City of Culver City

Staff Report Details (With Text)

File #:	26-05	**Version:**	1	**Name:**	CAC - Historic MGM SIgn Proposed Donation
Type:	Minute Order			**Status:**	Action Item
				In control:	CULTURAL AFFAIRS COMMISSION
On agenda:	9/16/2025			**Final action:**	
Title:	CAC ACTION ITEM - (1) Discussion of the Proposed Donation and Installation of the Historic MGM Sign; (2) Provide Recommendations to Staff for City Council as Appropriate				
Indexes:					
Code sections:					
Attachments:	1. 25-09-16_ATT 1_Selected Historical Documents MGM Sign.pdf, 2. 25-09-16_ATT 4_Uovo Cost Estimate for Moving and Installation .pdf, 3. 25-09-16_ATT 2_Preliminary Conservation Assessment Summary.pdf, 4. 25-09-16_ATT 3_Preliminary Site Plans and Renderings.pdf				

Date	Ver.	Action By	Action	Result

CAC ACTION ITEM - (1) Discussion of the Proposed Donation and Installation of the Historic MGM Sign; (2) Provide Recommendations to Staff for City Council as Appropriate

Meeting Date: September 16, 2025

Contact Person/Dept: Sally Unsworth / City Manager - Office of Economic and Cultural Development

Phone Number: (310) 253-6003

Fiscal Impact: Yes [X] No [] **General Fund: Yes [] No [X]**

Public Hearing: [] **Action Item: [X]** **Attachments: [X]**

Public Notification: Meetings and Agendas - Cultural Affairs Commission (09/12/25)

Department Approval: Jesse Mays, Assistant City Manager (09/12/25)

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Cultural Affairs Commission (CAC):

1. Discuss the proposed donation and installation of the historic MGM Sign.
2. Provide feedback on the proposed process, including community engagement steps.
3. Make recommendations to the City Council regarding whether the City should accept the donation into the permanent art collection and approve its proposed installation and long-term

care.

BACKGROUND/DISCUSSION:

Historic Significance

The MGM Sign is one of the most iconic symbols in Culver City's history as the "Heart of Screenland." The hand-painted double-sided sign, featuring Leo the Lion and the motto Ars Gratia Artis ("Art for Art's Sake"), is among the most widely recognized trademarks in film history. (See Attachment 1)

Sign Dimensions

The MGM Sign measures approximately:

- 14' tall
- 32' wide
- 3,000 lbs.
- Material: Steel

Early History

- Installed atop the MGM Wardrobe Building in the late 1920s.
- Relocated to Stage 6 in 1930, where it overlooked sound stages for more than sixty years.
- Originally included a "Studios" panel, later replaced with panels for current MGM films.

The 1987 Restoration and Re-Lighting

Restored and reinstalled in 1987 at the Filmland Corporate Center (10000 Washington Boulevard, now known as "One Culver"). The project required a helicopter, a 220-ton crane, and 800+ hours of labor. The re-lighting was a major civic event, covered by worldwide press and attended by Gene Kelly and Culver City Mayor Dick Brundo.

Removal and Storage

The MGM Sign was removed in 1992 and has since been in storage. The City Council previously declared it a cultural landmark.

Current Condition

A September 2025 conservation assessment found the sign in fair to good condition, with paint loss, fading, and corrosion. Treatment is recommended to stabilize and preserve it. (See Attachment 2)

Opportunity for Renewal

Re-installation presents an opportunity to:

- Celebrate Culver City's film history.
- Return a landmark to public view.

- Connect future generations to the city's identity as a cultural hub.

Site Location Selection

Cultural Affairs and PRCS staff reviewed various sites in and around Veterans Memorial Park. Due to the sign's size, most locations were not feasible. The Overland Avenue frontage of the Culver City Senior Center was identified as the most appropriate site for historical, visual, and public engagement reasons. (See Attachment 3)

Design Features

- Installation of one side of the sign against a new perimeter wall (6'-8' tall).
- Planting of a screening/shade sycamore tree.
- Creation of a paved "selfie" area with a historic plaque.

Community Engagement

Staff will seek additional input from:

- Senior Center members and participants
- The Parks, Recreation, and Community Services Commission.

Feedback will be summarized and presented to City Council.

FISCAL ANALYSIS:

Acceptance of the donation will involve costs for transportation, installation, conservation, and maintenance. To date, we have received one estimate from Uovo Art Transportation which includes project planning, onsite preparation, off-hours moving, and installation costs estimated at $115,445. Additional estimates and competitive bidding would be pursued if given direction to proceed. (See Attachment 4)

If accepted, costs will be drawn from the funds that are available for Cultural Affairs in the Capital Improvement Projects budget for Art Installation, Restoration, and Conservation. City Council's prior approval for the use of these funds will be necessary if the project were to proceed.

Under CCMC §15.06.100 (Art in Public Places Program), Cultural Trust funds may be allocated for permanent or temporary artworks. This provision supports the potential use of Trust resources for art acquisition, installation, restoration and conservation.

NEXT STEPS:

1. CAC reviews and provides feedback.
2. Staff presents concepts to the Senior Center and PRCS Commission in October.
3. If there is support, staff will prepare a report for City Council consideration later this fall.

ATTACHMENTS:

25-09-16_ATT 1_Selected Historical Documents MGM Sign

25-09-16_ATT 2_Preliminary Conservation Assessment Summary

25-09-16_ATT 3_Preliminary Site Plans and Renderings

25-09-16_ATT 4_Uovo Cost Estimate for Moving and Installation

MOTION:

That the Cultural Affairs Commission:

1. Discuss the proposed MGM sign donation and preliminary site plan.
2. Provide recommendations to Staff to be presented to City Council, together with other community feedback, regarding the possible acceptance of the sign into the City's permanent art collection, the proposed installation process and location, and funding source for moving, installation, and conservation.

OR

3. Recommend that the City Council decline to accept the sign donation.