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TO: City Bond Project Advisory Committee
c/o Lynne Birkinbine
Sent via email: lynne.birkinbine@tucsonaz.gov

FROM: R. Brooks Jeffery
Director, Drachman Institute
rbjeffer@email.arizona.edu

RE: Fully Fund the Tucson Convention Center Eckbo Landscape Rehabilitation

The 2013 Urban Land Institute (ULI) assessment of downtown Tucson identified focus areas for continued public-private developments that extend the ongoing success of the downtown's eastside redevelopment. The Tucson Convention Center (TCC) was at the top of their list for a number of reasons, including the potential to redevelop, renovate, and enhance the existing capacity of the arena, meeting halls, performance spaces, offices, retail, and hotels to create the vibrant mixed use campus first envisioned when TCC was designed in 1971.

The ULI study also specifically identified the Eckbo Landscape – the open space enveloped by TCC's buildings – as a critical component of this redevelopment vision. Named for internationally renowned modern landscape architect Garrett Eckbo who designed it between 1971-1973, this open space embodies his principle of spaces for people with multiple outdoor "rooms" that are tied together by the most critical element of a desert environment, water. The multi-level space was designed for large gatherings outside performance spaces with monumental fountains, as well as intimate spaces for sitting under a canopy of shade with a trickle of water, grass areas, and spaces for play where children can run around and splash in fountains designed as interactive environments. The Eckbo Landscape was also designed to frame views of the surrounding mountains and provide pedestrian links between Tucson's downtown landmarks. In short, the Eckbo Landscape – now nominated to the National Register of Historic Places – was designed as a *civic space* in the center of downtown Tucson created for people of all ages and for multiple purposes.

It has taken 40+ years since the construction of the TCC and Eckbo Landscape for the promised urban renewal to transform downtown Tucson into a destination for shopping, entertainment, and housing. What makes Tucson's development unique – and authentic – is the mix of existing historic building stock and streetscapes with new infill respecting the original scale and character that defines a quintessential Tucson downtown experience.

This "experience economy" is as essential a factor in downtown redevelopment as are the goods and services economies. The creation and sustainability of environments and programs that provide authentic Tucson experiences is what distinguishes us from other cities and what drives cultural tourism as well as long-term corporate investment. Research tells us that cultural tourists have a greater direct and indirect impact on local economies. Equally, companies and industries that seek new cities cite intangible qualities

of place – multi-generational cultural venues, local historic character, and authenticity – as the tipping factor for investment.

The Eckbo Landscape provides a much-needed venue for these civic experiences, giving additional character to our re-emerging urban core where events, such as Tucson Meet Yourself and the Mariachi Festival, have reinforced our community's diverse identity. The Eckbo Landscape, like many downtown sites, also represents the most recent of a multi-layered occupation by Tucson's cultural groups – O'odham, Hispanic, and American. Recognition of this cultural tell of compounds, plazas, and neighborhoods along the floodplain of the Santa Cruz River – a distinctly Tucson phenomenon – is just one component of a proposed rehabilitation of the Eckbo Landscape.

This proposed rehabilitation, part of the larger "Downtown Community Theaters and Historic Cultural Landscape" project of the Pima County Bond Proposal, replants dozens of trees to increase the hardscape shade canopy, redesigns water spaces for children and fountains with water-wise technology, replaces benches to accommodate greater sitting and relaxing, updates lighting to efficiently illuminate nighttime events and plaza areas for civic gatherings, while still respecting the integrity of Eckbo's original design.

Originally listed as #2 priority by your City Bond Project Advisory Committee, full funding for the TCC Downtown Community Theaters in general and the Eckbo Landscape specifically, is under threat due to recent efforts to reduce the overall bond funding level by the Pima County Bond Advisory Committee Chairs and County Administrator.

I urge you to continue your support to honor the integrity of process that returns full funding to this project, and particularly the Eckbo Landscape, as a critical venue and *economic component* to revitalizing downtown Tucson's civic sense of place.

cc: Elaine Becherer, City Manager's Office
Helen Erickson, TCC Today