

Arthur L. Reese Family Archives

Sonya Reese Greenland
Trustee and Family Historian
Arthur L. Reese Family Archives
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October 26, 2021

To: Becky Dennison
Venice Community Housing Corporation
bdennison@vchcorp.org

Sarah Letts
Hollywood Housing Corporation
sletts@hollywoodhousing.org

Dear Ms. Denison and Ms. Letts:

I am writing you to demand that my family name and all associations with my grandfather, Arthur Reese, including the use of his name and likeness be removed, immediately from your project with a full public apology to the community of Venice, to the City of Los Angeles and to all who have learned of this ill conceived project for the Venice Median.

As you know, my grandfather, Arthur Reese, was an esteemed Black forefather of Venice. He was a generous man, a Grand Master of the Masons, and took great pride in contributing his creativity, hard work, his land, and in bringing his relatives to the creation and betterment of this forever multi-cultural beachfront community of Venice.

I knew my grandfather well, I spent a great deal of time with him and loved him very much. I am the family historian and the Trustee of the Arthur L. Reese Family Archives. My grandfather would oppose your project for numerous reasons, some of which I will describe below.

It is disrespectful to my grandfather, my family, the Black community and all who have seen your false and misleading project descriptions, that you began using my grandfathers name years before you ever even contacted me. And when you did, in 2020, the description that you gave me was nothing like what your plans describe. I have since familiarized myself with your plans and have visited the site many times.

Your project is far too large to occupy our last large open space by the beach in Venice. No matter what you are building, nor for whom, it is unconscionable that you would combine forty (40) lots to build massive structures that occupy the full site with three stories plus a seven (7) story tower, from North to South Venice Boulevards and from Pacific Avenue to Dell, spanning the Historic Venice Canals and Historic Red Car Bridge.

Nothing on this scale exists in Venice and certainly not by the beach where it would make it more congested and less accessible for all who visit the beach and in emergencies to exit the area. My grandfather would be appalled. This is not suitable now, and is not smart planning for

the future growth of our population, particularly knowing that it is families of Color and with lesser economic means that need access to the beach to escape our ever hotter climate.

Providing 140 apartments for anyone does not justify encumbering access to the beach for hundreds of thousands of people, forever. It is families of Color and lesser economic means who use this surface parking lot.

Not everyone can afford to take their family to Disneyland but they should always be able to easily and safely bring their family to our multi-cultural beach. This is a surface parking lot and is the most accessible of all lots to Los Angeles beaches. It is at the end of Venice Boulevard - a major cross town thoroughfare that we all use to avoid traffic. This location is also preferred by my family and others because it is just before one gets caught in the extremely crowded beach-front lots.

Your representative told me that you would “honor” my grandfather by putting his name on a housing project like the small, well integrated homes you have built in Venice over the years which provide services to help its residents, who are people in need, in the Venice community.

This project is nothing like that. Your plans would tear down 4 existing low income apartments of longtime neighbors. I’ve met them. One family has a special needs child. You only commit to providing 3 new low income apartments and the balance would be for people earning up to \$90,000. Even if that meets some legal definition of “supportive housing,” it would not help the thousands of homeless and low income people now on the streets of Venice. This is not what you represented to me, not what you and your publications have lead the community to believe, it is not suited to that site, and not something that my grandfather would support.

The cost of this project alone shows how extraordinarily ill-conceived and wrong it is for Venice. There is no responsible justification for spending nearly \$1 Million Dollars per tiny 460 square foot apartment. The cost and effort that are going into this Billion Dollar development make no sense.

Housing and services are needed immediately. Arthur Reese would want this project stopped immediately with effort instead put to house and provide services to those in need now and with sensible plans for the future in an economical and humanitarian way.

Any other site in Los Angeles - and they exist - could have 140 tiny apartments like this at 1/2 this budget or less, (and without creating environmental, historic, and tourist problems). Building on this beach parking lot requires you to build 2 buildings: one for housing and one for beach parking. How could that ever make sense?

Even though you’re being given our public land for free by the City, it is unreasonable. That is not “social justice.” If you care about people of every socio-economic level, of every race, you should not allow the City to do this to Venice and to all who visit our beach. Grandfather would be totally opposed to the City and you squandering of our tax dollars and our open space.

Your parking design is contrary to “social justice.” Placing beach parking inside the eastern building only, using “Robotic Parking Machines,” perhaps even charging “elite” rates for online reserved parking, are all unreasonable obstacles that would make access to Venice Beach frightening, dangerous, complicated, outrageously slow, congested, and, in every way, difficult for the tens of thousands of families, that come from throughout Los Angeles for relief and to enjoy of our public beach.

