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## Hollywood Community Plan.. "Should Hollywood be Skyscrapers"

1 message

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# Should Hollywood Be Skyscrapers?

## L.A. developers seek yet another Century City

By [David Futch](#) and [Jill Stewart](#) Thursday, Jan 12 2012

Los Angeles city councilman and mayoral candidate [Eric Garcetti](#)'s dream to re-create Hollywood as a density-lifestyle "regional center" featuring skyscrapers cleared a big hurdle last month when the city [Planning Commission](#) unanimously approved its concept to dramatically remake Hollywood's skyline.

The vote should have been an upbeat event for Garcetti. He has long promoted his belief in heavy population density for L.A. neighborhoods, embracing a botched attempt by city planners to permit granny flats in backyards, backing a "density-bonus" reward that lets developers erect outsized luxury complexes banned by zoning as long as the developer includes a handful of cheap rental units.

But instead of earning accolades, the Hollywood Community Plan has faced a slowly stewing backlash.

First, several hundred Hollywood residents attended two big November meetings at the First Presbyterian Church of Hollywood, where a majority was shocked to hear the broad strokes of the Planning Department's proposed Hollywood Community Plan for the first time. Then, at the December Planning Commission meeting, Hollywood residents were forced to wait hours to speak, and their views were finally summed up by [Fran Reichenbach](#), president of the [Beachwood Canyon Neighborhood Association](#): "Whenever you hear someone say 'upzoning,' you should beware because it means 'Up yours!'"

After that, a flurry of news reports and opinion pieces questioned the logic of the plan, which some critics have dubbed the "rape of Hollywood." But for more than three weeks, Garcetti, who represents most of Hollywood and will play the single biggest role in whether the plan is adopted, was unavailable to comment to [L.A. Weekly](#).

Now that the commission — all political appointees of [Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa](#) — has given its blessing to the densification of much of Hollywood, the plan goes to the City Council's Planning and [Land-Use Management Committee](#), or PLUM, and then on to the City Council later this year.

Voting in lockstep in recent years, the council is expected to do as Garcetti wants.

The plan would give private developers, underwritten by public subsidies from the [Community Redevelopment Agency](#), tremendous new latitude over the future of Hollywood and many of its distinct residential communities. (The fate of the CRA is uncertain, with a court ruling that such agencies must disband in California by Feb. 1.)

Garcetti, tracked down by the *Weekly* on an early January morning at his downtown office, insisted he was too busy to discuss the remaking of Hollywood, then agreed to give the *Weekly* a walking interview as he strode down a City Hall corridor.

"There's no set plan," Garcetti said. "No rush. Nothing's being jammed down people's throats."

Running for mayor and clearly stung by growing questions about whether skyscrapers are smart for Hollywood, Garcetti said, "Let me be clear, I have never [called it] 'elegant density.' The mayor said that."

His message isn't flying with some.

"I don't mean to denigrate Eric Garcetti," says [East Hollywood Neighborhood Council](#) member [Doug Haines](#), "but to quote [another activist], 'Eric Garcetti has a planning background — he took one planning course, but it was the wrong one.'"

For decades, zoning that governs height and size has preserved thousands of affordable, low-slung, older apartments, bungalows and commercial buildings in Hollywood. Those zoning laws also have prevented a version of [Westwood's](#) Condo Canyon along Sunset Boulevard and halted massive overdevelopment in the city of [West Hollywood](#) from bleeding into Hollywood itself.

No real skyscrapers exist in Hollywood, with the two most prominent high-rises — the vintage Sunset-Vine Tower and Sunset Media — only standing about 20 stories tall. The iconic [Capitol Records](#) Tower is too short for skyscraper status, but New York developers want to erect two adjacent skyscrapers with luxury residences and hotel rooms comprising 1 million square feet, dubbed Millennium Hollywood, dwarfing Capitol Records.

The Hollywood Community Plan would pave the way for that, and more. In a radical departure from Los Angeles law, it would hand developers broad "by right" powers to build far higher and bigger than local zoning allows. And public hearings where people fight to keep their communities at a livable scale would be dispensed with in many instances. Garcetti says taller is better because high-rise towers could free up land on the ground to create small green spaces, and the plan "down-zones certain parts and protects areas. Right now if you go to Hollywood, there are homes right next to apartment buildings. This plan stops that from happening in many neighborhoods."

But residents — many of whom have studied the Environmental Impact Report — say that's not true. Haines, for example, can think of only a couple of pockets singled out for the new protections in the "many neighborhoods" Garcetti cites.

"Height districts" in Hollywood have long limited commercial, retail or mixed-use buildings according to a specified floor-to-lot-area ratio, or FAR.

