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June 11, 2020

The California Garden and Landscape History Society (CGLHS) supports the efforts of Public Accountability for our Capitol (PAC), a coalition of non-profit organizations and advocates working to protect our State Capitol and its surrounding park.

The California Garden and Landscape History Society celebrates the history, beauty, wealth and diversity of California landscapes. The grounds of the Capitol capture every one of these elements, expressing California's own unique qualities. The landscape is an inherently valuable part of the visitor experience. We are concerned that current plans for the Capitol and Capitol Park have not taken full account of the effects of the proposed changes to the property, potentially diminishing the integrity of this significant landscape.

Landscape characteristics have tangible and intangible qualities. The National Park Service has provided a list of landscape characteristics that, when documented and evaluated, create a framework for capturing these qualities. We feel that these existing features and characteristics have not been fully explored. Among the characteristics, the study of the property's spatial organization, circulation, topography, vegetation, views and vistas, structures, and small-scale features would yield a more thorough analysis. A detailed cultural landscape report would capture these aspects, which are sometimes subliminal and often overlooked, thus providing guidance for a more sensitive solution than what has been proposed.

Regarding historic vegetation, it appears that many more trees will be impacted than the available reports suggest. In addition, plans to replant the cedars in front of the old Capitol building are inadequate. Replanting old trees is a challenge in any situation, and the proposed planting areas provide insufficient rooting space to support the trees, most likely delivering them to a slow death. The permanent loss of existing, historic topography and circulation patterns and many historic trees should be avoided. Feasible alternatives must be presented and fully vetted in a public forum.

Given the historic importance of the State Capitol, the Annex, and Capitol Park, and considering COVID-19 and our renewed understanding of the importance of outdoor green spaces, it is apparent that the current proposal for the State Capitol falls distressingly short of expectations.

Sincerely,

Christine Edstrom O'Hara  
President

The California Garden & Landscape History Society (CGLHS) is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization.  
P.O. Box 220237 Newhall, CA 91322-0237. [www.cglhs.org](http://www.cglhs.org)