

## Communication from Public

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**Council File No:** 19-0370  
**Comments for Public Posting:** Additional comments for May 21, 2019 Public Hearing from  
NANDC



Re: CF19-0370, 19-0370-S1

Agenda Items 11 and 12, May 21, 2019

Honorable Members of the City Council PLUM Committee

COUNCILMEMBER MARQUEECE HARRIS-DAWSON, CHAIR  
COUNCILMEMBER BOB BLUMENFIELD  
COUNCILMEMBER CURREN D. PRICE, JR.  
COUNCILMEMBER GILBERT A. CEDILLO  
COUNCILMEMBER GREIG SMITH

The Neighborhood Council system enables civic participation for all Angelenos and serves as a voice for improving government responsiveness to local communities and their needs. We are an advisory body to the City of Los Angeles, comprised of volunteer stakeholders who are devoted to the mission of improving our communities and bringing government to us.

The Empowerment Congress North Area Neighborhood Development Council (NANDC) considered the Draft Environmental Impact Report for The Fig Project and found that the proposed demolitions cannot be supported in the context of the goals of the Community Plan and the CRA Hoover Project Area goals. NANDC strongly objects to the demolition of eight multi-family residence within the Flower Drive Historic District and, by Board motion at its meeting of November 2, 2017, urged the developer to consider an alternative that incorporates these buildings into his project design.

On November 1, 2018 the Empowerment Congress North Area Neighborhood Development Council affirmed its position and again reviewed the proposed project known as THE FIG and the FEIR issued for the project. The Board voted to maintain NANDC's opposition and efforts to retain the existing historic rent stabilized housing and support an alternative that retains the existing housing.

We believe the City of Los Angeles has erred in the entire process of developing the Final EIR. We urge the Council not to certify the EIR in the face of the factual data in the record, information that has been largely ignored. We urge the City Council to remedy the injustice and displacement of families and the failure to include in the FEIR an alternative for your consideration that would both save the rent stabilized housing, preserve a significant historic

resource and allow for the new development and the accompanying benefits. Return and recirculate the FEIR to include an adequate range of alternatives that:

- Includes the “towers” alternative that the preservation community embraced at two meetings with the developer and the Page & Turnbull architectural team <sup>1</sup>
- Includes an economics analysis of the feasibility of Alternative 3, which is a partial preservation alternative yet is dismissed without credible analysis of the reason for rejection
- Recognizes the environmental effect of the sign district and includes analysis of the impacts of the newly created sign district; this raise the question of how the push to develop a sign district may have prejudiced the City and drove the planning efforts to flatten the original towers proposal to four buildings
- Provides an answer in the EIR that factually demonstrates why an underground parking scenario is infeasible
- Consider impacts to the northerly section of the Flower Drive Historic District. The FEIR contains within it a view that somehow Districts are inconsequential and malleable to the aims of a developer
- Consider recent ownership changes that increase the potential for a design that can incorporate the Historic District

While the FEIR recognizes that the demolition of 8 out of the 19 RSO apartment buildings in the Flower Drive Historic District is a significant impact, it incorrectly claims this impact is unavoidable. Demolition of these resources is unnecessary as there are feasible alternatives proposed that could allow for development of needed housing and commercial uses that would incorporate these existing residential units into the Project. That is why the alternatives discussion in the FEIR is so critical. Yet in this document before you today, the towers alternative is invisible. The deck is stacked against a win/win solution. And we ask, why?

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<sup>1</sup> The rationale for not including the tower alternative provided by the representative of the development team at the November 5 public hearing was that those preservation representatives in attendance were not able to arrive at a consensus. This is another intellectually fraudulent comment: the consensus was to preserve the Flower Drive and that a “towers” version would be supported. The record proves otherwise.

