

Marilyn Who? Ask Councilman Krekorian or Mayor Garcetti

28 Aug 2015 Written by Richard Lee Abrams



PRESERVATION POLITICS-Who doesn't like Marilyn Monroe? Councilmember Krekorian, that's who!

Why else would Councilmember Paul Krekorian support the demolition of one of the most significant homes of Marilyn Monroe?

With the blessings of Mayor Garcetti, who believes in eradicating as much of Hollywood's history as possible, and with the support of Councilmember Krekorian, Marilyn Monroe's home at 5258 Hermitage Avenue, Valley Village, was illegally demolished on June 15, 2015. While living there in 1944 and 1945, Marilyn was still known as Norma Jean.

Garcetti is an old hand at demolishing historic structures. Remember, the Spaghetti Factory at Sunset and Gordon in Hollywood? After a legal battle, the developer agreed to a court order whereby it received many millions of dollars of concessions for its project. In return it stipulated that it would not destroy the facade of the Spaghetti Factory. That stipulation became a court order – by Judge James Chalfant.

Then late on a Friday afternoon, Garcetti made certain that a demolition permit was issued and overnight, the Spaghetti factory was gone.

As a result, Judge Chalfant ordered the occupancy permits revoked and the project is now in limbo.

Garcetti and Councilmember Paul Krekorian learned their lesson. Destroy first!!! Destroy an historic building BEFORE any court order can be issued, BEFORE any historical designation can be made, BEFORE due process has run its course, and BEFORE the asbestos documents have been obtained.

Why was this home unique? Between 1944 and 1945, Marilyn was living with her in-laws, the Doughterys, while her husband James Dougherty was in the Navy. She was living in this house as "Norma Jean" when she was discovered and soon transformed into Marilyn Monroe.

Norma Jean's mother-in-law, Ethel Dougherty, had found her a job at Radio Plane Munitions Factory aircraft plant where she sprayed parts with fire retardant and inspected parachutes. When Capt. Ronald Reagan needed a model for morale publicity, Reagan's photographer David Conover selected Norma Jean. That was the launching pad for her entire career, yet Krekorian and Garcetti find nothing historically significant about this phase of her life.

It is one thing to be discovered, but how many stars were discovered by Ronald Reagan? If that is not one for the history books, nothing is.

One of the most amazing aspects of this tiny home at 5258 N. Hermitage in Valley Village is that it captures the essence of Marilyn's life during a crucial transforming stage. While Norma Jean was born at County Hospital in Lincoln Heights, Marilyn Monroe's career was born while living in this house. Without her working at the munitions factory and without Capt. Reagan's need for a morale-boosting model, the world may have never had Marilyn Monroe.



The Garcetti Administration and Councilmember Krekorian do not see it this way. In opposing the historic status for this home, Councilman Krekorian's office said the home did not qualify because Norma Jean was not in a highly productive phase of her career. Really? Then let's tear down the birthplaces of all the presidents because obviously, when they were born, they are not being highly productive at birth.

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We all need to see the *verbatim* reason that Garcetti and Krekorian trashed this home: According to the Councilman's designated spokesperson, Krekorian said he thought there was nothing "in the staff report says that it was of any great historical significance, especially since Norma Jean only lived there one year."

You see how easily an L.A. councilman can turn Marilyn Monroe's home into nothing of great historical significance? This is not someone's opinion about what Krekorian thinks, but the authorized words from his own staff.

By the way, it's likely that the actual structure where Norma Jean lived was over 100 years old, giving it a claim to history even without Marilyn.

If the home had been so devoid of significance, why did Krekorian have it torn down just prior to the meeting of the Cultural Heritage Commission? The destruction happened on Monday, June 15 – just three days before the Commission's hearing on Thursday June 18. The hasty demolition shows that Krekorian and the developer both knew that the home qualified for historical protection. The only way to avoid the law was to have Krekorian's quick approval of its destruction. (As we shall see, the house could not be legally demolished.)

