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**L.A. County Board of Supervisors Approve \$15 Million from Capital Projects Budget to Support Natural History Museums of Los Angeles County “NHM Commons”**

**Board of Supervisors’ Forward-Looking Commitment Supports the Future of NHM and Exposition Park in Service to Students, Educators, Children and Families, and the Entire LA Community**

**Architectural Design by Frederick Fisher & Partners and Landscape Design by Studio-MLA Opens the Southwest Side of NHM’s Historic Exposition Park Home with a New “Front Porch,” Welcome Center, State-of-the-Art Theater, and Increased Space for Vital Collections and Community Programs**

**NHM Acquires Landmark Barbara Carrasco Mural *L.A. History: A Mexican Perspective*, to be Featured in Welcome Center Alongside New Dinosaur “Gnatalie,” Most Complete Sauropod on West Coast**

*Additional materials can be found in the press kit [here](#):-*



*Rendering of NHM Commons, a new community hub for exploring nature and culture and “front porch” for the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County facing Exposition Park. Rendering by Frederick Fisher and Partners courtesy of NHMLAC.*

**Los Angeles, March 31, 2020** –The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously today to approve the Natural History Museums of Los Angeles “NHM Commons” project and provide \$15 million toward its implementation, adding to \$15 million previously committed from the County’s capital budget in fiscal year 2019-2020. NHM Commons will provide 75,000 square feet of renovated space, new construction, and landscaping on the southwest side of its Exposition Park home, designed to offer an inviting, transparent “front porch” to the NHM campus, create a free welcome center, provide a new state-of-the-art theater and multipurpose space and increased exhibition spaces, and expand NHM’s broad-based programming. While funding for the project has been approved, in light of the current health crisis and economic uncertainties, no schedule has been set for groundbreaking or construction for this longer-term project.

In addition to the County support, the \$60 million NHM Commons project has received \$9 million from the State of California and another \$15.5 million in commitments from foundations and individuals. Two individual donors stepped up with lead gifts of \$5 million each: the Annenberg Foundation to name the Wallis Annenberg Lobby, and the Perlstein Family to name the Judith Perlstein Welcome Center. Additional support was received from the Kenneth T. and Eileen L. Norris Foundation, and three anonymous donors.

“The County of Los Angeles is proud to support the Natural History Museums of LA County -- the only County department focused on science education -- and the creation of NHM Commons,” said Kathryn Barger, Los Angeles County Supervisor, 5th District, and chair of the Board of Supervisors. “This appropriation is an investment in the future of our children and the ability of our residents and visitors alike to come to NHM and discover the wonder of our natural and cultural worlds. NHM Commons is a physical embodiment of the ‘Our County, Our Children, Our Commitment’ initiative launched in 2020 to make youth success a top priority for all County agencies. The Supervisors look forward eagerly to seeing NHM Commons become a reality.”

“While being mindful and intentional about where we now find ourselves with the museum closures, we are grateful to the Board of Supervisors for the capital project funding, as well as to the State of California and our generous donors for allowing us to keep an eye toward the future,” said Dr. Lori Bettison-Varga, President and Director of NHMLAC. “By creating greatly expanded opportunities to inspire wonder and discovery, NHM Commons will enable us to activate our collections, exhibitions, and programs, as we serve our diverse communities in exciting new ways. Bringing more of our behind-the-scenes work into the light and providing more opportunities for the public to connect with our research and vast collections, NHM Commons is the next major step in our vision for the next ten years at both Exposition Park and our La Brea Tar Pits site.”

“I am pleased the County is supporting the NHM Commons Project as an enhancement to the Natural History Museum’s role as the cultural anchor for Exposition Park and an important scientific and cultural resource for all Angelenos,” said Los Angeles County Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas, 2nd District. “This project will allow for even greater access to the Museum’s collections and the research of its scientists. I expect to see Angelenos engaging and learning to enjoy the nature and culture that is all around them.”

NHM Commons will provide 53,000 square feet of renovated space and 22,000 square feet of new construction. The work will proceed in tandem, with the vast majority of NHM remaining open to visitors. With the NHM Commons project, the ticketing and concierge experience at NHMLAC will be transformed to provide a personalized orientation to the Museum’s exhibitions, collections, gardens, and experiences.

“The themes of this reimagining of the Natural History Museum’s place in the community are transparency and connection,” declares Frederick Fisher, Founding Director of FF&P. “We are

honored to collaborate with one of the cornerstone institutions of our home region towards their goal of enhanced engagement with the community. We plan to open the Museum to Exposition Park and reveal its vast treasures and diverse activities.”

The Commons will create vibrant indoor-outdoor gathering spaces, replacing opaque exterior walls with a glass façade to give views into the Museum and its collections from the park. Los Angeles-based landscape architects Mia Lehrer + Associates (Studio-MLA) will increase the visibility and connectivity of NHM to Exposition Park and its community by creating gardens that provide much needed shaded spaces for community use and sustainable planting for a resilient future.

Inside, a new state-of-the-art 400-seat theater and multipurpose space will invite audiences to enjoy the best of live performances, film screenings, and special events. New media capabilities will connect NHMLAC scientists in the field with local and remote audiences, and flexible seating will provide space to host a wide array of innovative and free programs for the neighboring community.