The floor-to-lot-area ratios on some sections of Sunset and Hollywood boulevards would be doubled, from 1.5-to-1 to 3-to-1, or expanded even further, to 4.5-to-1. There would be no public hearings, preventing opponents from disputing these projects.

Developers also could seek special City Council approval for skyscrapers with a 6-to-1 FAR. A developer could stick a 60,000-square-foot complex on a 100-foot-by-100-foot lot (10,000 square feet). Think [Hearst Castle](#) or the [White House](#) — but squeezed into a towering high-rise on land not much bigger than somebody's yard.

Residential areas could face upheaval as developers target them under the loosened rules. Haines says, "They are artificially upzoning — and by 'artificial' I mean that the upzoning abruptly stops at the border of [territory] overseen by the Community Redevelopment Agency" — the border where fat public subsidies to developers end.

In addition, new design standards Garcetti has backed would allow a canyon effect on Sunset, sought by the Community Redevelopment Agency/L.A., and parking podiums up to 50 feet tall nearly to the sidewalk. Garcetti helped to water down a plan requiring skyscrapers to be erected on a north-south perspective instead of an east-west perspective to

protect classic views of the Hollywood Sign and the hills.

Instead of requiring a north-south perspective for skyscrapers, it's now a mere guideline. These standards, approved last month by the CRA — the canyon effect on Sunset, parking podiums reaching the sidewalk and the non-ban on skyscrapers with an east-west perspective — got Garcetti's blessing. Next they head to the Planning Commission for approval.

Garcetti lives in tree-lined [Silver Lake](#), far from the density lifestyle he urges others to adopt. "The real decision is whether we plan for [population] growth or not," Garcetti told the *Weekly*. "Not whether it does or doesn't come." But in fact, population growth is not coming to Hollywood — quite the opposite is unfolding.

For the past 20 years, Hollywood's population has shrunk despite billions of public dollars spent on redevelopment by the CRA. Hollywood lost more than 15,000 residents between 1990 and 2010, leaving a population of 198,000. Los Angeles itself is barely growing — defying boosters who say that extremely dense residential construction is required by demand.

Despite its tanking population count, the streets of Hollywood are over capacity, thanks to megaprojects such as Hollywood & Highland. Garcetti has spoken of bringing in thousands more residents, workers and shoppers.

"I don't get this FAR thing," Hollywood resident and activist [Ziggy Kruse](#) says, "but I have common sense, and it leads me to believe the city wants to build up areas that are already congested, especially along Hollywood and Sunset. You can't get around now!"

"The Hollywood Plan is disliked by everyone in Hollywood," says Hollywood attorney and land-use activist [Richard MacNaughton](#). "Los Angeles [City Hall] and Garcetti want to turn Hollywood into a vertical city like Manhattan. The Hollywood Plan is a propaganda piece for developers who think they can make money."

Perhaps the most dramatic element is the granting of power to developers to significantly increase the size of buildings — most of the time without environmental or planning review by the city or the community.

Former L.A. City Planner Richard Platkin explains, "[Developers] will no longer need to obtain special approvals, which are expensive and time-consuming."

Most of Hollywood is designated a Height District One, allowing a building-size ratio of no more than 1.5-to-1, Platkin says. The Hollywood Community Plan undoes that.

Platkin continues, "This change to the height district is a trick" to get around Proposition U, which was approved by seven of 10 Los Angeles voters in 1987 to stop overbuilding and inadequate planning.

Angelenos can look to the Miracle Mile District to see what's coming. Along Wilshire Boulevard, "High-rises now abut single-family homes," says Platkin — with City Hall overriding rules in which "the city tries to have a block or two of apartments between big buildings and single-family homes."

Last month, the Planning Commission waited until after a crowd of angry residents went home, then unanimously approved the growth proposal for Hollywood. Today, there are no slow-growth advocates sticking up for the community on the [L.A. City Planning Commission](#). MacNaughton says, "It's hard to tell the difference between corruption and incompetence when you're looking at it from the outside."

Platkin, an adjunct professor at USC's School of Policy, Planning & Development, says that when it comes to providing roadway capacity, water and LAPD officers to serve the new density, "Hollywood's infrastructure was taxed before this new plan. Now it's going to be hell on wheels living in Hollywood. ... People are moving out to places like [Encino](#). If the city is going to allow a 16-story building next to your home, you're going to leave."

A vision statement by the Planning Commission says the new plan is meant to create a sustainable, livable future — and claims that this vision is shared by Hollywood community members, homeowners and city departments.

"This is B.S.," Platkin says. Although some residents like the idea, "Basically, only Garcetti, the developers and their cohorts support additional density."

Garcetti doesn't see things that way, saying he's heard local support for the plan and that he has an open mind and plans to incorporate all the various concerns. He explains, "Some people may say this plan is the most incredible thing since sliced bread — and I might disagree with them."

