that exists to position art and culture as a core sector of comprehensive community planning and development in order to help strengthen the social, physical, and economic fabric of communities.

ArtPlace focuses its work on creative placemaking, the set of practices in which art and culture work intentionally to help to transform a place. ArtPlace has four core areas of activity: it manages a national grants program that supports creative placemaking projects in communities of all sizes; it will extend this work by investing more deeply through multi-year investments in 5 communities; it seeks to understand, document, and disseminate successful creative placemaking practices through its research strategies; and it works to connect practitioners, organizations, and communities with one another.

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Timeline: July 1, 2014 – January 31, 2015

Morphosis has been providing planning and design consultancy for the duration of the Cultural Quarter Project, working closely alongside the team members from the City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs (DCA), The Actors Fund, Artspace and the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) to develop a strategy for locating and developing a unique cultural hub in the City of Los Angeles. The consultancy work included two site-specific conceptual design documents and a third document that was submitted formally through a Request for Proposal (RFP) process.

At the conclusion of the successful RFP submission entitled "Hollywood Arts Center," the submitted name for this stage of the Cultural Quarter Project, it was determined that a secondary conceptual design package for the site identified at the Westlake Theatre or a speculative undefined site would be an unproductive use of energy and resources by Morphosis. Since the announcement date for the results of the RFP fell beyond the deadline of the Artplace contracts, there would be no time to complete a supplementary design for a new site if the Cultural Quarter team was unsuccessful with their submission. It was determined that the best approach for the project was to develop a report that took a macro view of a specified region in Los Angeles that could benefit a larger audience of stakeholders looking to develop projects that are focused on improving neighborhoods through cultural / residential directed initiatives.

Another factor that propagated the Master Planning Report was the designation of an area that joined parts of Koreatown, Westlake, Pico Union, East Hollywood and Hollywood as one of the five national Promise Zones as designated by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. This ten-year initiative, won by contributing consultants to the Hollywood Arts Center RFP, the Youth Policy Institute (YPI), is set to streamline funds for the development of projects in communities of high urban poverty and aims to increase economic security, expand educational opportunities, increase access to quality affordable housing, improve public safety and create jobs.

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A contributor for the Hollywood Arts Center RFP was the Youth Policy Institute, which was recently successful with the City of Los Angeles in being identified as one of five national Promise Zones by the United States Housing and Urban Development (HUD). This ten-year initiative is set to streamline funds for the development of projects in communities of high urban poverty and aims to increase economic security, expand educational opportunities, increase access to quality affordable housing, improve public safety and create jobs.

With the RFP site being situated within the boundary of the Los Angeles Promise Zone (PZ) with the initiative objectives aligning with many of the Cultural Quarter Project ambitions, the ability to expand the usefulness of a subsequent report appeared self-evident. Morphosis began working on a research document that could be used to assist both groups in understanding and locating prioritized sites within the Los Angeles Promise Zone.

To date, Morphosis has analyzed, strategized and proposed designs for three potential sites that were identified by the Cultural Quarter team as potential opportunities for development of the CQP. The sites included:

1. Broadway Site – 627 + 629 Broadway – Development work discontinued due to dissolving of the Community Redevelopment Agency of Los Angeles (CRA \ LA) and unobtainable land prices.
2. Little Tokyo Site – City-owned Parking Lot Number 7 site – Development work discontinued due to conflicting plans by the strong neighborhood community resistance.
3. Hollywood Site – City-owned Parking Lot Number 742 RFP – Development work completed as an RFP to acquire the rights to develop the site. Currently awaiting results of the RFP evaluation process.

A copy of the design proposals for each of the three sites created by Morphosis is Final Report for ArtPlace's reference, and is labeled "Attachment 2 - Cultural Quarter Final Report".