I would avoid bringing my granddaughter to Venice Beach if I’d have to park in this complicated structure, further away from the beach and then have to walk along narrow sidewalks with that

large, still undefined population within that huge building complex. We can park for 1/2 the cost on the beautifully landscaped safe surface parking lots in Ocean Park Santa Monica.

Your plan would further destroy what has been an important source of tourist income for the City and small business owners of Venice.

Ignoring environmental regulations is dangerous. Stand at the site and you know you are below sea level. It's a flood zone. It's a tsunami evacuation zone. And it's part of the Historic Venice Canals. It is unconscionable that you would use an exemption from environmental review, even if offered, to build in this environmentally sensitive location and on such a massive scale. Arthur Reese would insist that this site be made safe, beautiful, that it provide easy access for all people to the beach and that every environmental concern be carefully addressed.

My grandfather arrived in Venice via the the Red Car Trolley traveling over the historic bridge at this site. It is a Nationally Registered Historic Landmark, as are the beautiful Venice Canals that it spans. Your design strips our National Historic Landmark Red Car Bridge of its function - which everyone loves - and sandwiches it within your complex of oversized, over priced, under designed, dangerous and in every way inappropriate buildings. Is that even legal?

It is shameful that the City of Los Angeles has allowed this historic and tourist destination to be in disrepair. It should be a beautiful welcoming entrance to Venice Beach and the Canals. That's what my grandfather and Abbot Kinney built. Your plans would make the site much worse. You do not even bring the canal nor the sidewalks that your massive construction would encompass up to current environmental nor safety standards.

The City has not imposed the same basic requirements on this project that all other projects must meet. When I build, or when my grandfather did, we follow building and safety codes. This project is not to code and the City must even change zoning laws to make it feasible. It is not safe that you would build a new project and not even make the sidewalks wide enough for pedestrians (who are primarily families of Color with boogie boards, strollers, beach umbrella's, coolers and the like) to pass, particularly at this busy tourist location.

Not only is your project bad for Venice, your use of my grandfathers name and reputation - that of perhaps the most prominent Black forefather - is exploitation of Black Lives Matter. It seems that you have tried to create a racial and social divide in Venice, which is otherwise a proudly racially and economically integrated community. It is shameful that you have suggested otherwise.

The City has enabled housing prices to rise. That does not mean that it should now compound the problems by making it so crowded that it destroys everyones access to our wonderful beach.

Venice has more housing of every economic level and is more racially integrated than most any other part of Los Angeles, and surely more than any other beachfront community in California. We pride ourselves on that, and always have.

When I think of what Grandfather would want, I envision a simple, landscaped surface parking lot with the banks of the canal planted, in keeping with the environmental and safety standards of all of the canals. Public restrooms should be built. The boat access ramp needs to be made accessible, as the State requires. Historic plaques telling of our wonderful history should be on the Historic Bridge and Canals. Grandfather would want seating and a kiosk in what is now bare dirt, on the banks of the canal. Grandfather built the first gondola for Venice. Santa Monica's parking lots have these facilities. Los Angeles' only beach should be welcoming, safe and

beautiful for all, for generations to come. That is social justice and that is what Arthur Reese would want.

I am copying this to a few people and organizations who I know have relied on your misinformation. As Trustee of the Arthur L. Reese Family Archives, I demand that you cease and desist in the use of Arthur Reese's name and likeness in any manner in connection with this project. I further demand that you make a public statement explaining that (1) the name, reputation and likeness of Arthur Reese, the prominent forefather of Venice, is removed due to your not having received authorization for this project, (2) that on behalf of Arthur L. Reese, the Arthur L. Reese Family Archive strongly opposes this project, and (3) that you make a public apology for misleading the community and causing any racial or economic divisions as a consequence of your use of the Reese name, reputation and likeness.

I look forward to seeing your corrections and full apology disseminated to your entire audience within the next few days and before November 1, 2021.

Should you wish to reach me, please do via mail or email. This has caused me and my family tremendous grief. We do not want to speak with you nor your associates further.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sonya Reese Greenland". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned centrally below the text "Sincerely,".

Sonya Reese Greenland
Trustee and Family Historian, Arthur L. Reese Family Archives

cc:

Los Angeles City Council
California Coastal Commission
Venice Neighborhood Council