Let's take a moment to peek at this "Marilyn" hypocrisy. What standard did Garcetti use to protect Florentine Gardens when Hollywood desperately needed a full two acres for a new Regional Fire Station on its site? A Marilyn impersonator may have visited the club once or twice. The real Marilyn is not significant, but an ersatz Marilyn is significant?

The behind-the-scenes scuttlebutt about Florentine Gardens is that Garcetti wanted the now-defunct CRA to build mixed-use condos at Florentine Gardens. So he nixed that site for the two-acre regional fire station. Instead, Garcetti moved the proposed two-acre regional Fire Station 82 to Gridlock Hell -- the tri-intersection of Hollywood Boulevard, Van Ness and the Hollywood Freeway. Then, Garcetti downsized it by 75 percent so that it could be squeezed onto a half-acre space. Ironically, this lot also had historical significance. (see Scotty Bowers' "Full Service")

Krekorian's and Garcetti's excuse that Marilyn was not in a highly productive phase of her career is so ludicrous that only an administration without shame would make such a claim. This extremely modest home was all the more historically vital as it captured what life was like at the end of World War II. It epitomized the American dream – the rise to fame from the most modest means.

Norma Jean's small, old home embodied the essence of the Hollywood dream -- "being discovered." Nothing can convey her rise to fame as much as seeing the home where she lived when she was first chosen for stardom.

Did Los Angeles really need another glitzy condo project at this exact location?

Apparently, Councilmember Krekorian thought so. We know how City Hall works. If Krekorian did not want the home demolished, it would be standing today and those condos would never be built.

Will Krekorian now impose the five-year moratorium for an unlawful demolition? Ha! Don't hold your breath. The Los Angeles City Councilmembers represent one constituency only – the mega developers who want to re-make Los Angeles into Manhattan.

Krekorian knew that the demolition was not legal. The AQMD had posted the property as needing asbestos abatement documentation, but in a race to beat the Cultural Heritage Commission hearing, what's a little thing like exposing all the neighbors and workers to asbestos? Who cares what the law says? And who's going to enforce a law that Krekorian and

Garcetti chose to flaunt?

The rampage of destruction of historical places in Los Angeles is a by-product of Garcetti's mania to bring super density to all portions of the City. After being stymied in Hollywood -- losing lawsuit after lawsuit after lawsuit -- developers and politicians are looking for less sophisticated neighborhoods. They've settled on Valley Village as one site to which they are determined to bring super-density.

Developers have been buying up land in Valley Village and are launching plans to do to Valley Village what they did to Hollywood -- cram it with more apartments and condos than it can handle, bring gridlock to the area and chase out the current residents. Garcetti was so effective with his cleansing of Hollywood, that he actually killed his own council district. Between 2001 and 2010, Garcetti's land use policies, which are now Krekorian's land use policies, drove so many people out of Council District 13 that its loss of population caused it to cease being a legal council district.

Now, Hollywood is on the skids again. The traffic congestion is unbearable and transient Millennials are now a significant part of the population.

The destruction of Marilyn's home at 5258 Hermitage tells us one thing -- Garcetti and Krekorian are not going to allow anything to stand in the way of bringing super-densification to Valley Village.

ACTION INFO: There is another hearing on Tuesday, September 1, 2015, at downtown City Hall before the PLUM committee. The right thing to do would be to put the project into mothballs for five (5) years due to unlawful demolition.

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-cw

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Friday, August 28, 2015

The City of Los Angeles

PLUM Committee

c/o Sharon Dickinson

Sharon.Dickinson@lacity.org

Re: Date: Tuesday, September 1, 2015
Item #: 7
File #: 15-0963
Address: 5258 Hermitage Avenue, Valley Village, 91607

Dear Honorable Members of the PLUM Committee:

Citizens Coalition - Los Angeles [CCLA] submits its comments on the above referenced matter.