Broadway Site

The first site study focused on an adjacent site to the historic Los Angeles Theatre on Broadway in Downtown LA. Morphosis undertook three studies for the 5,200 sqft site. The first strategy for the site gathered all the area requirements of the stakeholders, Downtown Arts Center (DAC), CalArts and Otis College into a single twenty-three story tower with a total area of 219,950 sqft. This strategy resulted in a required area that was 37% beyond the allowable buildable area. The second strategy for the site reduced the total area by focusing the proposal exclusively on the CalArts portion of the program. This strategy resulted in an eleven-story building of 100,200 sqft, within the allowable buildable area. This however eliminated all of the DAC and the Otis program from the project. The third strategy switched out programs and located all of the DAC and Otis required area. This strategy resulted in a twelve-story building comprised of 119,750 sqft of building area. The site restrictions did not allow for an approach that included all of the required programs of the stakeholders.

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Subsequently the dissolution of California's redevelopment agencies by California Governor Brown in 2012 had a direct impact on the feasibility of developing the project at the Los Angeles Theatre-adjacent parcels. Since the CRA / LA's dissolution, the Los Angeles Theatre-adjacent parcels have come under new private ownership. Ultimately, development at this site was not feasible for the project since the property owners determined that a return on the investment was their top priority, and an affordable housing project does not fall within that goal. Additional research was performed on other properties in the Broadway area; however, considering the prohibitive site acquisition costs on Broadway, the project team has diverted its focus to sites that are held in the public trust and that could be made available below market rate.

Little Tokyo Site

The Cultural Quarter team then turned its attention to a second priority site, City-owned Parking Lot Number 7 in the Little Tokyo area of Downtown LA. Morphosis evaluated three different development strategies tailored to different footprints for the building, which would respond to the programmatic area total of 220,000 sqft. The first strategy for development at Parking Lot Number 7 is a condensed high-rise building with a small footprint and a height of thirteen stories. This approach accommodates the needs of all project partners, but does not allow for the possibility of a phased development.

The second strategy for development is a semi-condensed pedestals with a bridge, which requires a larger footprint and tops out at a height of seven stories. This design includes a large open space connection for pedestrians moving through from the street to the interior of the site and beyond into other areas of Little Tokyo, with a concluding connection to the nearby Issei Center. The third strategy for the development of the site is an expanded urban collector, which requires the largest footprint, and at three stories responds to the scale of the surrounding neighborhood. This strategy would accommodate the possibility of a phased development.

The goals of the Cultural Quarter project aligned with work envisioned by other groups in the Little Tokyo community, however, ultimately the city determined to maintain the existing usage at this juncture and no further work was performed. The Cultural Quarter team continued to investigate new site options in the Downtown area and with little promising leads began to look at options outside of Downtown LA, given the steadily rising market and challenges due to the dissolution of the Community Redevelopment Agency of Los Angeles. Other sites adjacent to Downtown LA were explored, including sites in Boyle Heights.

Los Angeles Promise Zone

Morphosis has produced a planning assessment that focuses on the urban conditions that exist in the recently defined Los Angeles Promise Zone. This report intention is to clearly explain the location and ambitions of the Los Angeles Promise Zone followed by an assessment of the area's housing, institutions and infrastructure to be used as a guide for the Promise Zone task force and future strategic partners that connect with the project over the duration of the initiative. The

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document will be used in conversations with elected officials and community stakeholders to illustrate the PZ as well as its priorities and potential of housing, education, job creation and safety. This report has the potential of not only assisting the PZ task force but to kick-start a larger inventory of project sites that seek strategic partners with similar cultural ambitions and are ripe for development.

Los Angeles Promise Zone Assessment Summary

The outcome of the initial study of the Los Angeles Promise Zone has resulted in the identification of three prioritized nodes. These nodes were selected through the research and analysis of the assessment document as areas deficient in housing, education and public open space, but all three are privileged by being located in close proximity to a metro line for efficient transportation on the Metropolitan Transit Authority's (Metro) Red Line.

The report includes detailed studies indicating built environment assets and comparatively presents these in relation to preferred urban neighborhood ratios of transportation, open space, schools, commercial areas and residential areas. This assessment clearly defines the current baseline and target objectives for healthy neighborhoods which can establish a baseline for developing these neighborhoods within the Promise Zone framework.

A copy of the assessment report created by Morphosis is Final Report for ArtPlace's reference, and is labeled "Attachment 3 - Cultural Quarter Final Report".

