

# West Hollywood General Plan

## Arts, Culture and Historic Preservation Background Report

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This Arts and Culture and Historic Preservation Background Report defines 2008 baseline conditions as they relate to the following items to assist in the development of appropriate goals and policies for the General Plan. The topics covered in this report are:

- Cultural Resources
- Community and Nonprofit Cultural Resources
- Commercial Cultural Resources
- The City's Role
- Historic Preservation

The following resources were used in the compilation of this report:

- City of West Hollywood General Plan (1988)
- City of West Hollywood Technical Background Report – White paper by Strategic Economics (2008)
- West Hollywood, "The Creative City" – White paper (date unknown)
- City of West Hollywood website (2008)
- United States Census website (2008)
- City of West Hollywood R2, R3, R4 Multi-Family Survey Report
- Various other websites and documents

## Cultural Resources

West Hollywood is an internationally-famous destination, a treasure trove of some of the most extraordinary places in Southern California, due to the vibrant, creative and diverse residents and businesses. Known as the "Creative City," West Hollywood is a thriving commercial art hub for film, music, art, design and architecture. The City has two Business Improvement Districts, the Avenues of Art and Design and the Sunset Strip Business Association, which provide marketing support for their respective communities, as well as public art and cultural events such as the Sunset Strip Music Festival and the Art & Design Walk.

Cultural resources fall under the purview of the Cultural Affairs Administrator, a position within the Economic Development Department. The Administrator is the staff liaison for the Arts and Cultural Affairs Commission. The Commission has three main subcommittees, through which it accomplishes its mission:

- Art on the Outside – works on public art displays
- Performing Arts and Cultural Affairs – oversees the annual Arts Grant program, which provides grants to nonprofit arts organizations
- Urban Arts – oversees the implementation of the City's "one-percent to art" program

The mission of the Arts and Cultural Affairs Commission is to promote and nurture the arts and cultural life of the City of West Hollywood.

ACAC achieves its mission by –

- providing accessible arts and cultural programming for all residents;
- supporting quality arts and cultural organizations in the City;
- promoting arts and cultural activities;
- advising City Council on policies affecting the arts and cultural life of the City, its residents and the organizations that provide such services to the City.

### **Three Subcommittees:**

**Art on the Outside** brings art out into the public realm to enhance the City's pedestrian-friendly culture. The Subcommittee takes the lead in developing and evaluating temporary exhibitions and art proposals for the City's Art on the Outside Program and large screen/vertical billboard art. The Subcommittee also reviews and recommends other temporary art installations by galleries and other businesses in the City which appear in the public realm. The Subcommittee determines the methodology and process by which to attract artists and art consultants and reviews requests for proposals as well as interviewing arts consultants and artists as appropriate.

**Performing Arts and Cultural Affairs** assists the Commission in furthering the City's arts and cultural goals by serving as the initial liaison between City departments, commissions and boards and the Commission on arts and cultural affairs projects and city sponsored events. The Subcommittee recommends the Commission's level of involvement and responsibility relative to each event and also develops, evaluates and recommends policy and strategies for review by the Arts and Cultural Affairs Commission. The Subcommittee also oversees the City's annual Arts Grant program.

**Urban Arts** oversees the implementation of the City's Urban Art Program pursuant to Chapter 19.38 of the City's Municipal Code that requires developers of certain projects to contribute one percent of the development valuation to public art. The Subcommittee takes the lead in making recommendations with respect to artist selection, schematic plan, final art plan and installation of the art. The Subcommittee also studies, develops and recommends policies, procedures and implementation strategies relative to public art conservation, the percent for art ordinance and other projects within its purview as determined by the Commission.

## **Community**

West Hollywood includes in its community populations who consider the City a haven for people that have sometimes been marginalized in the larger society – the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender community; a significant Russian-speaking immigrant population from the former Soviet Union countries; the disabled; and seniors. Culturally these groups are provided voices and opportunities through festivals and events such as the Russian Cultural Festival, Pride Month activities, Summer Sounds concerts, Shakespeare in the Park, the Book Fair and other performances and exhibitions. These events and activities are produced through various City departments and staff resources. The City's Arts Grant Program also provides small grants to nonprofit arts organizations to subsidize or underwrite various cultural programming such as concerts, dance and theater performances in the City.

## **Community and Nonprofit Cultural Resources**

Beyond the commercial cultural resources of the City, there are several nonprofit organizations and other resources that support the cultural life of the City. Among them:

**Celebration Theatre** – One of the nation's oldest theatre companies focusing on the LGBT experience, the Celebration Theatre is a community of artists dedicated to work that examines the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer experience.

**Classical Theatre Lab** – Classical Theater Lab is a West Hollywood based ensemble of professional actors which makes use of park facilities for rehearsals and performances. CTL provides several free staged readings of classic plays throughout the year, as well as the annual Shakespeare in the Park theatre program which offers free outdoor performances of one of Shakespeare's plays during July and August.

**Greenway Arts Alliance** – Located just outside the City's boundaries on the Fairfax High School Campus, Greenway's mission is to utilize the performing arts to build community between a broad constituency of artists, educators, community members and students; to produce inspiring professional theatre and performing arts productions that represent and reflect the rich diversity of Los Angeles; and to utilize its role in the community to serve at-risk students through a comprehensive in-class and after-school visual and performing arts educational outreach program.

**MACHA Theatre** – Mujeres (Women) Advancing, Culture, History & Art was formed in 2000 in order to build social, cultural, and artistic bridges between the straight and gay communities of various ethnicities through theatrical arts.

