

15-0963

Citizen Coalition Los Angeles

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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 politicians.

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 politicians 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.



Etta Armstrong <etta.armstrong@lacity.org>

Fwd: 5258 Hermitage Avenue, Valley Village, 91607

1 message

Sharon Dickinson <sharon.dickinson@lacity.org>
To: Etta Armstrong <etta.armstrong@lacity.org>

Fri, Aug 28, 2015 at 3:37 PM

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----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Richard Abrams** <abramsrl@gmail.com>
Date: Fri, Aug 28, 2015 at 3:15 PM
Subject: Re: 5258 Hermitage Avenue, Valley Village, 91607
To: Sharon Dickinson <Sharon.Dickinson@lacity.org>, RSM <AbramsRL@gmail.com>
Cc: Hollywoodians Encouraging Logical Planning <HwoodCA@gmail.com>

My apologies, the email "send itself" prematurely

Attached is CCAL's comment

On Fri, Aug 28, 2015 at 2:13 PM, Richard Abrams <abramsrl@gmail.com> wrote:

Dear Ms. Dickinson,
would you please add this comment from Citizens Coalition Los Angeles to council file # 15-0963.

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