

To the community,

The attached Museum Rehabilitation Study represents a major step in the Autry National Center's attempt to protect and find the best long-term use of the Southwest Museum's structures located in Mount Washington, adjacent to Highland Park.

The Southwest Museum of the American Indian has operated at this site since 1914 despite characteristics of the location that have limited the museum's ability to provide adequate public access to its important collection. For decades numerous attempts were made to invigorate the museum, including efforts to move it to a different site either within Los Angeles or out of the city. In 2003, the Southwest Museum Board determined to keep the collection in Los Angeles for the benefit of Los Angelinos, voting to merge with the Autry Museum of Western Heritage and create the Autry National Center.

Now, as steward of the Southwest Museum, the Autry National Center's prime obligation is to save, protect, and broaden public access both to the museum's historic buildings, as well as to its magnificent collection of Native American and early California material. Immediately following the merger, we commissioned noted preservation architects, Brenda Levin & Associates, to do the first detailed examination of the history of the buildings, their structural capacity, and the potential for their continued use as a traditional museum. To further ensure protection of the buildings, we were successful in having the Southwest Museum listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Brenda Levin's report lays the groundwork for a thoughtful assessment of the best long-term uses for the Southwest Museum. This initial phase presents two prototype plans and operating models for a museum-only use. Based on the projected operating losses of these two hypothetical models, we do not believe it is economically feasible to operate the site exclusively as a museum. Using "Rehabilitation Study Phase I Planning" as a benchmark, we will hold a public process that will help explore compatible and complementary uses that would allow for the building to be rehabilitated as well as ensure its survival as a public place. The Autry National Center Board is committed to preserving the Southwest Museum site as a key component of the future of the Autry National Center. We look forward to a creative solution for operating this extraordinary site, which would ensure its economic viability and prominence in our city.

I want to thank the Autry National Center Board of Trustees for their leadership in developing a plan to save a Los Angeles landmark. And I want to thank the combined staff of the Autry National Center for the love and care with which they have treated the Southwest buildings and collection. Brenda Levin and her team have performed a generous task in this first of a series of reports on the Southwest. In addition to the efforts and commitment of the Autry National Center, successful long-term sustainability of the Southwest Museum structures at Mount Washington will require the energy, support, and cooperation of the local community as well as of our civic and political leaders. Council members Antonio Villaraigosa, Ed Reyes, and Eric Garcetti have been enormously helpful in advancing the process and in ensuring that all voices are heard. We thank them and eagerly look forward to continuing a strong and collaborative relationship.

Sincerely,



John L. Gray  
President & CEO, Autry National Center