Los Angeles has been following a disastrous path, and this project displays all the worse features of the on-going fiasco which has been playing out in Los Angeles since 1993. Former Director of Planning, Gail Goldberg, called out Garcetti and other councilmember in 2006 when she said that the practice of allowing developers to set zoning policy was leading to disaster. At that time Director Goldberg was looking at Council District 13 in Hollywood, and four years later in 2010, the US Census data confirmed her observation. CD 13 had driven out so many residents since 2000 by allowing developers to do whatever they desired, that CD 13 no longer qualified as a legal council district.

Councilmember Krekorian like Councilmember Garcetti before him ignores facts and ignores all the rules of sane city planning. Instead, Councilmember Krekorian is treading down the same path of disaster as Garcetti followed as councilmember and now as Mayor.

The folly is summed by the 1887 statement of Lord Acton. "Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely."

Other comments on this project have documented the illegal demolition of the original residence at 5258 Hermitage Avenue. In a city which followed the law rather than the desires of the rich and powerful, this vital portion of the City's and of the nation's history would still exist.

We should be working together on creating a historic pocket park, but a greedy developer and Councilmember Krekorian have deprived us of the opportunity to save this aspect of Americana. A person's home is intimately tied to their being that it gives great insight into their lives. This was particularly true for Marilyn at this stage of her life. After years of abuse, Norma Jean had escaped to this haven of safety. Her husband was away in the Navy, and as so many wives of WW II servicemen, she was living with her in-laws.

The very modest home captured life at the end of WW II and shortly thereafter -- before the huge influx into The Valley -- before prosperity enveloped the nation. Just as the nation was about to take off, Marilyn's career was about to take off. This home was such an intrinsic aspect of American life that it was a historical crime to destroy it. And, destroy it for what? A few more condos!

When Los Angeles City Councilmembers see as their highest calling the protection of developer scofflaws from the consequences of their actions, illegal demolitions will become common place.

CCLA's comment, however, will not dwell well documented violations of this developer, but rather will discuss the frame work within which the present administration has been bringing ruin to the

City. Every day, Director Goldberg is being proven correct. Allowing developers to run roughshod over everyone else is leading to citywide disaster.

Since 1890, Los Angeles' history has been one of rapid population influx followed by lulls only to be followed by a new significant immigration. Each time, the City responded, albeit slowly, with improving its planning for more people. There were some monumental errors. The first example of power doing something dumb was the King of Spain in 1781 directing that the pueblo's streets be laid out with "streets running from northwest to southeast and from northeast to southwest instead of due north and south and due east and west,"¹ which is why that to this day no one can figure out why downtown streets name North Spring or East 3rd Street do not run north-south or east-west. Actually, the downtown streets are not on the diagonal of 45 degrees, but only 36 degrees of true north-south. Yes, LA has a long history of making dumb plans and incompetently implementing them

Los Angeles had a minor fiasco in 1925 when greedy business interests ignored the mathematic of the 1915 Study of Traffic Conditions in the City of Los Angeles pointing that subways were unworkable and a financial disaster. They constructed the first Hollywood Subway which went bankrupt.

Perhaps the worst pre WW II disaster was allowing the Chamber of Commerce to kill the Olmsted - Bartholomew Plan for comprehensive system of parks in the City and County of Los Angeles. Although the Chamber of Commerce members had commissioned the Olmsted Bros' study, when it was finished, developers hated it. Land would be removed from their clutches and instead it would be devoted to parks and a decent quality of life. To this day, Los Angeles is the most park-poor major city in the United States. [Griffith Park does not count as it is overwhelmingly wilderness park and not a community park.]

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Los Angeles has had its moments of sanity and foresight. In 1908, the City began to control by adopting zoning that divided Los Angeles into residential and industrial areas. When industrialists used, Los Angeles fought all the way to the United States Supreme Court, where it won the right for all cities to control their design.

Then, in 1915 the City's civil engineers produce the landmark Study of Street Traffic Conditions in the City of Los Angeles. Reading this highly professional study shows us what transportation and land use studies should be like. Today, we get nonsense studies which only state what the developers want to do with zero analysis. To extent there are any facts, they are wrong. To the extent there is community in-put, it is structured and controlled by the politicos.