Los Angeles Promise Zone Initiative and Site Search

A challenge of top priority in Los Angeles is the lack of urban density. The City's urban sprawl is often blamed for its dependency on cars, causing traffic, congestion and air pollution. High urban density has many environmental positive impacts as well as facilitates more integrated environments by bring people onto the street and potentially have a positive impact on public space and facilities, human interaction and community development, safety and crime rates, as well as economic activity through higher consumer rates.

A catalyst for higher density is public transportation. Each day, the Red Line transports over 150,000 riders, almost two times as many as the second most used rail line in the LA City Metro system. Connecting Downtown's Union Station to 7th Street Station, Koreatown, Hollywood areas and Studio and Universal City, the line is an important part of the City's economic infrastructure. Although the southern end of the line is most frequently used as it is within the Downtown area, 20,000 riders enter and exit the North Hollywood station each day, making the station one of the highest trafficked in all of LA County. The station is also where the Metro Red Line and the Orange Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Line meet; this, coupled with the high density of North Hollywood neighborhood, further distinguish the area as a Downtown space for the region.

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The Metro Red Line was a key consideration in the formation of the Los Angeles Promise Zone. After meeting with members of Mayor Garcetti's project leaders in the "LA Promise Zone, Mayor's Office of Economic Development", it was clear that PZ development would concentrate around existing Red Line stations. By concentrating housing, public services, cultural centers, parks, commercial areas and institutions within a ten-minute walk of a Metro station increases urban density and allow for easier, accessible public use.

The existing Metro line travels through Downtown from Union Station to 7th Street Station and continues north and then west through Westlake, Koreatown, East Hollywood, Hollywood and through the Hollywood Hills to Studio/Universal City and ending in North Hollywood. The Metro Red line is the most used Metro Line in the Los Angeles Metro Network. There are seven Red Line stops located within the Promise Zone. Each station has a unique urban makeup and demographic. The Mayor's Office identified three of the station zones that need attention: Vermont / Sunset, Vermont / Beverley, and Westlake MacArthur Park.

Westlake and MacArthur, located just over the edge of Downtown Los Angeles and one stop away from the Downtown transportation hub 7th Street Metro Center Station, represented the highest density of people with nearly 100 residents per acre and with a ratio of jobs to residents as 0.28 (28 jobs for 100 residents). The percentage of commuters traveling away from the area using rail is the highest within the Promise Zone with 64% of commuters using the Red Line. Only 20% of people who commute to the area use the Metro Red Line. With a location so close to Downtown LA, the neighborhood is ideal for a high-density residential and commuting population.

Within a ten-minute walking radius of the Vermont and Beverley station boasts a predominately residential area as well with only 11 jobs for every 100 residents. In this area, the population density has decreased from the Western/ MacArthur Park area as it is 1.5miles northwest of MacArthur Park. The most challenging aspect of the area, however, is the station's proximity to the 101 Freeway. The 101 Freeway crosses through the ten-minute walk radius of the station while the onramp is less than a half mile away. Although the Red Line has a high ridership from this station, the percentage of riders commuting away from the area using the rail line is only 33%.

The Vermont / Sunset station is located within an urban center. The population density is considered high at 63 people per acre and with nearly 80 jobs per 100 residents the area has the highest ratio of jobs to residences in the Promise Zone. Directly east of the metro station is Hollywood Presbyterian Medical Center and located nearby are restaurants, offices, churches, both private and public schools and Barnsdall Art Park.

These three stations showed great potential and opportunity for development. However, the research unveiled a transportation-oriented area ready for housing and community development within the Promise Zone.

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Hollywood / Vine

Hollywood and Vine, the final Red Line stop within the Promise Zone, was not suggested as an area of interest by the Office of Mayor Garcetti. However, this Metro stop has enormous need and potential. Located just south of the 101 Freeway where the highway enters the Hollywood Hills, the Red Line station is ten minutes from the line's last stop in North Hollywood and 16 minutes from Downtown LA on the line. The zone boasts walkable streets with relatively small block sizes and 129 acres of underutilized land.

