

## BERGAMOT STATION ART CENTER

### **Press Release: Wayne S. Blank Bergamot Station Ltd. Santa Monica, CA May 20, 2014**

After careful consideration I am announcing my decision to withdraw from the Bergamot Station developer selection process. I have become convinced that the City of Santa Monica's current approach to redevelopment of the site is fatally flawed and that if the City remains on its current path, it will likely result in the death of Bergamot Station as a world-renowned arts center. I would urge the City Council to reject all three of the current development proposals and postpone major redevelopment of the complex at this time.

There are three major problems with the current developer selection process.

First, the City's requirement that all parking for new buildings planned for Bergamot Station must be located on-site and will be primarily subterranean will result in severe disruption to the existing galleries and other tenants. As a gallery owner myself, and as one who has recruited and worked with the art gallery owners for the past 20 years, I do not believe we could survive the transition period. The City originally told potential developers to consider building a new parking structure on the adjacent City Yards property, but half-way through their selection process, staff rescinded that possibility citing too many questions about financing a parking structure and a City Yards master planning process which has not yet progressed to the point where such a site planning decision could be made. The City should postpone the Bergamot development process indefinitely until these critical questions are answered and should make a comprehensive parking program that realistically addresses the needs of Bergamot Station, Santa Monica City Yards and the impact of the new EXPO light rail station their top priority.

Second, the current process has veered drastically from the community's desire to maintain the unique low scale industrial feel, and primarily arts-focused uses that define Bergamot Station. After seven years of community planning efforts for the area, the current staff-recommended development proposal departs most radically from the goal of preserving the special adaptive re-use qualities of Bergamot, as was suggested by the community during the LUCE process.

Third, the City's developer selection process unwisely prohibited potential developers from including the adjacent privately owned parcels along Michigan Avenue in their designs and programming proposals. The City owns approximately 60% of today's Bergamot Station land and the adjacent privately owned parcels comprise about 40% of the remaining area. 40% of the Bergamot galleries are located on the private portion. The private properties have operated in seamless connection to the City-owned land for more than 40 years, even when the entire site was a water heater manufacturing plant. The adjacent properties can provide critical relief to the phasing and parking issues facing this complex project. Including them in any proposal may make the difference between survival or extinction for many of the current art galleries at Bergamot. Moving forward, the City should work collaboratively with the adjacent property owners. It is the only realistic approach.

The cumulative impact of these problems outweighs any desire to rush hastily into a redevelopment plan for Bergamot Station. We should leave Bergamot Station as it is for now, except that a simple and cost-effective pedestrian connection to the new EXPO light rail station should be created in the interim. The City should focus its efforts on thinking through a more comprehensive parking program, should clarify its commitment to preserving the unique character of Bergamot, and should expand its thinking to include the historically connected privately-owned properties. Without this "re-boot" of the process, Bergamot Station as a rare and precious arts center and cultural resource will be unnecessarily threatened and potentially destroyed.