CITY OF BEVERLY HILLS
STAFF REPORT

Meeting Date: July 2, 2013

To: Honorable Mayor & City Council

From: Nancy Hunt-Coffey, Assistant Director of Community Services

Subject: Request by Mayor Mirisch to discuss the height of the Millard Sheets mural

Attachments:
1. Letter from Mandana Motahari, AIA, Principal of RTK Architects, Inc.
2. Letter from Tony Sheets, artist and son of Millard Sheets

INTRODUCTION

Mayor Mirisch has asked that the City Council discuss the height of the Millard Sheets mural and the process by which the height was determined.

DISCUSSION

The Millard Sheets mural was installed in the motor court at the Beverly Wilshire Hotel in 1974 as part of the project that created El Camino Real which ran alongside the hotel. As part of a planned renovation in 1987, the piece was slated for destruction. Robert Ahmanson stepped in to save the piece by working with Louis Carnevale of Carnevale and Lohr to remove the mural in sections. Mr. Ahmanson at that time was head of the Ahmanson Foundation and is nephew of Howard Ahmanson, founder of Home Savings & Loans (later to become Chase bank). Mr. Ahmanson donated the piece to the City of Beverly Hills and it was immediately moved to the warehouse at Carnevale & Lohr where Louis Carnevale graciously stored the mosaic for over 20 years. At various points during those years, the Fine Art Commission attempted unsuccessfully to find a place suitable to place the mural.

In 2011 the Fine Art Commission decided to take on the challenge of finding a home for the mural. The Commission made two field trips to Carnevale and Lohr in Bell Gardens to see the mural and access the piece. A number of locations were subsequently considered, including the entry to the Crescent Parking Structure and the Palm Court. After extensive consideration and site visits around the City and Civic Center campus, it was determined that the westerly facing wall of the Civic Center Parking Structure was most suitable for the installation of this piece.

Staff was asked by the Fine Art Commission to seek the services of an engineer to determine if the parking structure could bear the weight of the piece, which is more than 5 tons. Based on the work of the engineer, staff reported to the Fine Art Commission that the structure could bear the weight.

Three different placements were considered for the Civic Center Parking Structure, and at the April 19, 2012 Fine Art Commission meeting, the following motion was made unanimously supporting option 1 which centered the piece over the entrance and exit of the parking structure:

7. CONSIDERATION OF MILLARD SHEETS MURAL PLACEMENT

Staff presented photos with the two potential locations of the Millard Sheets mural; in order to complete the structural engineering report the firm will need the final choice of where on the façade it will be installed.

Motion: Commissioner Potter moved to place the Millard Sheets mural per Option 1 as presented by the structural engineering firm in the packet, being centered over the entrance and the exit of the Civic Center Parking structure.
Commissioner Pressman seconded the Motion
Ayes: Commissioners Friedman, Vice Chair Chalom
Noes: none
Absent: Shepard, Chair Smooke
Carried: 4/0

The Commissioners voted on centering the mural in this way because they wanted to avoid removing mature trees adjacent to the structure and to provide a symmetrical view of the piece as drivers enter the parking structure.

At the December 4, 2012 study session, the City Council discussed the installation of the historic Millard Sheets mosaic mural above the entrance to the Civic Center parking structure. At that meeting, then Vice Mayor Mirisch raised a concern regarding the site lines of the piece, asking whether someone from the street would be able to see the piece from Rexford Dr. and whether the piece should be raised. The following is a transcription of what was said:

Comments by then Vice Mayor Mirisch:

"My question is in terms of the sight lines there. Will people standing from the street, for example, from City Hall, be able to see over the booth where people are taking tickets? I'm just wondering if it shouldn't be a little higher up so that it would have maximum visibility from anywhere around the circle of the plaza. That would be my only question or comment. Whereas now, it looks like the sight lines might be a little bit blocked standing at certain areas either at City Hall or on this side of the street. Has anyone looked at that?"

Nancy Hunt-Coffey:

"We haven't looked at that but we certainly will."

Mayor Mirisch:

"I mean, I would say for me, let's go for maximum visibility, because it is such a beautiful and meaningful piece and perhaps if it's up a little bit higher, that would solve that, so, I'm guessing that the engineering doesn't matter.

Great, thank you!"

Staff took this suggestion under consideration and studied the parking structure from a number of perspectives. Staff conferred with the architects and structural engineers; examined the installation of other Millard Sheets murals; considered the height of this installation in relation to its visibility based on the various points where it would most likely be viewed; and considered the safety of people wanting to view the piece. After substantial consideration, staff determined that the original placement of the mural was preferable for the following reasons:

- **Structural Considerations—**As can be seen from the picture below, which was presented to the Fine Art Commission at its April 2012 meeting, there is an existing concrete column structural system that is part of the parking structure which is represented by the cross hatched lines. The horizontal lines essential illustrate the location of the floors of the parking structure.

