

Irwin Mark Jacobs  
La Jolla, California 92037

December 31, 2010

Mr. Bruce Coons  
Executive Director  
Save Our Heritage Organisation  
2476 San Diego Avenue  
San Diego, CA 92110

Dear Mr. Coons:

I find your letter of December 20 to Mayor Sanders and myself concerning the Plaza de Panama project less than constructive, given its hyperbole and factual misstatements. In it, you state as fact that "the greater San Diego preservation community strongly opposes the current" (Plaza de Panama Committee) proposal. Although I consider myself a preservationist, and I suspect the same is true for the other members of my committee and a number of the museum directors on your cc list who do support the project, I did not receive a request for my opinion on this subject. Could you please inform me how you define the greater San Diego preservation community, how it was approached, and provide a copy of the material used to solicit their strong opinion.

You state that "The current proposal is extremely destructive and would forever alter the iconic Cabrillo Bridge and the historic landscape, and would hide the most important character defining features of the front entrance to this National Register District." You also state "The plan as currently conceived and recommended would destroy for all time the architectural, historic, and cultural integrity of Balboa Park, along with its historic landscape. The proposed addition would be in the most visible and destructive location possible." In Figures 1 and 2, I show what I think you characterize as "the most important character defining features of the front entrance." It is over the already disturbed landscape of Figure 2 that a right turn will take cars over a landscaped earth fill and short curved bridge segment to the already existing Alcazar Garden parking lot. The bypass will be screened by mature landscaping and held to a height that will now allow the west wall at the south end of the Museum of Man to be visible when approaching over the bridge for the first time in 70 years.

What I would characterize as "the most important character defining features of the front entrance" are shown in Figure 3. This is what is seen when approaching the park over the Cabrillo Bridge. The project provides a right turn about at the traffic sign and before the arch, allowing bicycles and pedestrians to proceed through the arch but diverting all cars. The surface beyond the turnoff and continuing through the Plaza de California and Plaza de Panama would no longer be asphalt and concrete pavers but rather an attractive surface material yet to be determined through a public process. Most importantly, all cars would be removed from a beautified Plaza de California and Plaza de Panama. The result would now be like the current East Prado after cars were removed, as shown in Figure 4. Far from being destructive, as you describe it, we would now have an entrance to Balboa Park through the iconic west gateway as it was historically in 1915-16, when entrance through the arches was restricted to pedestrians and small electric wicker cars. The full width of the proposed by-pass is about 55 feet, with 65 feet of the low wall at the end of the Cabrillo Bridge



