

Nicholas, After Heated Council Discussion, Resigns as Greystone Foundation Chairman

By Marina Milligan
Staff Writer

Following a heated debate between Councilmembers over the future role and structure of the Greystone Foundation, Fred Nicholas resigned as chairman of the Foundation at City Council's study session this week.

Questioning the present effectiveness of the Foundation and saying that the Council should have control over the city's "most valuable asset," Councilmembers Charlotte Spadaro and Bob Tanenbaum suggested "democratizing" or disbanding the group.

"(Greystone) is the most valuable asset we have and we don't have any direct influence over what is happening," Tanenbaum said. He pointed out that no one on the present Council—other than Mayor Ben Stansbury—had been a Councilmember when the Foundation was formed and therefore its perspective and views do not reflect those of the present Council.

"I don't see any reason for having them continue," he said of the Foundation. "The Council should bear the responsibility (for Greystone), not the citizens in this particular issue."

Councilmember Charlotte Spadaro agreed, saying "The Foundation may have a role to play but this has been a slow moving process and I would really like to see something happen. There are a lot of possible options that are not being considered."

She proposed that Beverly Hills use the mansion—which has been valued as high as \$40-million—for city purposes. She also suggested "reforming" the Foundation as a Council committee so the Council could appoint its members or direct the staff to find different ways to "arrange" the group.

Nicholas said the Foundation "has no authority to do anything" and that its primary role is to "funnel information" to City Council.

He told Council that "not one damn thing" has been done with the information the Foundation has presented to Council. "Every time something comes up it's not good enough," he said. "It's a disgrace" and "you should be ashamed."

At the end of the discussion, Nicholas informed Council that he was "not interested in further serving on the Greystone Foundation."

He later told The Courier that he was "greatly offended" by the Council because some of its members "ignored the hundreds of hours" the Foundation has spent "investigating and recommending uses" for the mansion.

"Instead of thanking and encouraging Greystone Foundation," he said, "several members of the Council have attacked the

role of the Foundation and its work and called for its dissolution...I find it impossible to continue pro bono work which is maligned, unacceptable and unappreciated."

Nicholas said other members of the Foundation supported his position and were "very upset." He added that "I expect there will be a response."

Councilmembers Max Salter and Donna Ellman defended the Foundation's present role, arguing the group would be more effective in finding a suitable

tenant for Greystone because its members have "clout" and have contacts in the art world.

Salter said the Foundation procured a tenant for Greystone, Frederick Weisman, who wanted to house his multi-million dollar art collection in the mansion but "an idiot publisher" in Beverly Hills drove him away with a lot of bad press.

"You don't throw away and change something that requires continuity," Salter said.

Spadaro argued that he

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couldn't blame "a little bad press" for Weisman withdrawing his proposal, and added that no one really knows for sure why he pulled out.

Stansbury was not present at the meeting.

City Attorney Greg Stepanicich said that Council does not have the authority to disband the Foundation.

"The issue is what is to be the continued role, if any, of the Foundation in finding a use for the site and then what is the role, if any, in the management of the user," Stepanicich said.

The Foundation, formed in 1984 to find an occupant for Greystone, is comprised of the same 15 members appointed to the Greystone Citizens Committee in 1983 by Council.

Last year, the Foundation presented Council with the Weisman proposal which was accepted. However, Weisman withdrew his proposal after a of "serious negotiations," said City Librarian Michael Cart, also the staff liaison to the Foundation.

Currently, the Foundation is working on a proposal by the L.A. County Museum of Natural History.