

April 15, 2016

The Honorable Jonathan Rothschild
and Council Members
P.O. Box 27210
Tucson, AZ 85726-7210

RE: Tucson-Pima County Historical Commission (T-PCHC) Recommendations re March 2016
Broadway 30% design plans

Dear Mayor and Council Members:

The Broadway 30% design plans were officially released on March 14, 2016, and since that time the full commission and its Transportation Subcommittee have been reviewing and discussing the plans with various stakeholders before discussing the structure of our response to you at our April 13, 2016, meeting.

Background

From the beginning, the T-PCHC considered making a summary “no-build” recommendation for the Broadway project, due to the wholesale loss of historic resources. We instead decided to work within the system (even though we were not allowed a seat on the citizen’s task force [CTF], despite our request to have a representative), offering information on the value of Broadway’s historic resources, and making recommendations on ways to achieve a zero-historic-demolition alignment. Many of our recommendations were rejected, but we were pleased with the spirit of the June 2015 alignment.

Unfortunately, the subsequent 30% design bears little resemblance to the approved June 2015 resolution, demolishing far more historic buildings. Loss of even one or two of these buildings weakens the buffer zone, and can begin a “domino effect” spreading into the adjacent neighborhood and along the corridor. These demolitions will permanently alter the historic streetscape, which is a cornerstone of Tucson’s unique “sense of place.” Sense of place is one of the primary reasons why people (including businesses) choose to move to Tucson or visit as tourists.

The *New York Times* understands Tucson’s architectural sense of place:

http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/14/travel/in-tucson-an-unsung-architectural-oasis.html?_r=0

Other communities already understand this. For example, the 30% design would not meet the treatment recommendations in the new *Phoenix Streetscape Conservation Guide*:

https://www.phoenix.gov/pddsites/Documents/pdd_hp_pdf_00080.pdf

Additionally, the current 30% design does not respect Context Sensitive Solutions principles (featured prominently in Broadway Project literature) by destroying the context it should be sensitive to:

<http://contextsensitivesolutions.org/>

Though some of the buildings along the corridor have been neglected, this does not justify removal. Most of them are easily restorable to their original, highly distinctive Mid-Century Modern appearance.

Recommendations

After weighing the views of the Broadway CTF, engineering viewpoints from the Tucson Department of Transportation, and public comments either made directly to the commission or during several hearings and public forums, we would like to make three recommendations.

Option 1. Do not fund the current 30% plans, and request redesign for 6 lanes *within the current right of way*, using custom, creative, progressive design techniques to include as many desired features as possible. This option is the least expensive, preserving existing businesses and the entire historic streetscape.

This option has not been seriously explored, rejected in favor of “one-size-fits-all” design. Resistance to this approach by TDOT engineers and the department’s contractors has been strong. Therefore we suggest seeking independent engineering peer review of the current 30% design (including the 2015 technical design parameters, street element widths, resolution 22410 A). This is an ideal point in the project to pause for brief, independent design review by outside transportation engineers who are qualified to critique the assertions that led to the divergence from the June 2015 alignment. Obtaining an objective second opinion by a qualified engineer licensed in Arizona (but not from Tucson) would be money well spent. We believe that citizens concerned with a variety of issues surrounding this project would appreciate this good-faith effort to ensure that all options have been seriously considered in the design process. Everyone concerned with the project deserves to understand the significant divergence between the intentions of a year ago and the 30% plan we have today.

Option 2. Do not fund the current 30% plans, and request a revision that would use creative solutions instead of demolitions to solve the various challenges facing businesses along the corridor. Option 2 would also include a plan to preserve the integrity of the Rincon Heights Historic District by either acquiring property on the south side of Broadway, or moving affected houses located on the north side. Read about a Phoenix house-moving success story here:

<http://www.phoenixnewtimes.com/arts/kimber-lanning-saves-wurth-house-on-roosevelt-row-in-downtown-phoenix-7374554>

Option 2 is more expensive in the short-term, but these costs will be recouped in the long term by preserving the tax base, increased property values, etc. The National Trust for Historic Preservation Green Lab recently did an exhaustive study of Tucson businesses. Their local findings have not yet been released, but we know they will mirror their fascinating findings from other cities. Here is their executive summary; the name says it all: “Older, Smaller, Better”:

http://www.preservationnation.org/information-center/sustainable-communities/green-lab/oldersmallerbetter/report/NTHP_PGL_OlderSmallerBetter_ExecSummary.pdf

Many additional economic studies can be found here: <http://www.achp.gov/economicstudies.html>

Resistance to additional expenditures could also lead to serious consideration of the third option below.

Option 3. Do not fund the current 30% plans, and seek a way to modify the fundamentally outmoded RTA mandate that replaces a thriving, unique historic corridor with an intimidating mini-highway. This option would be developed *within existing right of way*, requiring no further acquisition. Progressive and creative new designs could be explored, creating an exemplary project that would make Broadway a destination similar to downtown.

Conclusion

In closing, we suggest that on April 19 you do not fund the acquisitions for the 30% design, but instead take a short hiatus and explore one or all of the three options above. A medical analogy to our zero demolition goal is *primum non nocere*, or “first do no harm.” Remember that all the other features of the 30% design are potentially reversible, but it is not possible to “un-demolish” a building.

At the end of my letter, I close with several illustrations from *Broadway Born Modern: A Guide to Tucson’s Modernist Sunshine Mile Euclid to Country Club*, published by the Tucson Historic Preservation Foundation (THPF) in conjunction with Modernist Week several years ago, later posted on the National Trust for Historic Preservation Leadership Forum blog:

<http://blog.preservationleadershipforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Broadway-map-FINAL-web-10-31-12.pdf>

It is still the best single source for architectural information on the commercial buildings along the Broadway corridor. The images appear courtesy of the THPF.

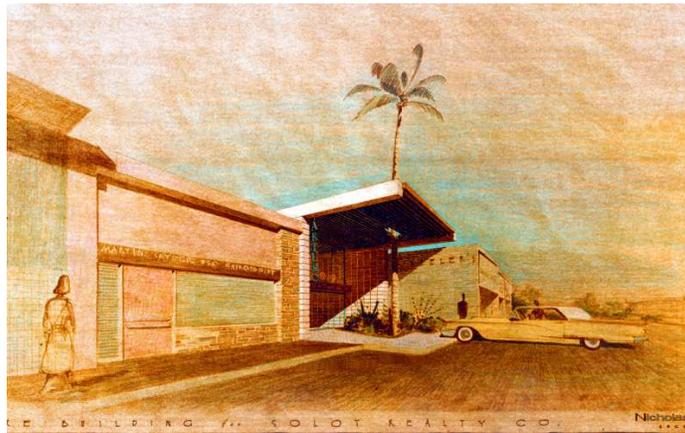
We respectfully request that you consider the options we have presented and encourage creative approaches to addressing the challenges posed by the Broadway Project.

Sincerely,



Teresita Majewski, Chair
Tucson-Pima County Historical Commission

Cc: Broadway Citizens Task Force; Jonathan Mabry, COT Historic Preservation Officer; Michael Ortega, Tucson City Manager; Beth Abramovitz, TDOT Project Manager; T-PCHC Commissioners; the Broadway Coalition



The Arizona Bank, built 1964, Friedman & Jobusch, Architects. The banking industry of this era commissioned prominent architects to design progressive buildings in a variety of styles.



Snyder Podiatry, built 1966 at 2825 East Broadway.