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July 20, 2010

Esteemed Members
of the Land Use and Planning Committee
c/o City Clerk
200 N. Spring Street
City Hall
Room 395
Los Angeles, California

re: Proposed Baseline Hillside Ordinance

Dear Councilmembers:

I am writing to object to the proposed new baseline hillside ordinance.

1. As a designer, I can tell you that the proposed ordinance is very complicated and very difficult to utilize. There are different rules for every type of slope, so that often several different rules apply to the same property. The rules are internally inconsistent and sometimes self-contradictory. For example, can you use the "minimum" size and still get a bonus? If the slope is very steep, do you still get a minimum size (apparently not because the ordinance does make some lots unbuildable).

2. The ordinance will destroy the value of old housing stock ("tear-downs" and "fixer-uppers"). The ordinance is so restrictive that many existing old houses are already too large under the ordinance, so there is no ability to rebuild the same size house or add rooms.

3. The ordinance will not stop large home construction, but it will restrict it to the super-rich. The ordinance will drive down the value of small lots, because they will be unbuildable or not economically buildable. The value in many small lots is the ability to build a larger house, which will be taken away. But the super-rich will still be able to buy multiple lots (at lower prices) and still build large homes on the now-larger lots. This will encourage even more income stratification in the city.

I urge a "no" vote on this ordinance.

Yours truly,

Sanaz Afsar



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July 20, 2010

City Clerk
200 N. Spring Street Rm. 395
City Hall
Los Angeles, CA 90012

attn: Land Use and Planning Subcommittee
re: Objection to Proposed new Baseline Hillside Ordinance

Dear Councilmembers:

I object to the proposed new hillside ordinance and urge you to vote "no" on the proposal because:

1. The new ordinance drastically reduces the size of house that can be constructed on over 200,000 residential lots in the city, far below what anyone would consider a "mansion." The restrictions are far greater and resulting homes far smaller than per the City mansionization ordinance. For example, the "minimum size" is set at one half the floor area ratio (FAR) in the mansionization ordinance. The ordinance will render between 8 and 10 percent of affected lots legally unbuildable.

In this regard, the "real world examples" in the staff report are unrealistic and frankly skewed in favor of super-rich landowners who can afford very large lots. The "real world example" at p. A-19 of the staff report assumes a 40,567 square foot lot -- almost a full acre. The report states the owner will be able to build a 10,388 foot house on this lot, which the report feels is adequate. Other "real world" examples in the report are lots of 62,085 square feet (1-1/4 acres) and 60,700 feet and houses of 10,000-12,000 feet.

In the real world, most homeowners and lot owners in hillside areas have lots of 10,000 feet or smaller, perhaps even 5000 feet. If, as often occurs, the lot is very steep, the owner may be stuck with the minimum floor size of 1,250 feet - the size of a two-bedroom apartment. Given the high cost of building in any sloped area, this will render the lot economically unbuildable.

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2. The ordinance is being considered without a fiscal or economic impact report or analysis. Individual home construction and remodeling is the one part left in an otherwise dismal construction economy. The value in construction and remodeling is usually being able to build a larger home or add space -- not a "mansion," just adding a room, etc.. The ordinance is so restrictive that many existing homes are already too large, so renovation and additions will be impossible. The City will lose building fees and the assessed tax base will decline in value.

3. The value of a lot or a small house is a function of what house can be built on that lot. There is huge expense in building or rebuilding a house, and to justify that expense and the cost of the land, the new house must be larger and more attractive than the old. The ordinance will drive down the value of smaller houses and lots by making them economically unbuildable. This will penalize owners of small houses while rewarding those who already built large homes.

Yours truly,


Saied Kashani