

Making Way for Future-Ready Learning Spaces at Samohi

Demolition of History Building Central to Campus Plan

The Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District is making significant progress on the Santa Monica High School Campus Plan, developed with input from the Samohi principal, teachers, parents, students, and community members and approved by the Board of Education in 2016.

The plan calls for the demolition of several buildings, including the History Building, as the campus is improved to create effective educational spaces for generations to come. In the past weeks, some community members, including members of the Santa Monica Conservancy, have begun a campaign to alter the approved plans concerning the History Building.

While district officials appreciate the sentiment, the reasons for the campus plan, guided by student needs, remain. There is much misinformation surrounding this decision and the district seeks to inform the public of the student-focused reasoning behind the decision.

The district's approach to the campus planning process:

- The district's obligation is to provide the highest quality education for present and future students.
- The district does take into consideration a campus or building's historic place in the community and treats historic resources with respect, preserving them when it is both practical and advantageous for students.
- The plan was developed with considerable input from students, teachers, community members, school administrators, and the Facility District Advisory Committee.
- The district involved the community during multiple phases of planning and approval, going beyond legal requirements and accepted norms. Community meetings continue.
- Those now pushing to drastically change the plan did not show up or make their concerns known throughout the planning and entitlement process.
- The district has spent millions of dollars pursuing the widely-accepted Samohi Campus Plan, including a year designing the Phase 3 project that results in removal of the History Building.

The History Building is fundamentally unsuitable for future use:

- Despite the concept that kids can learn anywhere, the facility makes a substantial difference to the quality and type of learning that occurs in classrooms.
- Classrooms in the History Building average less than 700 square feet. The district's educational specifications call for classrooms of 1,100 to 1,200 square feet.
- The classrooms in the History Building worked for teaching in the early to mid 1900's. Education has changed, and our school needs have changed.
- The structure of the building dictates that rooms of the necessary size and proper configuration could not be feasibly created through modernization.
- The district considered alternate uses of the building, but it was unsuitable for any that would meet the campus plan goals, all of which are focused on improving the educational experience of students.
- The footprint and location of the History Building drastically reduces the options for realizing the goals of the Samohi Campus Plan.

Campus advantages with the removal of the History Building in preparation for Phase 3 of the Samohi Campus Plan include:

- A new South Gym, which will contain a two-court gym; an auxiliary one-court gym; studios for fitness, dance and yoga; locker rooms and support spaces.
- The new Exploration Building, part of which occupies ground space in which the History Building currently sits. The Exploration Building includes: Visual arts spaces for classes in photography, film, and multimedia; and the Capstone program, which includes pathways for engineering, health/wellness/sports medicine, and law/justice/government.
- All classes and offices in the History Building are being relocated to the Discovery Building, currently under construction and planned to open in August 2021.
- The new buildings and classrooms will be more accessible to individuals with disabilities.

Campus history is being honored and consciously preserved in the Campus Plan:

- Historic Barnum Hall has been preserved with minor but necessary interior alterations.
- The English Building is being preserved and will become administrative offices that do not require the expansive space of modern classrooms.
- The Greek Theater will be preserved, possibly with accessibility upgrades and a stage house to replace the one removed when Drake Pool was built.

According to the Historic Resources Group, the History Building no longer retains historical integrity, because:

- After the Long Beach earthquake, it was rebuilt in 1937.
- It underwent drastic remodeling in subsequent years, including the destruction of a wing.
- It is not included on the City of Santa Monica's list of locally designated Structures of Merit or Landmarks and would not be considered a historic resource by the National Register of Historic Places or the California Register of Historic Resources.

“Our goal throughout this process has been to create the best possible learning environment for Samohi students. When campus planning started, retaining the History Building was prioritized along with English, Barnum Hall and the Greek. Everyone appreciated the History Building’s symbolism to alumni, but its inadequacies and challenges to educating current and future students drove the decision,” Carey Upton, Chief Operations Officer said. “We spent more than two years engaging the community in planning, and have been encouraged by the enthusiasm the Samohi Campus Plan has elicited from students, staff and community members.”

As the campus plan is fully in construction of Phases 1 and 2 and more than halfway through design for Phase 3, any drastic change or stoppage would be costly to the district and taxpayers and detrimental to current and future students.

A more detailed memo describing the process and plans is available [online](#).