OPTION 1

The structural engineers and architects studied placement of the mural very carefully. They designed a mounting system which suspended the mural from a new steel frame structure, supported by these existing parking structure concrete columns and floors. Having the connections at column/beam intersections

improves out of plane (seismic/wind) performance of connections and transfers the load direction onto the floors of the parking structure rather than adding out-of-plane loads at the middle of a column. Current placement of the mural takes advantage of column/beam intersections at two levels, one of which is the first floor of the parking structure; whereas moving the piece higher would not allow the mural to sit on a floor of the parking structure. Moving the mural higher would have resulted in larger out-of-plane forces and would have required additional connection points and larger connectors. This became problematic because the existing concrete frame structure is constructed with a large amount of rebar that is closely spaced together, and the connectors would have to be fastened between the rebar. As a result, adding the required number of connectors would have been challenging, more costly and would have required a complete reengineering of the plans. However, almost any placement can be engineered with, of course, an associated cost.

- **Visibility—** One of the goals of the project was to maximize visibility of the piece by the most number of people. It was therefore determined that the primary audience for the mural was motorists entering the Civic Center parking structure. For the piece to be most easily viewed by someone coming into the parking structure in a car, the mural was placed as low as reasonably possible with the intent that the driver could view the piece, but continue to maintain awareness of their surroundings. Raising the mural to a higher elevation was concerning as it could pose a safety concern for drivers approaching the parking structure. The higher the mural raised, the greater probability for a driver to increase time looking up and disrupting their attention from driving into the structure.

Bridge from Library to Police

View from car, just beyond overhead bridge

View from car, just before entrance to parking structure

- A secondary audience for the piece was people walking eastward along the passage way from the Library to the parking structure as most users of the parking structure return to the structure via this walkway. While there are a few palm trees that interrupt the view along this passage way, the piece is placed low enough so that the foliage of the trees does not block the view of the piece. Part of the goal with the placement was to pique the interest of patrons along this walkway and to encourage them to use the safe viewing spot (as described below) to get a clear view of the piece.

View from walkway leading from library to parking structure

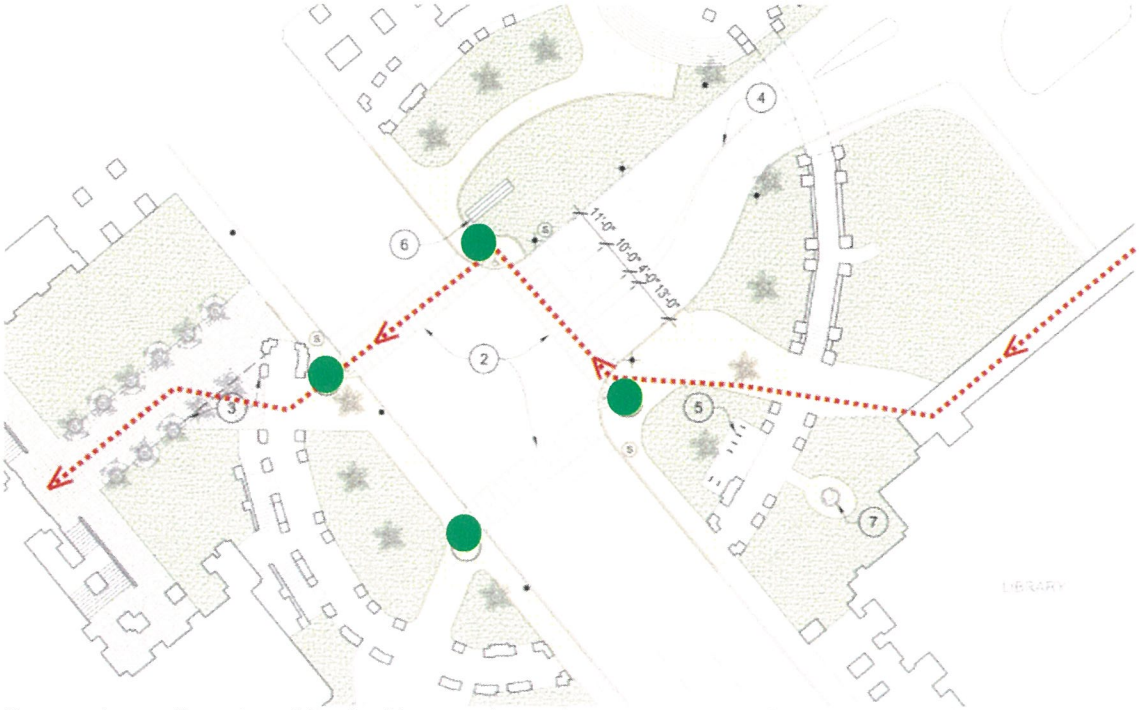
Unfortunately it is very difficult to view the piece from Rexford or from in front of City Hall. The bridge from the Library up to the second floor entrance of the Police station blocks the view of the parking structure partially at some points and entirely at other points. Raising the mural would not have resulted in a clear view of the mural from the street or the colonnade except at a few spots.