**MAK Center/The Schindler House** – The iconic and historic Rudolf Schindler House on Kings Road is home to the MAK Center for Art and Architecture which provides cutting-edge exhibitions and performances in its residential community.

**MOCA/PDC** – MOCA, one of the nation’s pre-eminent contemporary art museums has a satellite site on the campus of the Pacific Design Center, which often features major exhibitions of art and design.

**Facilities** – The Arts and Cultural Affairs Commission completed a cultural facilities assessment in 2007 that cited a lack of affordable and usable space for community based theatre, exhibitions, and rehearsal space. Much of the space currently utilized is at Plummer Park on the City’s Eastside which boasts Fiesta Hall, a multi-purpose performing arts facility, as well as the Community Center which has several different sized rooms for art classes and rehearsals, and the Great Hall which is a smaller multi-purpose facility. The City is embarking upon a Park Master Plan for Plummer Park that will include significant upgrades to Fiesta Hall to provide a 99-seat black box theatre, as well as movable seating arrangements that can accommodate larger seating for music concerts. In addition, the City is exploring the feasibility of a joint-use agreement with the Los Angeles Unified School District to utilize the 1400-seat historic auditorium at Fairfax High to present concerts and performances that require larger stage and audience capacity.

## Commercial Cultural Resources

West Hollywood’s commercial cultural resources are a major economic generator for the City. According to a recent report on retail in the City, the furniture and home furnishings category was second only to food and beverage in terms of generating a surplus, i.e., drawing more money in from people who live outside the City than losing money from residents to outside businesses.

Some of the most significant commercial cultural venues are:

- *Sunset Strip* – a major destination for concert-goers, with a long history as one of the nation’s centers of live popular music
- *Avenues of Art and Design* – the West Coast’s premier conglomeration of interior design studios, art galleries, showrooms, specialty shops and restaurants located along Melrose Avenue, Robertson and Beverly Boulevards
- *Pacific Design Center* – the West Coast’s leading resource for furniture and interior design, with over 130 showrooms in two (soon to be three) distinctive buildings designed by Cesar Pelli on a 14-acre campus and including the Silver Screen Theatre which plays host to movie premieres, theatre productions and awards events. Also included on the campus is a branch of the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) that features architecture and design exhibits.

- *The Lot* – the former United Artists studios, now available for filming and events

## The City's Role

The City plays many different roles to support art and cultural programming in the City. Those roles include:

- The City as host/facilitator for large community and cultural events, such as the LA Pride Festival and the Art & Design Walk.
- The City as programmer/coordinator for such events as Summer Sounds, the Book Fair, and the Halloween Carnival.
- The City as venue provider for nonprofit arts and cultural organizations including the use of Fiesta Hall and sections of Santa Monica Boulevard for the LA Pride Festival and Parade.
- The City as a Cultural Destination for such famous locations as the Sunset Strip, the Avenues of Art & Design, and Santa Monica Boulevard ("Boy's Town").
- The City as arts and culture policy-maker through City Council and the Arts and Cultural Affairs Commission.
- The City as "mentor" in fostering and developing the creativity of its residents through opportunities to actively engage in the arts through direct participation, e.g. open mike at the Book Fair, art classes at the park, public access TV training, community theatre, choral groups, etc.
- The City as cultural historian preserving the arts and cultural history and districts of the City and its residents and communities.

## Historic Preservation

Stewardship of West Hollywood's cultural resources has been important to the City from the time it was incorporated. The city has been the site both of architectural achievement in buildings like the RM Schindler house on Kings Road and in its period revival courtyard residential buildings, as well as being an important site in the history of music, entertainment and design culture. In the original 1988 General Plan, the subject was covered as Issue Nine: Historically and Architecturally Significant Structures. The City undertook its first Historic Resources survey in 1986-87, and the Historic Preservation Plan and General Plan Element was completed in 1998.

The City's Historic Preservation Commission is responsible for providing recommendations to the Planning Commission and City Council on designating historic resources and districts. The Commission also provides Certificates of Appropriateness that are required in order to alter or demolish any designated or potentially eligible cultural resources.

The City's Preservation Ordinance establishes the guidelines for designating a resource on the West Hollywood Cultural Resources Register. It includes qualitative criteria for determining a resource's historic nature. The ordinance, along with other federal and state regulations, establishes incentives to property owners of historically designated property. These incentives include consideration of alternative uses as a rehabilitation

incentive, flexibility in building codes when performing rehabilitations, and reduction of state property taxes through owner participation in the Mills Act program. Currently the city has 79 historic resources listed on either the local city or state registers. Of those, 18 are also listed on the national register. The city also includes one historical district, North Harper Avenue, that is listed on the national register.

In 1998 the city adopted a Preservation Plan that established six key historical themes to categorize historical resources. These themes are Rancho La Brea, Sherman, Residential Architecture, The Sunset Strip, Interior Design Industry, and Gay and Lesbian Culture. Other themes, including the oil industry, and Russian immigrant culture could be utilized for categorizing historic resources.

The city most recently updated its Historic Resources Survey in 2008 focusing on its multi family buildings in the city's R2, R3, and R4 zones. The survey identified buildings that might qualify for either national, state, or local historic designations. The city's stock of multi family housing dates back to the 1920s and includes a broad range of development types and architectural styles. Multi family housing has played an important continuing role in sheltering a large stock of rent-stabilized households. The majority of the city's single family housing stock consists of pre World War II styles and includes representative examples of Craftsman and period revival houses.