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Autry Museum Seeks Vibrant, Viable Future Concepts for the Historic Southwest Museum Site

New Request for Interest Encourages Creative Approaches to Revitalizing Landmarks of Northeast Los Angeles



Image: The Autry's Historic Southwest Museum Mt. Washington Campus. Photo courtesy of Thomas McDonell.

Los Angeles, CA (March 26, 2019)—[The Autry Museum of the American West](#) announced today that it is seeking organizations to propose innovative and financially sustainable concepts for the revitalization and creative reuse of the [Southwest Museum](#) (SWM) campus and the Casa de Adobe through a Request for Interest (RFI). The historic sites are located in the dynamic Mount Washington/Highland Park neighborhoods of Northeast Los Angeles. The Autry is encouraging responses by June 10, 2019, through the Autry's website.

The SWM site's prominent twelve-acre hillside location features breathtaking views of the L.A. skyline and the San Gabriel Mountains, along with stunning architectural flourishes, including a landmark main building, three-story and seven-story towers, and a dramatic tunnel entrance. One of L.A.'s few properties to have a Metro Gold Line stop named after it, the site is a brief walk from the Southwest Museum Station and fewer than five miles from Downtown L.A.

On nearby Figueroa Street, the Casa de Adobe is a 1917 replica of a nineteenth-century Spanish California rancho. The Casa became part of the Southwest Museum of the American Indian in 1925 and was part of a 2003 merger with the Autry.

Together with the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the office of L.A. City Councilmember Gil Cedillo, and the National Trust's broad-based Project Steering Committee, the Autry issued the RFI to invite and evaluate interest from a wide range of parties, which may include but are not limited to arts organizations, foundations, educational institutions, community organizations, private businesses, and historic property developers, among others. Respondents, including potential new owners/operators, are encouraged to consider how multiple uses can be combined to create a vibrant and sustainable operation that brings value to Los Angeles.

"I first visited the Southwest Museum site in the 1950s, and I continued to follow its evolution while I served as the director of the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C. Continuing with my direct participation in the preservation efforts as the leader of the Autry for the past six years, a pivotal period of collaboration and deliberation, I am deeply committed to identifying an exciting future for the Southwest Museum site and the Casa de Adobe," said **W. Richard "Rick" West, Jr.** (Southern Cheyenne), President and CEO of the Autry, which has owned and maintained the sites since 2003.

"We are eager to hear from parties who can bring renewed energy, imagination, and resources to this project," said West. "Throughout this process we have been fortunate to have the encouragement of L.A. Councilmember Gil Cedillo, the expertise and hard work of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and the dedicated involvement of various local community leaders to help establish key priorities and chart this path forward."



Images: (Left to right) Southwest Museum site tunnel entrance • Southwest Museum site courtyard. Photos courtesy of the Autry.

The Autry owns the SWM site and the Casa de Adobe through a 2003 merger between the Southwest Museum of the American Indian and leadership of the (then) Autry Western Heritage Museum. Following the merger, the Autry embarked on a comprehensive conservation program to save and protect the SWM's important collections and identify a viable future for the historic site. This decade-long effort required significant investment of funds and staff to preserve the extensive collections—a critical priority—as well stabilize and maintain the aging buildings. As part of the site's future, the Autry is interested in partnering with new owner/operator(s) on public and educational programming that is inspired by and draws on the content of the historic Southwest Museum collections.

Local community and government leaders, including **Councilmember (District 1) Gil Cedillo** and the National Trust for Historic Preservation, have been working with the Autry for the past several years to consider potential new directions and opportunities for the historic sites.

“The Southwest Museum and the Casa de Adobe are beloved historic sites in my district and the City of Los Angeles. Since becoming Councilmember, I have been committed to helping find the right fit and the right future opportunity to ensure these sites continue to provide value to this community and greater Los Angeles,” said Councilmember Cedillo. “We are excited to play an active role in this project—one that we anticipate will bring major cultural, community, and economic benefits.”

