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The Natural History Museums of Los Angeles County and L.A. County Board of Supervisors Honor Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas with Named Entrance Plaza for NHM Commons

New “Front Porch” Will Open the Southwest Side of NHM’s Historic Exposition Park Home



Rendering of the Mark Ridley-Thomas Entrance Plaza, NHM Commons. Rendered by Frederick Fisher and Partners.
Courtesy of the Natural History Museums of Los Angeles County.

Los Angeles, CA (November 24, 2020) – The Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County (NHM) will soon welcome visitors and neighbors to the Mark Ridley-Thomas Entrance Plaza on the southwest side of its Exposition Park campus as part of the NHM Commons project on track to break ground in the summer of 2021. The Natural History Museums of Los Angeles County (NHMLAC), including NHM, La Brea Tar Pits in Hancock Park, and the William S. Hart Museum in Newhall, is a public/private partnership with the County of Los Angeles. During today’s Board of Supervisors meeting, a motion put forward by Supervisors Kathryn Barger and Sheila Kuehl was approved to name the entrance plaza in recognition of Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas and his leadership, guidance, and inspired public service, particularly during his tenure representing the Second District of Los Angeles County, which ends November 30. Throughout his 12 years as a County Supervisor, Ridley-Thomas has been a strong advocate for education and the appreciation of the natural world, supporting greater access to

NHMLAC research and collections and to improving the health of local communities through expanding green space and public offerings in Exposition Park. Ridley-Thomas was elected this month to serve on the Los Angeles City Council from the 10th District effective December 1.

“It is my honor to partner with Supervisor Kuehl in naming the entrance plaza of the Natural History Museum Commons after Supervisor Ridley-Thomas,” said Supervisor Barger. “This dedication is significant in marking the immeasurable contributions that Supervisor Ridley-Thomas has made to Arts and Culture in his District and throughout the County. Visitors to the Museum will be reminded of this for generations to come.”

“The Natural History Museum is pleased to name the NHM Commons entrance plaza in honor of Supervisor Ridley-Thomas, who has been a true champion of this institution, the project and of increasing access to the arts, science, culture and green space for the surrounding neighborhoods in the Second District and for all Angelenos,” commented Dr. Lori Bettison-Varga, President and Director of the Natural History Museums of Los Angeles County. “We are grateful for the many years of support and collaboration from the Supervisor and look forward to activating the plaza as a cultural hub and destination.”

With support from Los Angeles County, the State of California, foundations and individual donors, NHM Commons unites architectural design by Frederick Fisher and Partners and landscape design by Mia Lehrer + Associates (Studio-MLA). NHM Commons will provide 75,000 square feet of renovated space, new construction, and landscaping 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. The NHM 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, and will include gardens that provide much needed shaded spaces for community use and sustainable planting for a resilient future. Barbara Carrasco’s recently acquired mural *L.A. History: A Mexican Perspective* will be on view in the new free welcome center alongside NHM’s newest dinosaur “Gnatalie,” the most complete sauropod on the west coast.

“I have long said the Natural History Museum is the cultural heart of Los Angeles and the historic anchor of Exposition Park,” said Supervisor Ridley-Thomas. “I have witnessed first-hand the transformation of the institution over the past 12 years as it has delighted Angelenos with dynamic exhibitions and programs, and engaged neighborhood residents in community science. NHM continues to welcome the broadest audience to experience the museum—physically and virtually. I am truly honored to have this new entrance plaza named after me and look forward to the NHM Commons becoming a true community hub when it opens in 2023.”

Supervisor Ridley-Thomas began his Los Angeles public service in 1991 when he served 12 years as Councilman of the City of Los Angeles 8th District. From 2002 to 2008, he

represented the 48th California Assembly District and the 26th California Senate District. He joined the County Board of Supervisors on December 1, 2008, representing the Second Supervisorial District. Supervisor Ridley-Thomas has championed numerous public assets through his decades-long career in public service, co-authored the motion establishing the L.A. County Department of Arts and Culture in May 2018, and co-authored the Anti-Racism, Diversity and Inclusion Initiative adopted by the Board of Supervisors in July 2020. Supervisor Ridley-Thomas and the Natural History Museums of Los Angeles County (NHMLAC) have been highly involved in the development and progress of the Exposition Park Master Plan.

The \$60 million NHM Commons project has received a total of \$56.6 million including \$30 million in support from Los Angeles County and \$9 million from the State of California. Another \$17.6 million in commitments from foundations and individuals includes contributions from two individual donors who 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 and our museums are currently focused on the immediate challenges around COVID and continuing to protect our employees and guests on site while delivering virtual exhibits, programs, and educational resources," added Dr. Bettison-Varga. "While we work to manage the present situation it is important to simultaneously look to the future, so that when we emerge from this crisis our museums are more accessible and relevant than ever."

NHM Commons is part of a larger 10-year institutional vision for increasing access to research and collections that will provide more resources and amenities for neighboring communities and create 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 begun with the early stages of master planning under the direction of the architectural team of WEISS/MANFREDI.

About the Natural History Museums of Los Angeles County

The Natural History Museums of Los Angeles County (NHMLAC) include the Natural History Museum in Exposition Park, La Brea Tar Pits in Hancock Park, and the William S. Hart Museum in Newhall. 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 historical 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 experiences that explore the past, present, and future. Visit NHMLAC.ORG for adventure, education, and entertainment opportunities.