



October 6, 2011

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Re: Glendale Courthouse Draft Environmental Impact Report

Dear Ms. Sainz:

The Board of Directors and members of The Glendale Historical Society (TGHS) appreciate the opportunity to comment on the Draft Environmental Impact Report (Draft EIR) for the proposed new Glendale Courthouse project. TGHS strongly supports the efforts of the AOC to maintain the Glendale County courthouse in its current location and welcomes the AOC's stated intent to retain key historic features of the existing courthouse. However, we remain concerned that the AOC is not committed to preserving the Courthouse's architectural integrity and eligibility for listing as an historic resource, and that extensive or complete demolition remain possible.

The existing 1959 Glendale Courthouse, designed by architect Arthur Wolfe, is one of the most significant and distinctive examples of mid-20th century Modern architecture in Glendale and is a prominent feature of Glendale's civic corridor. The 2006 Glendale Downtown Specific Plan EIR determined that the building is eligible for listing on both the California Register and the National Register. It features strong rectilinear concrete forms contrasted with a serpentine brick wall, mosaic tile-clad columns, glass walls and a custom ceramic sculpture representing Liberty, Freedom and Justice. Interior elements include fine terrazzo floors, staircases, original lighting fixtures and curved wood benches that follow the interior of the serpentine wall.

The Draft EIR fails to adequately explore an alternative that would preserve and adapt these significant existing features and accommodate the expanded needs of the court with a sensitively-designed addition or additions connected to the original building via hyphens or courtyards. The Draft EIR dismisses the Full Re-use Alternative without considering it in conjunction with such additions, which could provide the additional square footage required by the AOC. The Draft EIR also fails to include the adjacent Board of Realtors property in its spatial analysis. This property provides sufficient extra space to allow for a creative design solution that would include the rehabilitation of the existing Courthouse with a new addition or additions, as well as ample parking. The possible acquisition of the Jewel City Bowl site would further improve the viability of this option.

TGHS is also concerned by the consideration of the Diamond Honda site as an Alternative Project Site. The Diamond Honda building is one of Glendale's most significant Spanish Colonial Revival commercial buildings and is a prominent visual landmark in the city. Although it is not currently listed we suspect that the Honda building is eligible for listing on the Glendale Register of Historic Resources.

The adaptive re-use of the existing Glendale Courthouse and its expansion with a sensitively designed addition would better meet the specifications of the California Trial Court Facilities Standards than would the demolition of the existing building and its replacement with an entirely new structure. The existing Glendale Courthouse has successfully represented “the dignity of the law, the importance of the activities within the courthouse, and the stability of the judicial system” for more than 50 years. As a well-known landmark in Glendale’s civic corridor it most definitely represents “an individual expression that is responsive to local context, geography, climate, culture, and history” and improves and enriches the site and community in which it is located. The exceptional design by Arthur Wolfe represents the best in mid-20th century architecture, and with some creative effort its spaces can certainly be adapted to changes in judicial practice.¹

The Final EIR should evaluate preservation alternatives for the Glendale Courthouse, including a modified Full Re-use Alternative, that will maintain the significant character-defining features of the 1959 building. Archival documentation or interpretive elements inserted into a new courthouse would not be adequate mitigation for the demolition of this significant Glendale landmark. The Glendale Historical Society strongly urges the AOC to seriously explore alternatives to demolition and commit to developing a solution that would meet the Court’s requirements while maintaining the architectural integrity of the existing courthouse and its eligibility for listing as an historic resource.

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me at president@glendalehistorical.org or Vice President Greg Grammer at greg.grammer@glendalehistorical.org.

Sincerely,

John LoCascio, President
The Glendale Historical Society

Cc: Mayor Laura Friedman; Hassan Haghani; Jay Platt

¹ Draft EIR, p. 3-9