One spot along the colonnade where the mural is visible.

View from the front of City Hall

View from south side of colonnade

Although nothing more than a basic plan had been developed at that time, staff also considered the view of the mural in relation to the possible reconfiguration of the Rexford intersection with the entrance to the parking structure. Below is a drawing of the proposed reconfiguration of this intersection.



Proposed reconfiguration of Rexford intersection at the entrance to the Civic Center parking structure.

Staff looked at the location of the proposed corners that would be introduced as a result of the reconfigured intersection, which are represented by the green dots above. By raising the mural by about 50%, staff felt the view of the mural would be improved from the northwest corner of the intersection.

Northwest corner of proposed crosswalk

However, from the other three intersections, it was felt that raising the piece would not significantly improve the view of the piece from the corners.

Southwest corner of proposed crosswalk

Northeast corner of proposed crosswalk

Southeast corner of proposed crosswalk

- **Artist intent of placement—**The original installation of this mural was closer to ground level, since it was part of the motor court of the Beverly Wilshire Hotel. As can be seen from the picture of the work in its original setting, it was raised slightly and set back somewhat from the motor court. Furthermore, flower pots were placed in front of it, so the piece was removed a bit from direct contact with the public.

Original placement of Millard Sheets mural

In considering the placement of the piece, the Fine Art Commission examined a few locations that would have placed the mural at a same height as it was originally installed. However, for a variety of reasons including the retention of mature trees and the safety of the piece, the Commission opted to raise it above the entrance to the parking structure. Staff also felt that a higher installation was desirable in light of the amount of damage that has occurred with publicly accessible pieces like the Kusama *Hymn of Life*.

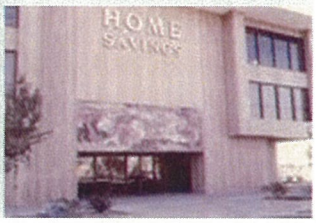
As a ground level installation didn't prove desirable, staff examined the placement of other Millard Sheets murals. From this study it appeared that most of Sheets' murals were placed either at ground level or raised just above the entryway to the building. As a result, staff felt that if the piece could not be installed in a location similar to its original installation, that it should be installed in keeping with other similar installations.

101 S. Harbor Blvd, Anaheim

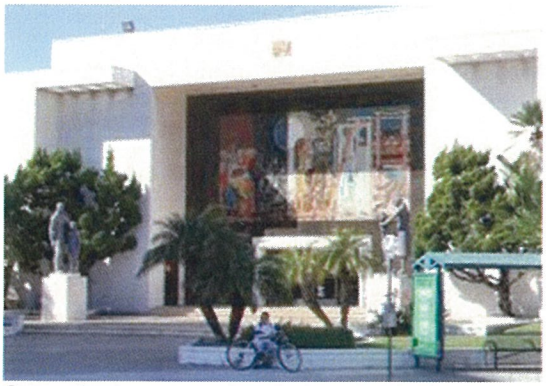
Sunset & Vine

Wilshire & 26th St.

