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February 9, 2018

Los Angeles City Council
c/o Office of the City Clerk
City Hall, Room 395
Los Angeles, California 90012

Dear Honorable Members:

REPORT ON POTENTIAL AMENDMENTS TO PROPOSED PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING ORDINANCE; CF 17-1422

On January 17, 2018, the Homelessness and Poverty Committee instructed the Department of City Planning (DCP) to report back within thirty days with possible amendments to the proposed Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) Ordinance in order to include additional design guidelines related to building massing, building orientation and screening of mechanical equipment. This report provides some additional discussion regarding the intent of the design standards initially included in the proposed PSH Ordinance, as well as some suggested language for possible additional standards that the City Council may wish to incorporate in the ordinance.

Details of Design Standards in Proposed Ordinance

The proposed PSH Ordinance would create a ministerial approval process for qualifying PSH projects. In order to be approved under this process, a qualifying PSH project would be required to meet a set of performance standards, including several design standards. The intent of these design standards is to ensure high quality projects that are sensitive to the surrounding context. Because many PSH projects developed as a result of the proposed ordinance would not otherwise be subject to Site Plan Review, these standards were also included as a means to ensure high quality project design, while adhering to a ministerial standard of review.

In addition to these standards, a number of the additional incentives included in the draft ordinance promote context-sensitive project design. The height incentive provided in Subparagraph (e)(4) includes a transitional height requirement whenever a project site is adjacent to a lower density residential zone (R2 or more restrictive). Additionally, the yard/setback incentive in Subparagraph (e)(1) has been tailored to ensure that proposed PSH projects respect the prevailing front yard setback in residential neighborhoods. These requirements are intended to ensure that the available incentives do not lead to PSH projects that are out of scale with the surrounding neighborhood.

Additional Considerations

The design standards provided in the PSH Ordinance were intentionally crafted to ensure high quality design of PSH projects without delaying the construction of these much-needed housing units. As discussed in the staff recommendation report, PSH is a highly regulated type of housing that is reliant on public funding for construction and operation. These funding sources (including but not limited to the Los Angeles Housing and Community Investment Department, Low Income Housing Tax Credits and the Veterans Housing and Homelessness Prevention Program) already pose requirements on PSH projects related to project design, including in some cases an architectural review process. Partially due to the strict scrutiny that applies to PSH projects, the majority of PSH projects which have been completed in the City have provided high quality design. As such, the PSH Ordinance includes objective design standards that promote high-quality design. In addition, further neighborhood design standards can be implemented through the *re:codeLA* effort and Community Plan updates.

Suggested Amendments to Incorporate Additional Design Features

Design standards that are included as part of the ordinance must be objective in nature so as to adhere to the proposed ministerial approval process. Any design standards must be predictable, objective, fixed, quantifiable and clear.

The proposed PSH Ordinance that was approved by the City Planning Commission (CPC) included several ministerial design standards relating to façade transparency, building massing, building orientation, landscaping, lighting and screening of at-grade parking facilities. The City Council may incorporate additional design standards to ensure high quality building design. The following standards have been prepared by the Department for Council's consideration.

Building Massing

1. Amend the proposed massing standard in Subparagraph (g)(5) to specify that buildings more than 200 feet shall include a break in plane along any exterior street-facing wall. Suggested amended language would read:

Massing. Buildings more than ~~200~~ 300-feet in length along any exterior street-facing building façade shall include a design element that provides visual relief every 100 200-feet. The design element shall either setback from or step forward from the primary-face of the building by at least a depth of 12 inches and shall be a width of no less than 5% of the building face (ex: 5% of 100' 200' = 5' 10') and shall extend up the face of the building at least 50% of the façade height ~~the full height of the building's first story.~~

2. Amend the proposed façade transparency standard in Subparagraph (g)(4) to include an additional transparency requirement for upper floors of exterior street-facing walls in all zones. Suggested amended language would read:

Façade Transparency.

- i. For any building located in a Commercial Zone, a minimum of 25 percent of that portion of the exterior street-facing walls which are between 2 feet to 8 feet above the sidewalk grade, shall be comprised of transparent (untinted, unfrosted, non-

- reflective) windows or openings, exclusive of areas for walkways, driveways, paseos and plazas.*
- ii. *A minimum of 10 percent of the upper story portions of the exterior street-facing building façade as measured from the top of the finished ground floor to the top of the building façade shall be comprised of transparent (untinted, unfrosted, non-reflective) windows or openings.*
 - iii. *Glass Transparency. Glass is considered transparent where it has a transparency higher than 80 percent and external reflectance of less than 15 percent.*

Mechanical Equipment

3. Create a new standard to require screening of roof-top mechanical equipment. Suggested language would read:

Mechanical Equipment – Roof Mounted. *Roof mounted mechanical equipment shall be set back a minimum of 5 feet from the edge of the roof, and shall be fully screened from the ground level view from all abutting properties and abutting public rights-of-way except alleys. New buildings must provide a parapet wall or other architectural element that fully screens roof-mounted equipment from ground level view. Existing buildings with no or low parapet walls shall screen the equipment on all sides by an opaque screen. Sustainable energy systems (including solar panels, rainwater catchment devices and wind turbines) shall be exempt from roof-top screening requirements.*

4. Create a new standard to require screening of wall-mounted mechanical equipment. Suggested language would read:

Mechanical Equipment – Wall Mounted. *Wall mounted mechanical equipment that is visible from a public right-of-way must be fully screened by landscaping or an opaque screening material. Screening must be of a height equal to or greater than the height of the mechanical equipment being screened. Sustainable energy systems shall be exempt from wall-mounted screening requirements.*

Conclusion

The Department appreciates the additional opportunity for discussion of these issues. If you have any additional questions, please contact Matthew Glesne at (213) 978-2666 or matthew.glesne@lacity.org.

Sincerely,

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