

We Support the Position of a Chief Design Officer for City of Los Angeles

Dear Mayor Garcetti, Representative Bass, and Mr. Caruso:

On behalf of the Los Angeles Chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA|LA) and our 4500+ members, we express our strong support for the role of Chief Design Officer (CDO) for the City of Los Angeles. As the next Mayor considers prospective candidates for the next Chief Design Officer, we would like to support you by offering a list of qualified people. To synthesize and execute a holistic, yet multi-faceted design vision across all city departments, AIA|LA recommends that criteria be established for the next Chief Design Officer to be a licensed architect in the State of California with a deep understanding of Los Angeles' diverse civic landscape.

Our great city faces enormous design challenges and opportunities that comprise each mayoral candidate's top priorities (homelessness and a lack of affordable housing, climate action and resilience, preparing the public realm for the 2028 Olympics & Paralympics, to name the most pressing etc.) We believe the executive leadership of the Chief Design Officer can work directly with all city departments on behalf of the Office of the Mayor to implement a visionary agenda for the built environment, and improve the form, function, and urban design of the city.

We applaud Mayor Garcetti for creating the position of CDO and we recognize the contributions and leadership of the first officeholder, Christopher Hawthorne - such as the Lowrise LA competition, the Al Fresco outdoor dining program, and his work with the Civic Memory Working Group. Established in March of 2018, the Chief Design Officer was created "to improve the quality of civic architecture and urban design across Los Angeles," and was integrated into the Mayor's Office of Economic Development to help leverage a comprehensive and cohesive design vision across all city departments. For a city as complex and multifaceted as Los Angeles, it's vital that the role of the Chief Design Officer be elevated in prominence in the City's hierarchy of decision-makers and is empowered with the direct authority to ensure safe, resilient, equitable, and healthy outcomes in all matters related to the architecture, design, and urban planning of Los Angeles.

Additionally, we encourage the next Mayor to hire more architects to serve on the Public Works Commission and in leadership positions for city departments, as well as be appointed to serve on the City Planning Commission and other important boards and commissions. Integrating more 'design-thinkers' into executive management roles will help Los Angeles address critical issues impacting the functionality of city governance and elevate the performance of all city services.

With the upcoming transition in mayoral leadership, AIA|LA wants to highlight the essential responsibility of the Chief Design Officer to ensure that design excellence remains a core tenet of the City's goals and priorities. The Chief Design Officer can serve as the executive leader who connects the resources of the Office of the Mayor with all city departments impacting the built environment, such as Public Works, Bureau of Engineering, City Planning, Building & Safety, LAFD, LADWP, LADOT, LAHD, Recreation & Parks, and the CAO's Municipal Facilities Committee.

If you have any questions or seek additional information, please feel free to contact Will Wright, our Director of Government & Public Affairs at will@aialosangeles.org Thank you for your leadership on this initiative.

Truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mitra Memari".

Mitra Memari, AIA
President, AIA Los Angeles