Figure 1 – Present View Looking East from the Cabrillo Bridge

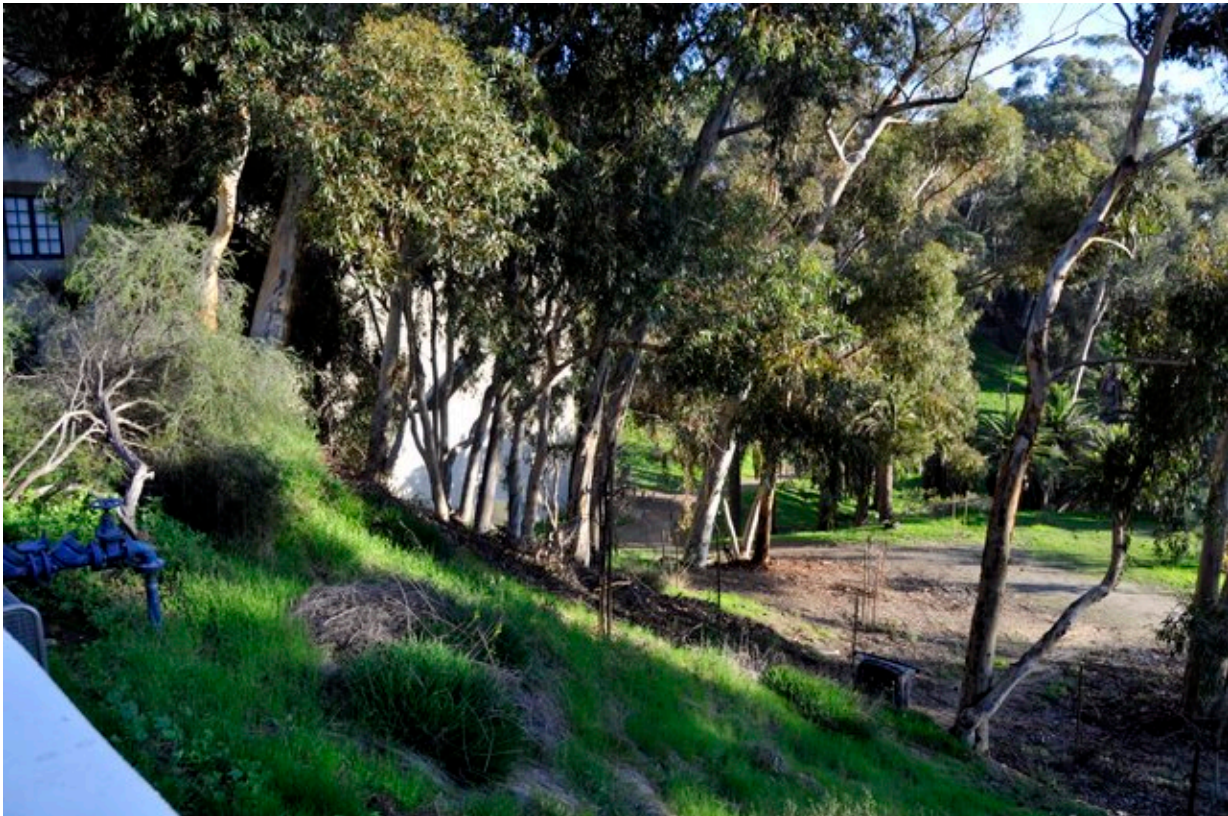


Figure 2 – Closer View Looking East from the Cabrillo Bridge





Figure 3 – Current and Historic “Front Entrance” to the Park



Figure 4 – East Prado on December 29, 2010



removed and with no impact to any lighting on the bridge. A diagrammatic view without landscaping is shown in Figure 5.

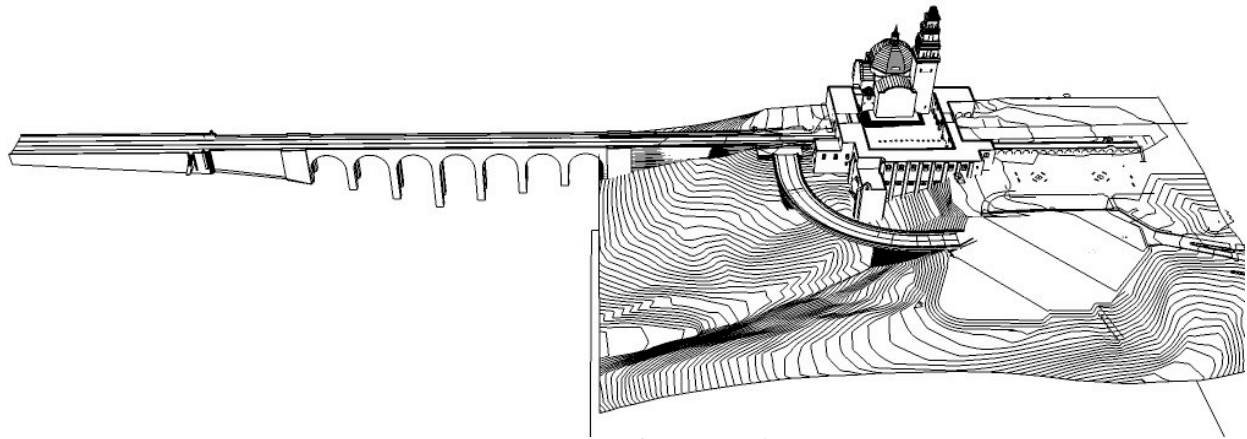


Figure 5 - Diagram of Proposed Bypass

An initial rendering of the bypass is shown in Figure 6. This is certainly not a “swath of concrete and massive fill bisecting the entire front façade of the National Historic Landmark Spanish Colonial Hilltop town and historic entry to the park” as you describe. Additional landscaping will further mask the bridge while retaining the now-accessible view of the Museum of Man south wing.



Figure 6 – Initial Rendering of Bypass as Seen from Cabrillo Bridge

Our objective is not in your words “to remove 70 parking places from the Plaza de Panama”, but rather to remove all cars from the Plaza de Panama during park hours, and, in doing so, to also remove the cars from the Plaza de California, West El Prado and Esplanade, restoring these areas to beautiful visitor spaces. With parking eliminated from the Plaza and with only handicapped parking, valet, and pick-up/drop-off in the Alcazar lot, but no general parking, our proposal will greatly reduce the cars in the core of the park, many of which now make many circuits looking for parking.