Ever since those early days, developers have been fighting against the idea of any zoning regulations or transportation planning based upon facts and science. When they could not stop the government from making laws and publishing studies, the developers shifted to buying the government that made the laws and conducted the studies.

The most destructive force had its inauguration day in 1993 when Dick Riordan became mayor. That signaled the mega-density era where Los Angeles abandoned all sane planning in order to cater to the whims of the real estate developers. They had made heavy investments along "transportation corridors" where they planned to construct highly dense apartment complexes. There is more profit to be made when one buys up a limited number of parcels and then has the politicos decree that all major projects be on these narrow parcels of land. No developer want to purchase 3 acres to construct single family homes when he can purchase ½ acre and construct a 25 story condo project. The goal is to maximize the square inch profit.

We call these parcels "Transit Oriented Districts" [TODs] rather than "Profit Oriented Scams" [POSS] which would reflect their true purpose.

The developers had suffered a serious set back in 1970 with the defeat of the Beverly Hills Freeway. As the City of Beverly Hills learned, the real purpose of the Beverly Hills Freeway was not to solve any transportation problem, but rather to justify the demolition of the single family neighborhoods from the Golden State Freeway to the San Diego Freeway. The proposed freeway was seen as vital to bringing increased density to Century City.

Wisely, the City of Beverly Hills discovered that it had the right to deny the use of any of its land for freeway exits or entrances and it had the right to demand that the freeway be cut and covered for the entire length of the City of Beverly Hills. There was no way to gain access to Century City without using Beverly Hills land and the cost of cutting a huge trench and then covering it was prohibitive.

Without the foresight of Beverly Hills, a huge swath of Los Angeles from the border with Beverly Hills to the 5 Freeway (where it crosses the 2 Freeway) would be filled with 4 to 5 story apartments and condos creating a traffic disaster of unimaginable proportions along its entire route. The increased number of apartments and condos would have resulted in at least 10 times many cars. It would have created a “traffic congestion wall” dividing much the Basin into South and North sections.

The City of Beverly Hills knows that excessive population density brings excessive traffic congestion. In 1915, Los Angeles knew this fact and its civil engineers had set forth the mathematics, topography and finances of transportation with particular attention to subways and light rail transit [LRT (subways that run above ground.)] To the extent that Beverly Hills has traffic problems, they stem from bad decisions made by the City of Los Angeles.

As mentioned above, the 1915 Traffic Study (page 38) showed that Los Angeles should not try to restrain the outward expansion of the business and commercial sections by creating Transit Oriented Districts [TODs], (although that termed had not been coined in 1915.)

The wealthy and powerful have always used new transportation systems to enrich themselves to the detriment of everyone else. As we saw, the real purpose behind the Beverly Hills Freeway was not to facilitate transportation but to justify the building mega-density complexes along its route, culminating at Century City. [History is replicating itself with the Subway to the Sea going beneath Beverly Hills High School and the center of Century City. Its purpose like the real purpose behind the widening of the 405 Freeway is to justify mega-density in Century City.]

Now, we see a Councilman Krekorian wants to bring disaster upon his constituents by destroying the nature of Valley Village in order to allow favored developers to greatly increase the population density of this small community which is pretty much in equilibrium.

Councilman Krekorian has many more such deals in the pipeline. Developers don't buy upon so much property unless they know there will be a favorable political climate. This Valley Village project, which destroyed a vital portion of Los Angeles' history, is actually a test case to see how far the councilman will go to sell out his constituents to kowtow to the demands of myopic, but greedy developers.

A councilmember who cared about his constituents would have sought a Interim Ordinance forbidding any demolitions (with the standard exceptions), while a longer range preservation plan was developed. As people who are familiar with the relationship between increased population density and quality of life know, any honest long range plan would certainly find any additional density to be an anathema to a good quality of life.

The most important question the PLUM Committee needs to ask is: what is best for the quality of life of the residents of Valley Village?

One thing is certain. The answer will not be to allow this project. To do so would be to tell all of the shady developers that it is open season on Valley Village.