Rolling Hills



Location unkown



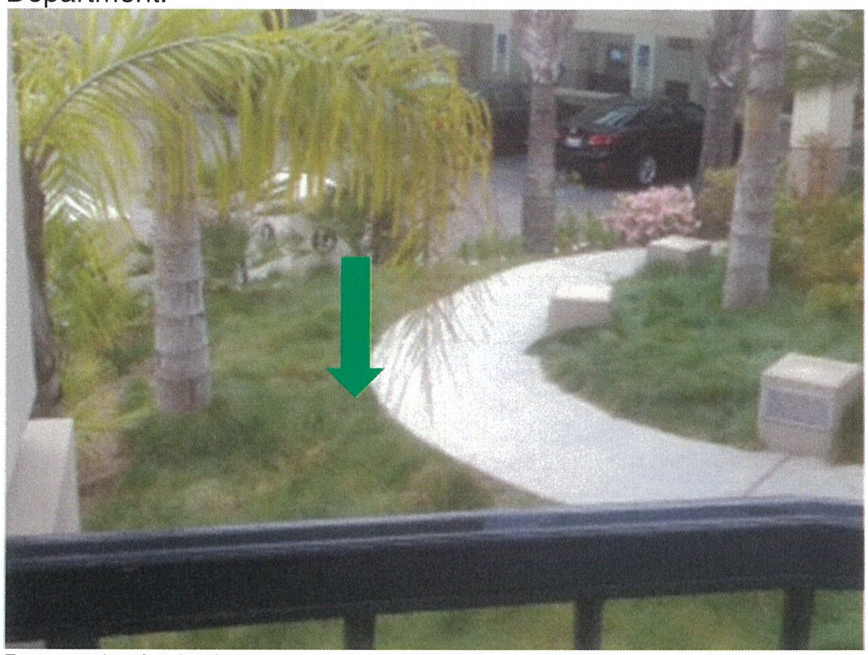
Santa Ana

Buena Park

Beverly Hills

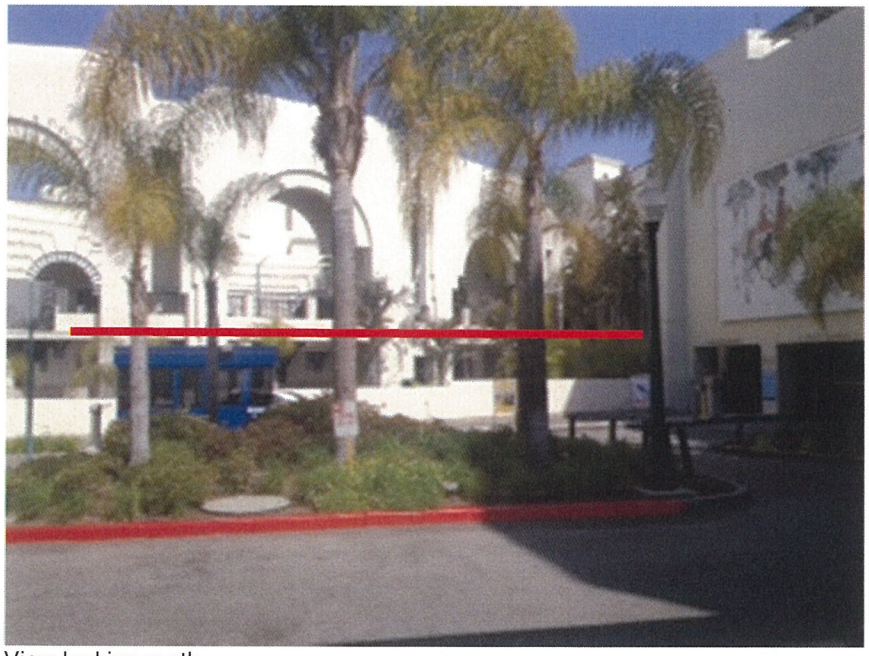
Mr. Sheets' son recently visited Beverly Hills to view the installation of his father's piece. When asked about the height of the piece, he felt confident that it was ideally placed. The attached letter provides more detail on his thoughts on the piece.

Establishment of a safe viewing spot— In analyzing the placement of the mural, staff felt that it was important to establish a safe viewing spot for members of the public who wanted to enjoy it. The concern was that people might be tempted to view the piece from the driveway into the parking structure. As a result, staff determined that a safe viewing spot would be at the curve of the ramp that leads from the Library walkway up to the bridge to the Police Department.


