



April 4, 2024

Governor Gavin Newsom
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SUBJECT: Save the West Lawn, West Plaza and Steps - Revise the Capitol Annex Project

Dear Governor Newsom:

The Foundation is California's largest historic preservation organization with over 30,000 members and supporters. We provide statewide leadership, advocacy and education to ensure the protection of California's diverse cultural heritage and historic places. We believe government leaders, property owners, design professionals and all preservationists will save California's historic resources when they are fully informed.

The Capitol Annex Project, comprised of a new Annex building, underground parking garage, and a new, partially above-ground Visitor Center on the west lawn of the historic 1870s Capitol impacts our state's historical and cultural heritage. Despite being listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the 1952 East Annex was demolished last year. Now, CPF is deeply troubled by the prospect of losing the iconic West Lawn, West Plaza, and West Steps - symbols of public engagement and civic demonstration for generations of Californians, governors and State Legislators. CPF is now focused on preserving these historic elements from the third element of the Capitol Annex Project plan.

The Capitol Annex Project proposes to locate an expanded, partially above-ground Visitor Center on the West side of the historic 1870s Capitol, which would require demolishing almost 40% of the existing West Lawn, West Plaza and West Steps. CPF stands firmly against the destruction of the West Lawn due to the currently proposed Visitor Center in front of the historic 1870s Capitol. The CPF webinar linked below explains why the Visitor Center should be relocated

https://www.youtube.com/live/YGg_VXPkmrQ?feature=shared&t=172.

We are asking for your support to:

- 1) preserve the West Lawn - recognize and save the only remaining original park located in front of the historic 1870's Capitol;
- 2) retain public use of the West Lawn, Plaza and Park the site of numerous major events, demonstrations, and rallies for almost 150 years; and
- 3) relocate the Visitor Center. The Department of General Services (DGS) and the Joint Rules Committee (JRC) agreed in its final environmental document that relocation can work, yet the Visitor Center still is proposed for the West Lawn.

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Cindy L. Heitzman

The Court of Appeal Third Appellate District's decision last year raised serious legal issues about the project, and specifically the West Lawn. The Court said: "Overall, the new visitor/welcome center would alter historic landscape features of the West Lawn of the Capitol and reduce the ability of the resource to communicate its period of significance." Opinion on Rehearing, Save Our Capitol! v. Dep't of Gen. Servs. (2023) 87 Cal.App.5th 655, 676.

DGS and JRC admitted in the latest environmental report that the restored 1870s Capitol could be at risk of removal from the National Register of Historic Places and the California Register of Historical Resources because of the Visitor Center location and that it would create significant impacts to the West Lawn. In addition to these historic designations, the historic Capitol's west façade is protected by state law. Yet, the Legislature has not approved the relocation of the Visitor Center to reduce negative impacts to the West Lawn and the historic Capitol's west façade.



Visitor Center Impacts

- Destroys approximately 40% of the only remaining original 1870s Capitol Park.
- Even worse, prevents large events, celebrations, rallies, and marches in the future.
- Destroys an historic site -- the only remaining part of the original 1870s park -- used by Californians from Caesar Chavez's La Raza March in 1966, and other major rallies and legislative events for over 150 years.
- Eliminates direct access to the historic 1870s Capitol, forcing people to walk to L and N Street to reach the historic Capitol.

It's NOT too late to relocate! Why?

- The Visitor Center on the West Lawn was not approved by the Department of General Services (DGS) and Joint Rules Committee (JRC), even though the final environmental document still proposes it on the West Lawn.
- The 3rd Court of Appeals directed DGS and JRC to redo portions of its environmental review and reduce the impacts to the historic West Lawn by evaluating the relocation of the Visitor Center.
- DGS and JRC agreed in the final environmental document that relocation of the visitor center is feasible on the north or south of the historic Capitol.
- Relocating and building the Visitor Center on either the north or south side of the historic Capitol will preserve the West Lawn, Plaza, and Steps for the future and meet the Legislature's stated project objectives.

- This would be a “win-win” for all Californians and the Legislature. Save the West Lawn like the Legislature saved the historic 1870s Capitol in the 1970s.

I look forward to your support and discussing ways in which you can help relocate the Visitor Center from the West Lawn.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Cindy Heitzman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent vertical stroke for the letter 'H'.

Cindy Heitzman, Executive Director
California Preservation Foundation