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To: Cultural Heritage Commission

Re: Westdale Village Courtyard Apartments

CPC CHC-2005-5158-HCM, CHC-2005-5217-HCM, CHC-2005-5219-HCM, CHC-2005-5220-HCM, CHC 2005-5221-HCM, CHC-2005-5222-HCM, CHC-2005-5223-HCM, CHC-2005-5224-HCM, CHC-2005-5225-HCM, CHC-2005-5226-HCM, CHC-2005-5227-HCM, CHC-2005-5228-HCM

To the Commission:

I write in strong support of historic-cultural monument status for the Westdale Courtyard Apartments. As an architect and the author of an architectural history of the Ranch style (*The Ranch House*, Harry Abrams, Inc., New York, 2005), I speak with some knowledge of how these buildings fit into the twentieth century history of Los Angeles. I have also written eight other books, most related to other aspects of twentieth century Southern California architectural history, including *The Architecture of John Lautner*, *Rancho Deluxe*, *Palm Springs Weekend*, and *Google Redux: Ultramodern Roadside Architecture*.

These buildings may appear to some to be modest, but they tell a significant part of the story of Los Angeles' development after World War II. The very fact that they seem so common is due to the tremendous impact the Ranch House had on the character and shape of our city; the Ranch was one of the most successful residential housing types of the last hundred years. It was the housing of choice as American cities grew into suburban metropolises, the major urban and demographic shift of the mid twentieth-century.

Indeed, Los Angeles is a Ranch House city in the way that New York is a Brownstone city, and San Francisco is a Victorian Row House city. These housing types each typify the average home in their respective eras, and their success and multiplication give each city its distinctive character.

The Westdale apartments also contribute, by intentional design, to the unified and spacious quality of their neighborhood. Their existence offers evidence that disputes the myth – and falsehood – that Los Angeles' growth after 1945 was unplanned and misbegotten sprawl. These buildings, designed and planned by the influential developer Paul Trousdale to be part of the larger Westdale community development, refutes that assertion.

The Westdale Courtyard Apartments are also excellent and intact representatives of the Ranch House style. This style is only very recently the subject of interest by architectural historians and preservationists. My book is the

first architectural history of the style, showing its deep roots and influence in Southern California.

The Ranch style denotes the suburban way of life which became the ideal, the dream, of the average American in the 1950s. The style conveyed a sense of self reliance, of living close to nature, and an informal and pleasant family lifestyle. Consciously unpretentious, the shingle roofs, porches, wide eaves, gabled roofs, shutters and board walls are all part of a well-designed style. Today this style is out of fashion. But that does not mean that the Ranch is not architecturally significant. It must be measured on its own merits like any style, not on the changeable taste of the moment.

It is important to note that other styles (such as the Victorian house, and the Art Deco movie theater) were also once considered unfashionable and deemed worthy only of demolition. However, the general opinion of those styles has changed dramatically; today the Victorian homes of San Francisco are considered prime real estate, with prices to match. Art Deco movie theaters have been rehabilitated and form a delightful and treasured part of many center cities, including Los Angeles.

The Ranch House style is today on the verge of being rediscovered, and its historical value appreciated. The Mar Vista Historical Society is to be commended for its effort to save these buildings from short-sighted destruction. They deserve to remain a continuing part of the quality neighborhoods of Mar Vista. Their one story profile, their well-maintained original exteriors, their spacious lawn courts and green landscapes cause them to unite with adjacent single family homes, as well as the shopping areas, parks, and schools that were designed to create a strong community. This strength would be severely compromised if they are replaced.

Simply because these buildings may seem common does not mean they are not significant, nor does it mean they are poorly designed. I ask that you allow these buildings to remain an influential part of the Mar Vista scene.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Alan Hess

CC: Bill Rosendahl
Jay Platt, Los Angeles Conservancy