In 2015, the National Trust named the SWM site a “National Treasure.” With this designation, the Trust kicked off a multiphased planning process that included intensive stakeholder interviews; an online survey; a yearlong event series to draw new audiences and communities to experience the site in new ways; the formation of the Steering Committee to make connections and guide this work; and a detailed market assessment and reuse analysis.

“The beauty and history of the Southwest Museum site is unmatched in Southern California. We are pleased to continue our long-term partnership with the Autry to realize sensitive and creative uses that will mark an important new chapter for this place that is such an integral part of the Northeast LA community,” said **Chris Morris**, the National Trust's Senior Field Director. “We know that the best partner for this type of project is one that brings innovation along with experience, a deep respect for historic buildings, and an overarching desire to be a good neighbor.”



Images: (Left to right) M. R. Harrington [left] and S. M. Wheeler [right] with the museum truck at the Southwest Museum, preparing to leave on the expedition to Borax Lake, 1930–1940, gelatin silver print. Unidentified photographer. Braun Research Library Collection, Autry Museum of the American West; P.20477 • Photograph of attendees of the First Annual Fiesta at the Casa de Adobe, Los Angeles, California, June 6, 1927. Braun Research Library Collection, Autry Museum of the American West; S5.18.

ONE-OF-A-KIND PROPERTIES

Southwest Museum Site

The majestic site is a former home of the Southwest Museum of the American Indian, which opened in downtown Los Angeles in 1907 and moved to the Mt. Washington location in 1914. The work of the architectural firm of Sumner Hunt and Silas Burns, the Spanish Colonial Revival building was conceived with substantial input from archaeologist, journalist, ethnographer, early preservationist, and museum founder Charles Fletcher Lummis.

The interior space consists of two large exhibition halls on the upper level flanking a large central staircase and entryway. The lower levels are divided into office, and storage spaces, along with an outdoor patio area. The most prominent features are the three-story Torrance Tower at the west end and the seven-story Caracol Tower on the east. The latter contains a unique spiral staircase with spectacular views of downtown Los Angeles and the San Gabriel Mountains.

Two additions face the outdoor courtyard. Designed by architect Gordon Kaufmann, the two-story Poole Wing (1941) features clerestory windows with an open floor plan on the second floor. The freestanding Braun Research Library (1977) was designed by architect Glen E. Cook to house archival materials. This two-story masonry building separates the courtyard from the surface parking lot.

The campus is currently open to the public on Saturdays, 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., and for occasional community meetings, public programs, and pop-up exhibitions. From 2004 to 2016, a significant portion of the museum became a conservation lab while the Autry undertook its major multiyear,

multi-million-dollar effort to document and conserve the SWM's extensive collection of cultural materials and artifacts, now housed at the Autry's Resources Center in Burbank, which is scheduled to open next year.

Casa de Adobe

The nearby Casa de Adobe is located at 4605 Figueroa Street, a major north/south corridor that runs through Highland Park. Created by the Hispanic Society of California in 1917, the Casa was designed to resemble an early adobe ranch house with four wings divided into small rooms that enclose a central courtyard. It was used for a variety of programs and purposes in the twentieth century, including festivals, educational programs, art exhibitions, and special events. The property is currently closed to the public due to safety and accessibility issues.

Historic Designations

The 1914 Southwest Museum building is listed on both the National Register of Historic Places and the California Register of Historic Places. The campus was also designated a City of Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument. These designations make the property and its rehabilitation expenditures eligible for certain local, state, and federal incentives that can provide gap financing for capital costs. The designated status also allows use of the California State Historic Building Code, which provides alternative permitting regulations for the rehabilitation of original or restored elements and features.

The Request for Interest is available online at TheAutry.org/SWMRFI. Responses are due to the Autry by 5:00 p.m. PDT on Monday, June 10, 2019.

IMAGES AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

About the National Trust for Historic Preservation

The National Trust for Historic Preservation, a privately-funded nonprofit organization, works to save America's historic places. www.savingplaces.org

About the Autry Museum of the American West

The Autry is a museum dedicated to exploring and sharing the stories, experiences, and perceptions of the diverse peoples of the American West, connecting the past to the present to inspire our shared future. www.theautry.org