As stated in Jim Childs November 27, 2017 ADHOC letter to Planning: “At the conclusion of the second meeting I understood that there was a consensus for a proposed new Project Alternative concept, which would retain the elements of the FLOWER DRIVE HISTORIC DISTRICT, the proposed 21-story Hotel, and add a second tower for the residential components.”

A curious justification for the seven stories is contained in the FEIR: that public input and the planning department decided that seven stories is more compatible than the original 21 one story tower concept of the developer. This is neither explained nor are any facts provided.

Not a single community member in in hours of testimony at two public hearings has said “seven stories is more compatible.” Just where did this “public input” come from and why is it not anywhere in the record? And just what does compatibility mean? The dictionary defines it as:

**“com·pat·i·bil·i·ty”**

**[kəmˌpədəˈbɪlədi]**

**NOUN**

**a state in which two things are able to exist or occur together without problems or conflict.”**

The FIG project is NOT compatible. There is an inherent conflict in the FIG development and the retention of the Flower Drive Historic District unless it is redesigned to respect the District.

The City made a fundamental error in judgement early in the process when it directed the developer to “pancake” his project from the original 21 story tower concept to a limit of 7 stories which then necessitated the destruction of the Flower Drive Historic District. We question how a justification for “compatibility” can ignore the genocide of an entire neighborhood. The belief that this 7 story version would be more “compatible” with the surroundings is an arbitrary decision that had no transparency and is completely unexplained in the FEIR. The original plan for the site was a 21 story tower and a “two towers” alternative needs to be considered in the EIR.

### **Overriding Considerations**

There is no justification for a statement of overriding considerations when an alternative exists that preserves Flower Drive and diminishes impacts. The City cannot approve a project that has severe environmental impacts (which the FEIR acknowledges) when there is a feasible alternative.

“One of the alternatives arrived at which received support by the preservation community at the meeting: “The full preservation alternative is with 2 towers and underground parking, 1 residential bldg. 7 stories. Requires removal of the Flower Dr. Garages. Parking at rear rather than front (a la Biltmore)”; Project requires zone change from C21L to 2D for a height increase; they stated that the "hotel has to be on a corner." <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Mitzi March Mogul, notes from meeting with Page & Turnbull and the developers, 11/21/2016

## **The Tract Map VTT-74193-2A**

Tract Map approvals require that certain findings be made and in this instance those findings cannot be reasonably made. The record shows that the tract map is not in conformance with the Southeast Community Plan nor the Exposition/University Park Redevelopment Project Area, which remains a governing “specific plan” type land use overlay. The Project conflicts with multiple goals and elements of the redevelopment plan as the FEIR admits. The redevelopment plan also requires the preservation of historic resources with “special consideration.”

The newly adopted Southeast Community Plan designates Flower Drive as RD1.5, a designation that was arrived at after numerous public hearings NANDC has spent many hours engaging in dialogue with planning in the creation of the current southeast and south community plans which makes the tract map proposal even more troubling. Given that this project also does not conform to either the former or newly adopted Southeast Community Plan (was R-4 and is RD1.5 zoning on Flower), nor the Redevelopment Plan, the DAA should not have granted the tract map request in its present form and not adopted the FEIR. The currently approved Tract map would annihilate Flower Drive from our neighborhood history.

In our November 27, 2017 letter to the DEIR, NANDC stated: *The Empowerment Congress North Area Neighborhood Development Council (NANDC) considered the Draft Environmental Impact Report for The Fig Project and found that the proposed demolitions cannot be supported in the context of the goals of the Community Plan and the CRA Hoover Project Area goals. NANDC strongly objects to the demolition of eight multi-family residence within the Flower Drive Historic District and, by Board motion at its meeting of November 2, 2017, urges the developer to consider an alternative that incorporates these buildings into his project design.*

In closing, we urge that PLUM support the appeals and recommend revision of the FEIR to include an alternative that retains the historic housing while allowing for the development.

Respectfully,

Jean Frost  
Chair, NANDC Policy Committee  
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