Situated along the famous Hollywood Boulevard, the Hollywood and Vine station is at the center of many Hollywood cultural destinations including the Hollywood Palladium, Amoeba Music, Le Cordon Bleu College of Culinary Arts, Second City Comedy Club, The Egyptian Theatre and countless well known nightclubs and restaurants. Already the area is a cultural center of Los Angeles, attracting locals and tourists. With one of the highest ratios of jobs to people within the Promise Zone, its existing cultural significance, density and access to Downtown as well as North Hollywood, Studio and Universal City, the area has enormous potential for densification.

Mixed-used development that incorporates diversity in typology, program and residential income level is essential for sustainable urban densification and integrated balanced communities. However, the current local demographics of the area shows an increase in an already high average income level, increase in property value and a decrease of affordable housing with 86% of its affordable units expiring by 2015.

The Actors Fund / Artspace / DCA / CalArts proposal for affordable artist housing, theatre and performance space, as well as educational and community facilities would blend well into the existing cultural performance space as well as offer much-needed affordable housing.

Hollywood Site

In hopes of identifying a new priority site for the project, the Cultural Quarter team met with staff from City Council Districts 1 and 13, and held further conversations with the City's Housing and Community Investment Department. Two new City-owned priority sites were identified with affordable leases from the City of Los Angeles: (1) the City of Los Angeles-owned Parking Lot Number 742 and adjacent storefront spaces on Hollywood Boulevard and (2) the historic Westlake Theatre in the MacArthur Park neighborhood of Los Angeles.

Parking Lot Number 742 is situated directly between Hollywood / Vine and Hollywood / Highland stations. With stations within an eight-minute walk in both the east and west directions, the site offers low-income residents a convenient and practical access to the city particularly the economic centers of Downtown Los Angeles as well as North Hollywood / Universal City.

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Parking Lot 742 and the adjoining commercial storefronts on Hollywood Boulevard are currently maintained by the City of Los Angeles. The Los Angeles City Council authorized the Los Angeles Department of Transportation and the Los Angeles Housing and Community Investment Department to release an RFP to select a development team to propose a mixed-use and mixed-income housing development for the site and provide a replacement parking.

Prepared by Morphosis Architects, the architectural portion of the RFP addressed the programmatic needs expressed by DCA, The Actors Fund, Artspace and CalArts. The site is a complex "T" shaped site with frontage on Hollywood Blvd, Wilcox Ave and Schrader Blvd. The RFP called for a single proposal that responded to the detailed submission requirements set in the RFP, including to focus on providing replacement parking for the existing 147+ parking stalls, a minimum of sixty low-income residential units and a minimum of 16,000 sqft of commercial space.

The strategy for the proposal was to meet the minimum objectives of the RFP with the addition of providing a catalytic cultural hub as the central focus by introducing the new CalArts performing arts school into the Hollywood neighborhood. The proposition featured an iconic entrance for CalArts on Hollywood Blvd with a generous light-filled paseo to the residential and parking areas at the south end of the site. Two large commercial spaces would face Wilcox Ave, which would include the primary entrance for the low-income residential units. These rental apartments would be designed to be affordable spaces for both actors and artists in the Hollywood areas and range in size from +580 sqft one bedroom units, +820 sqft two bedroom units and +1100 sqft three bedroom units. The parking garage of more than 200 stalls would be accessed off of the slower Schrader Blvd at the west of the site.

One primary constraint at the site should be noted. The current zoning restrictions imposed on the site limits any development to a FAR of only 2:1. The required FAR for this site to include the required program indicated by the RFP and supplemented by the development team functional program results in a minimum FAR of 4.5:1, more than double what was currently allowed. The Cultural Quarter design exceeded the listed FAR but designed the massing of the building to respond to the context and be sympathetic to the surrounding neighborhood building heights.

The decision for the successful submission of the RFP is forthcoming at the end of February, 2015. Three submissions were made, which gives the Cultural Quarter team much optimism to be the successful team and proceed in the work to bring this project to life in the Hollywood neighborhood.