(L) Barbara Carrasco’s mural *L.A. History: A Mexican Perspective* will greet visitors to the free NHM Commons, in the Judith Perlstein Welcome Center.

(R) NHMLAC’s newest dinosaur “Gnatale,” the most complete sauropod skeleton on the West Coast, will be also displayed. Renderings by Frederick Fisher and Partners courtesy of NHMLAC.

### **Convergence of Nature and Culture**

The Judith Perlstein Welcome Center at NHM Commons will serve as a new access point to the Museum, featuring dynamic displays of cultural objects and specimens from the natural worlds. In the Welcome Center, visitors can enjoy a free, accessible reception area and begin to enjoy the Museum’s unparalleled collections of more than 30 million artifacts through collection highlights. Also on view will be Chicana artist Barbara Carrasco’s 1981 landmark mural *L.A. History: A Mexican Perspective*. The 80-foot-long painting was recently acquired by the Museum from the artist. The acquisition of Carrasco’s mural was made possible by a grant from the Vera R. Campbell Foundation; the mounting and presentation of the mural was supported by Nancy and John Edwards.

The mural, which portrays the city’s history through vignettes woven into the flowing hair of *la Reina de Los Ángeles* (the Queen of Los Angeles), was on view at NHM from March 2018 to August 2019 in an exhibition titled *Sin Censura: A Mural Remembers L.A.* The first time the full length of the rarely exhibited artwork was shown inside a museum setting, the exhibition title referenced the mural’s censorship by the former Los Angeles Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA), which commissioned Carrasco to create the mural for the city’s 1981 bicentennial but halted the project when the artist refused to remove 14 depictions of historical moments the agency deemed too controversial.

“The Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County is a wonderful place for my mural *L.A. History: A Mexican Perspective* to be viewed as a permanent visual testament to the struggles and successes that the diverse communities of Los Angeles have experienced,” said Barbara Carrasco. “I have been

looking for a home for this mural for many years. The Natural History Museum of LA, where I came as a little girl, is the perfect home for it.”

The Welcome Center will also feature NHMLAC’s newest dinosaur “Gnatalie,” the most complete sauropod skeleton on the West Coast, highlighting how the Dinosaur Institute’s fieldwork translates into scientific knowledge as well as spectacular displays. The team has been led by Dr. Luis Chiappe, NHMLAC Senior Vice President for Research and Collections, and the Gretchen Augustyn, Director of the Dinosaur Institute. The 80-foot-long, 150-million-year-old Sauropod skeleton was discovered in Utah in 2007 by NHM researchers, who carefully unearthed the specimen while being “eaten alive” by gnats, giving the fossil its namesake. Gnatalie’s bones are an unusual green, due to a mineral present during the fossilization process in the quarry in which it was found. It will be the first green dinosaur skeleton to be mounted anywhere.

NHM Commons complements the recent ten-year transformation of NHM’s campus through the \$151 million NHM Next campaign, which commenced in 2008 and saw more than 60% of the public space renovated or repurposed, the creation of verdant 3 ½-acre Nature Gardens from previous hardscape and parking lots and the addition of compelling, award-winning exhibitions including Nature Lab; *Becoming Los Angeles*; Dinosaur Hall; Age of Mammals; the Haaga Family Rotunda; and the outdoor Spider Pavilion and Butterfly Pavilion.

NHM Commons is part of a larger 10-year institutional vision for increasing access to research and collections while providing more resources and amenities for neighboring communities and creating integrated indoor-outdoor destinations at both NHM in Exposition Park and at La Brea Tar Pits in Hancock Park. The reimagining of La Brea Tar Pits—the only active urban paleontological site in the world—has just begun with the early stages of master planning under the direction of the architectural team of WEISS/MANFREDI.

### **About NHMLAC**

The Natural History Museums of Los Angeles County (NHMLAC) include the Natural History Museum, La Brea Tar Pits, and the William S. Hart Museum. They operate under the collective vision to inspire wonder, discovery, and responsibility for our natural and cultural worlds. The museums hold one of the world’s most extensive and valuable collections of natural and cultural history—more than 35 million objects. Using these collections for groundbreaking scientific and historic research, the museums also incorporate them into on- and offsite nature and culture exploration in L.A. neighborhoods, and a slate of community science programs—creating indoor-outdoor visitor experience that explore the past, present, and future.

### **About Frederick Fisher and Partners**

Founded in 1983, Frederick Fisher and Partners (FF&P) is one of the nation’s leading creators of spaces that inspire, educate, and enhance communities. Some of FF&P’s clients known for representing these characteristics include MoMA PS1, the Annenberg Foundation, Princeton University, Colby Art Museum, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens, the Broad Art Foundation, the Getty Museum, the University of Southern California, Otis College of Art and Design, Crossroads School for Arts and Sciences, and the Buckley School. FF&P has recently worked with USC on the Iovine and Young Academy for Arts, Technology and the Business of Innovation (with HED) to change the way professionals use design, technology and business, and with the City of Santa Monica to create a City Services Building that is California’s first Living Building Challenge building, the most stringent environmental building standard in the world.