

Communication from Public

Name: Susan Phifer

Date Submitted: 06/30/2020 12:13 PM

Council File No: 19-1204

Comments for Public Posting: Re: Agenda Item 19-1204 I'm Susan Phifer ,President of the Mt. Washington Preschool & Child Care Center founded in 1991 Our nonprofit provides year-round full day early learning and care programs for working families of all incomes in Northeast Los Angeles. On behalf of our Board of Directors families, staff we urge the council to approve Item 19-1204 on the agenda related to the Mayor's 46th Program Year Consolidated Plan. We operate La Casita Verde Child Development Center at the City-owned Ziegler Estate. Ziegler Estate is a City Historic-Cultural Monument and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Consolidated Plan includes funds for the City to upgrade Ziegler Estate. Our Board has pledged an additional \$50,000 to commission a Historic Structures Report and Maintenance Plan in support of this grant. We are committed to working with the City throughout the implementation Stewardship by the City is required to ensure that it can continue to be a child-serving institution for families of all incomes. We thank you for your support.



Mount Washington Preschool and Child Care Center, Inc.

4601 N. Figueroa St. Los Angeles, CA 90065

June 30, 2020

SUBJECT: JUNE 30, 2020 CITY COUNCIL AGENDA ITEM 35
COUNCIL FILE NO. 19-1204

Dear Los Angeles City Council,

My name is Susan Phifer and I am the President of the Mt. Washington Preschool & Child Care Center, Inc. founded in 1991 by the late Patricia Griffith, a local champion for working mothers and their children. Our nonprofit provides early learning and care programs year-round and full day for working families of **all** incomes in Northeast Los Angeles as well as to City and federal employees in downtown. On behalf of our Board of Directors and past, present and future families, teachers, staff, and volunteers, we urge the City Council to approve Item 35 on the June 30 agenda related to the Mayor's 46th Program Year Consolidated Plan.

We operate La Casita Verde Child Development Center at the City-owned Ziegler Estate adjacent to the Southwest Museum Station on Metro's L (Gold) Line. Designated City Historic-Cultural Monument No. 416, the property is also listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Since 2001, La Casita Verde has served as an anchor for the Arroyo Seco's hub for local and regional recreation, culture and education. Our services give families of low wealth access to economic mobility and opportunity and provide their children with quality programs to grow and learn.

The Consolidated Plan includes \$1,194,345 in CDBG funds for upgrades to stabilize this unique property. City staff have determined that its rehab is a multi-phase project and an additional \$1,194,345 is included in the Future Year Projects priority-funding list. The Ziegler Estate's deteriorating physical conditions pose not only a potential health and safety risk for young children and their families, our employees and the public but it also threatens its landmark status. Steady asset management and historic stewardship by the City is required to ensure that it can continue to be intensively used as a child-serving institution.

Built in 1904 by Charles Hornbeck and Alfred P. Wilson, the 5,000 square foot two and one-half story wood structure was designed as a stately home with elements of both Queen Anne and American Craftsman architecture. It was purchased by the former Community Redevelopment Agency from the Southwest Museum in 1992. The project consisted of rehabilitating the property and adapting it for use as a child care center to address the need for additional licensed child care for families including those with limited incomes.

In 2002, the project won the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Housing and Urban Development Secretary's Award for Excellence in Historic Preservation. The award cited "an energetic coalition of city departments, the Community Redevelopment Agency, the Community Development Department, and citizens groups for rescuing a gem from decrepitude while bringing a high-quality child-care center to the underserved Highland Park area."

The quality of a child development center is not only related to the qualifications and experience of the teachers and the type of curriculum offered. In a dense urban neighborhood, other factors determine success including a desirable location, the quality of facility design, and access to public transit. Another key factor for us is integrating families from a variety of incomes and backgrounds to create an enriched and positive experience for everyone. La Casita Verde is one of the few mixed-income centers in Los Angeles and the only one in Northeast. Since mixed-income centers are more costly to operate and State child care subsidies are scarce, we have to rely on grants and donations to offer tuition assistance.

Our Board has pledged \$50,000 to commission the Historic Resources Group, Inc. to prepare a Historic Structures Report and Maintenance Plan for the Ziegler Estate in support of this grant. We are committed to working with the City throughout the implementation of upgrades to minimize disruption of La Casita Verde operations.

Prior to the pandemic, many families with young children were forced to make a choice between spending a significant portion of their income on child care, or finding a cheaper, but potentially lower-quality care option, or leaving the workforce altogether to become a full-time caregiver. We know that in the near future parents and guardians, and especially women, will incur greater child care challenges. This is due to increased operating costs to meet more stringent regulations and the reduction in the number of centers in operation due because of the COVID-19 health crisis.

Please act in the best interest of working families now and in the future by recommending approval of the requested CDBG funds for the Ziegler Estate/La Casita Verde to City Council so that this public resource may continue to be a beacon of hope and prosperity for Northeast Los Angeles.

In closing, I'd like to acknowledge our deep appreciation to Councilmember Cedillo and the assistance of City staff who worked on this grant application representing the departments of Building & Safety, General Services, Public Works Bureau of Engineering, Los Angeles Housing + Community Investment, and Economic & Workforce Development.

Sincerely yours,

Susan Phifer, President
Board of Directors

cc: Martha Benedict, Geneva Burleigh, Tracey Chavira, Sylvia Robledo, Ashley Sipchen, Brad Weyers, Tamara Brown, MWPCCC Executive Director, Rosa Guzman, La Casita Verde Director