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April 17, 2013

Council of the City of Los Angeles
Planning and Land Use Management (PLUM) Committee
200 North Spring Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Re: Report on Multiple Approvals Ordinance (MAO) Time Extensions
Council File 11-1140

Honorable Members of the Planning and Land Use Management (PLUM) Committee,
Councilmembers Ed P. Reyes, Jose Huizar, and Mitchell Englander:

The Multiple Approvals Ordinance (MAO), adopted on March 30, 2012, was the second of six recommended Zoning Code amendments initiated by the Director of Planning, intending to streamline and simplify the Department's case processing functions. Prior to the initiation of the MAO, the Zoning Code created an uncertain and challenging development approval process for both applicants and stakeholders.

City Planning staff conducted an extensive outreach program of meetings and workshops to identify the Code sections that present the most significant obstacles to development. Some key issues found were that: the Zoning Code did not specify decision makers and appeal routes for all possible combinations of entitlements; there was a lack of clear procedural hierarchy of decision-making authorities; and it was unclear which decision-maker had jurisdiction over complex projects with different entitlements. Most importantly, there was no synchronization of the life of entitlements related to individual projects.

The recent recession stalled many projects leaving applicants struggling with expiring entitlements. To address this issue, the State mandated time extensions for subdivision approvals granting a three-year extension to all approvals with initial expiration dates between July 1, 2008 and January 1, 2014. The City also adopted ordinances to implement these State bills (SB 1185 and AB 333), which allow up to a three-year extension of time for subdivision approvals with initial expirations through January 1, 2012. In addition to adopting these State standards, the MAO went further by extending the same time to all land-use entitlements. By providing a one-time extension consistent with State law but with broader applicability, the MAO has assisted in the economic recovery of Los Angeles.

As a result, this ordinance will improve the quality of development citywide by providing clear, streamlined processes for analyzing the merits of proposed projects requiring multiple discretionary approvals. The changes also free up case-processing staff time to better implement the goals of the City's General Plan, the City Planning Commission's strategic directions, DO REAL PLANNING, and the Planning Department's BLUEPRINT 2010-11.

Since its effective date, the Planning Department has accepted over 170 time extensions of expired or soon-to-be expired project approvals. These extensions have played a significant role in jump-starting the local economy by providing more housing opportunities and supporting local businesses. Of these 170 time extensions, approximately 90 are for residential projects, including single family homes, apartments, subdivisions, adaptive re-use, and mixed-use projects. Examples include a mixed-use project in Westlake providing 376 units and 10,500 square feet of office and commercial space, another mixed-use project in Chatsworth-Porter Ranch providing 338 units and 15,500 square feet of commercial space, as well as 46 units in an adaptive re-use joint live-work quarters in Northeast Los Angeles. All in all, these time extensions have revived the approval and likely construction of over 6,000 units.

The remaining 80 time extensions are for various non-residential projects. Although most are relatively modest in scale, they support a wide array of businesses. Examples include a conditional use permit for a YMCA, the construction of a new school in Hollywood, the remodel and expansion of another school in the Wilshire District, the continued use and maintenance of a landscaping business, as well as the continued use and maintenance of various signs. We will continue to monitor these extension applications as they help to foster the economic recovery of Los Angeles.

For further information, please contact Tom Rothmann at (213) 978-1891.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Alan Bell".

Alan Bell, AICP
Deputy Director of Planning

AB:TR:NS