A parking garage is proposed behind the Organ Pavilion with several hundred more spaces than now available in the Plaza de Panama, the Alcazar Garden lot, and the existing Organ Pavilion surface lot. The Organ Pavilion lot, which now appears as shown in Figure 7, will





Figure 7 – Organ Pavilion Parking Lot on 12/29/2010

be transformed to park land by a pedestrian-friendly landscaped roof covering the underground parking garage. No cars will be visible from the west or south and we will now have a car-free pedestrian pathway from the Plaza de Panama through the Esplanade to President's Way just short of the Pan-American Plaza and as well as to the International Cottages.

In a recent letter to Mike Kelly, I noted that I have analyzed every alternative brought to my attention and have not found any, other than the bypass or a complete removal of vehicles from the Cabrillo Bridge, that will allow elimination of all cars from the Plaza de Panama, Plaza de California, West El Prado and the Esplanade south of the Plaza de Panama during park hours. In designing our program, we have assumed that the community would not accept a complete removal of vehicles from the Cabrillo Bridge. If you believe you have a feasible program to accomplish this without inconveniencing the many who use the bridge including those noted in a letter from the Committee of 100, "the disabled, seniors, children, parents with strollers; park and institution staff, volunteers and docents; and museum-, restaurant-, and theatre-goers," we would gladly eliminate the right turn, short bridge, and parking garage from our plan. I note that some, including SOHO, have proposed retaining the through traffic in the Plaza de Panama, with the road routed close to the Mingei Museum, while eliminating parking in the Plaza. With as many as 7500 cars a day using that two-way route (based on our recent traffic studies), this would not reduce congestion, improve safety, nor improve the pedestrian and park experience. The Plaza experience would be even worse if we not only continue traffic through the Plaza, as you suggest, but include the space in the Plaza de Panama required for passenger drop-off and pick-up and valet.

You state that "there are several other potential solutions that are not being pursued" and that "SOHO would be happy to meet to discuss reasonable options that meet the goals of the community, the museums, the city and that also meet the needs to protect Balboa Park." I would be pleased to do so, but any alternate solution must remove all cars from the Plaza de Panama by December, 2014 in time for the Centennial celebration. Without a feasible alternative, we of course will not "reject the current plans" as you request in your letter. As I also wrote to Mike Kelly, were

we to fail to implement a solution by this centennial, it may fall to others to do so by the bicentennial.

Very truly yours,

Irwin Mark Jacobs

cc:

Hon. Christine Kehoe, State Senator  
Hon. Toni Atkins, Assembly Member  
Hon. Todd Gloria, City Councilmember  
Stacey LoMedico, Park and Recreation Director  
M. Wayne Donaldson, State Historic Preservation Officer  
Janet Matthews, Ph.D., Associate Director for Cultural Resources  
and Keeper of the National Register of Historic Places, National Park Service  
National Trust for Historic Preservation, Western Division  
Cathy Winterrowd, City of San Diego Historical Resources Board  
Council of Design Professionals (CDP)  
Susan Brandt-Hawley, Brandt-Hawley Law Group  
David Kahn, San Diego History Center  
David Kinney, Balboa Park Committee  
Charles Daniels, Park & Recreation Dept.  
Vicki Granowitz, Balboa Park Committee  
Charles Hellerich, Balboa Park Conservancy  
David Lang, Balboa Park Cultural Partnership  
President, Spanish Village Art Center  
James Kidrick, San Diego Air & Space Museum  
Michael W. Hager, San Diego Natural History Museum  
Roxana Velasquez, San Diego Museum of Art  
Louis G. Spisto, The Old Globe  
John Wilson, Timken Museum of Art  
Rod Sidner, Mingei International Museum  
Alan Kidd, Hall of Champions  
Ron May, Neighborhood Historic Preservation Coalition  
Michael Kelly, Committee of One Hundred  
Friends of Balboa Park  
Mission Hills Heritage  
La Jolla Historical Society  
Hillcrest History Guild  
University Heights Historical Society  
North Park Historical Society  
Between Heights Community Association (BeHi)  
Citizens Coordinate for Century 3 (C3)