May 3, 2016

Dear Claremont City Council, Planning Commission, and City Manager:

The Claremont Colleges consistently rank among the most prestigious colleges in the world. While each college has its own character and mission, the collaborative work of our students and faculty as part of this consortium makes us truly unique among educational institutions. Students come to Claremont to take advantage of expertise, resources and opportunities that are not available anywhere else. We are thought leaders and innovators in higher education, and we understand the evolving needs of our faculty and students. We write today to share two important points regarding the proposed Pomona College Museum of Art.

First, there is a false dialogue taking place about a border between the colleges and the village. We believe the colleges are an integral part of the village neighborhood. We were founded together and have grown together, and have always been a part of each other’s attraction. It is critical to any discussion that we recognize and build on this positive connection. The success of Claremont as a community and as a cultural center for our region is a core value that we share.

Second, in the on-going conversations regarding the proposed Pomona College Museum of Art, one important perspective has been lost: its academic mission. Visual art uniquely provides a bridge between disciplines, offering ways to address questions explored in the humanities, sciences and social sciences through multiple frameworks and creative transposition. Direct engagement with original artworks facilitates powerful connections within and between disciplines, leading to new levels of understanding and new perspectives. Cross-disciplinary, creative thinking is paramount to the liberal arts.

The Pomona College Museum serves the important educational mission of all the Claremont Colleges. Our faculty members are leaders in their fields, and their academic excellence has shaped the form and function of art facilities on all our campuses. Pomona’s collection resources are not duplicated at any of the other galleries. Other colleges use their collections and exhibitions for teaching, and Pomona College’s plan for a new facility will increase access to collections for all undergraduate classes, including classes that choose to work on exhibitions.

In the last four years, one-third of students interning at the Pomona College Museum came from Claremont McKenna, Harvey Mudd, Pitzer and Scripps Colleges. Over the years, students engaging with art programs at the Claremont Colleges have gone on to careers in some of the most impressive museums in the United States (The Getty, The Whitney, MOMA, The Frick Museum, Norton Simon Museum, and LACMA), as well as on to the most recognized graduate programs in the world including the Courtauld Institute of Art in London.

Buildings are part of the educational experience. Planning that involves a campus’s physical plant is more nuanced than simply finding a space where a building will physically fit. It involves carefully planned cross-disciplinary synergy and adjacency, accessibility and integration into the
social, functional and educational environments of our students. The nature of our unique consortium of colleges adds a layer of complexity to these planning decisions as each college’s students and faculty make use of other college’s facilities. Our planning is thoughtful, informed and collaborative, and done with experts who put at the center of their work the single most important consideration: the academic excellence of our student programs.

The proposed location for the new Pomona College Museum of Art on the west side of College Avenue has been determined to be the only alternative that achieves the educational mission and curricular needs of Pomona College. As presidents of the Claremont Colleges, we support this proposal on the strength of its academic excellence, inclusiveness of undergraduate student needs across the colleges, and the welcome bridge it provides between the colleges and the Claremont civic center. We urge you to join us in supporting this project.

Sincerely,

David W. Oxtoby, President, Pomona College 5/3/16

Robert Schult, President, Claremont Graduate University 5/3/16

Amy Marcus-Newhall, Interim President, Scripps College 5/3/16

Hiram E. Chodosh, President, Claremont McKenna College 5/3/16

Maria M. Klawe, President, Harvey Mudd College 5/3/16

Thomas Poon, Interim President, Pitzer College 5/3/16

Sheldon M. Schuster, President, Keck Graduate Institute May 2, 2016

Stig Lanesskog, Chief Executive Officer, Claremont University Consortium 5/3/16