

March 21, 2012

E. Shearer-Nguyen, Environmental Planner
City of San Diego Development Services Center
1222 First Avenue, MS 501
San Diego, California 92101

Dear Ms. Shearer-Nguyen:

On behalf of the Timken Museum of Art, I am submitting this letter of comment on the Draft EIR for the Plaza de Panama Project.

The Timken has taken a great interest in the Plaza de Panama Project since the project was first announced in 2010. As one of the institutions located on the Plaza de Panama, we will be living with the results of the project for many years to come.

While the Timken supports the Plaza de Panama Project in general our board and professional staff have a number of concerns particularly regarding the design of the Plaza itself. We presented these to the project architects at our recent board meeting on March 19.

Indeed, the activation of the pedestrian space in front of our museum will be a welcome change from the dangerous circling of cars attempting, usually in vain, to find parking. While traffic in the Plaza currently travels at a slow pace, there are constant conflicts with pedestrians and it is not a very park-like experience. However, the current design of the Plaza, with a double row of trees surrounding the whole, is unacceptable to the Timken. As it stands now, the museum and the plaza fronting the building is blocked by a row of blighted dense pear trees. By adding a second row of trees in front of our building, however airy the foliage is expected to be, promises to render the museum as invisible as it is today to someone standing in the Plaza.

The Timken was built as a consciously modern statement, an elegant and simple contrast to the beautiful and decorative Spanish-inspired and Art Deco buildings that existed when it opened in 1965. The building was constructed on a platform, visible on all sides (this has been altered by the loggia to the south built by the Committee of 100 as well as by the handicapped ramp to the northwest and its pendant planter to the southwest of the front door). The overall changes in the Plaza are not a restoration to 1915 but a rethinking for today's uses. Keeping the fountain in the center of the Plaza renders any restoration moot. Speaking for the board of the Timken, I would respectfully suggest that the plaza in front of the Timken be open to the Plaza de Panama as a whole, creating an L-shaped plaza and creating an open vista to one of the most important art collections in the United States and one of the crucial cultural attractions in southern California.

We believe the Plaza de Panama project is a visionary solution to a problem that was inconceivable to the architects and planners of 1915, who intended all the buildings on the Plaza to be razed at the conclusion of the Fair. Please consider the issues of 2015 and the current uses of the Plaza as we move ahead with the project.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

John Wilson
Director

Timken Museum of Art
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Balboa Park
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