Proposed safe viewing spot

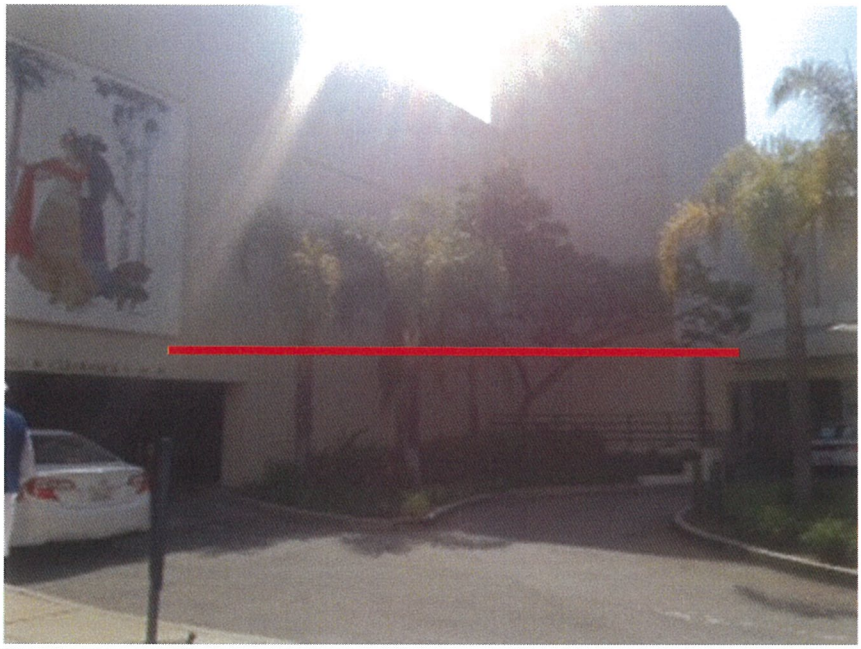
View from safe viewing spot

- **Aesthetics--**Aesthetics of the placement of the piece can be very subjective. However, there are some architectural elements surrounding the Millard Sheets mural which tend to support the placement of the mural at its current height. On the north side of the parking entrance, there is a walkway as part of the colonnade which is at a similar height as the base of the Sheets piece.



View looking north

On the south side of the parking structure entrance is the covered walkway from the parking structure to the library. The lines of this structure also tend to follow the bottom placement of the piece.



View looking south

Staff took Mayor Mirisch's suggestion under serious study. However, as a result of the reasons listed above which include structural engineering, visibility from a variety of points, establishment of a safe viewing point, trying to stay true to artist intent and aesthetics of the location, staff felt that the height as recommended by the professional architectural firm was optimal for the piece and that the considerations listed above out weighted the ability to be able to see it from select spots along Rexford.

It should be noted that on May 7, 2013 the City Council conducted a visit to the western side of Rexford to view the piece in situ.

FISCAL IMPACT

If directed by the City Council, staff could request bids to relocate the piece to a higher level. The cost to install the piece was $273,440. It is expected that the cost to reengineer the structural system, remove the piece, refasten it and restore the seams would be higher than the original cost to install it. It should also be noted that this work would like require a further closure of the parking structure at the Rexford entrance.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the City Council consider Mayor Mirisch's concern regarding the height of the Millard Sheets mural which was recently installed on the westerly facing wall of the Civic Center parking structure.

Don Rhoads, Director of Administrative Services

Nancy Hunt-Coffey
Approved By

Attachment 1

RTK

RTK ARCHITECTS, INC. Architecture, Planning, Interiors

April 8, 2012

Considerations in Placement of Sheets Mural at Civic Center Parking Garage:

The existing pedestrian overpass blocks the view of the mural from Rexford Drive, once passing the bridge in a vehicle or from the bridge leading to the Police Facility, the first opportunity one has to view the mural in full without obstruction. In both cases, considering the eyelevel and approach with respect to viewing distance, the current placement is at the optimum location.

Raising the mural to a higher elevation may pose a safety problem for drivers approaching the parking structure, as the driver may tend to look up to view the mural and have their attention impaired.

Furthermore there are also structural considerations; the mural has been designed to be supported from a new steel frame structure supported off the existing parking structure concrete columns. The placement of this structure was carefully studied. Having the connections at column/beam intersections improves out of plane (seismic/wind) performance of connections and transfer the load directly into the floors, rather than adding out-of-plane loads at the middle of the column. Current placement of the mural takes advantage of column/beam intersections at two levels whereas moving the piece higher will only have this advantage at one level only.

Raising the mural will result in larger out-of-plane forces and will require additional connection points and larger connectors, it is worthy to mention that existing concrete frame structure is constructed with a large number of rebars closely spaced and adding to the number of connectors will be quite challenging to avoid existing rebars.

Mandana Motahari, AIA
Principal
RTK Architects, Inc.

Attachment 2

Tony Sheets

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Hello Sandy,

It was so exciting to see my Father's mosaic once again in a wonderfully placed location where the public can fully appreciate it. Your hard work and care in locating the mural where you have fit the site perfectly. Placing the mural low on the wall as you have done keeps it at pedestrian eyelevel, as well as highly visible to those entering the parking garage. A higher placement on the wall would have made it look like a "plop art" after thought. I hope you will be able to find an equally well planned setting for the two painted murals of Dads commissioned by Mr. Cartwright.

I was able to plan the trip down for the May 7th dedication into my schedule; however the change to June will not work for me unfortunately. I will be truly disappointed to miss the event. Perhaps my sister, Carolyn Sheets Owen-Towle can attend in my place. I will have her contact you.

Best and thanks,

Tony Sheets