



April 29, 2013

Honorable Ed Reyes, Honorable Jose Huizar and Honorable Mitch Englander
and Members of the Planning and Land Use Committee
City of Los Angeles
200 North Spring Street
Los Angeles, California 90012-2601

RE: Council File 13-0046 – Proposed Department of City Planning and Development

Dear Councilmembers Ed Reyes, Jose Huizar and Mitch Englander:

The Los Angeles Chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA|LA) supports the proposal to create the Department of City Planning and Development by restructuring the departments of City Planning, Building and Safety, Transportation and BOE's Land Development Group. AIA|LA applauds the efforts of the departments of City Planning and Building and Safety to set the framework for a better designed and more functional City of Los Angeles. In addition, we look forward to active participation with the restructuring team and regular opportunities to share our thoughts on what fundamental principles such a re-organized department must value in order to achieve the City's stated goals.

As an organization that represents over 3200 design professionals, the AIA|LA advocates for a robust city department that promotes excellence in architecture, planning, place-making, and social and functional equity. We also value an organizational model that facilitates better customer service with a more streamlined process that optimizes the City's staffing resources and ensures better outcomes for development and the community.

We are supportive of a departmental structure that reinforces a citywide long-range planning vision, which better coordinates the elements of development, land-use and circulation, and which collects the planning functions currently distributed amongst various departments, so as to create a more cohesive and functional vision for the City. We believe this first and foremost for the long-term welfare for the City-at-large. In addition, we are supportive of a more efficient planning, development and permitting process. We believe the proper implementation of such a restructuring will be key and we look forward to remaining actively involved in the discussion.

By setting the proper hierarchy of our citywide priorities, we can ensure a successful Department of City Planning and Development:

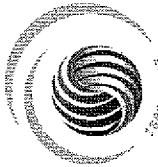
1. A long-range vision for our city that supports the merits of design excellence and re-asserts authentic place-making as the top priority.
2. Better outcomes for both individual projects and communities-at-large, where we are making places of consequence that are economically, socially, environmentally vibrant.
3. A simplified, predictable and transparent entitlement process.
4. A system that fully implements electronic plan check, integrates a computerized plan check tracking system, and has a Project Manager on each plan check to ensure a level of consistency that removes conflicting code interpretations late in the process.
5. Better standards to ensure quicker turnaround time and improved coordination with procedures to track performance measures.
6. A smart, customer-relations based culture within the department that facilitates greater cooperation between the players.

We look forward to remaining actively involved as the details of this restructuring are further developed.

Very truly yours,

Nicci Solomons

Nicci Solomons, Hon. AIACC
Executive Director



LOS ANGELES AREA
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
125th anniversary

April 29, 2013

Honorable Ed Reyes
Chair, Planning & Land Use Committee
200 North Spring Street, Room 410
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Re: Proposed Departmental Realignment (Council File 13-0046)

Dear Chairman Reyes:

Business organizations working in the City of Los Angeles have long supported Development Reform efforts. We thank you for your commitment to taking a step in the right direction to increase efficiency, accountability, and certainty in the City's development process through the proposal of a new Department of City Planning and Development. We agree that there are substantial hurdles associated with communications between the various City departments normally involved in the development process. We understand that the proposed Realignment of City Departments aims to address these obstacles by realigning key functions between City departments to ensure a smoother, more transparent process for the business community.

The Chamber is in support of the concept of this new Department and we applaud you for your effort thus far. We seek to work with you implement key recommendations and priorities into the new Department to ensure its success. At the same time, we are asking for specific commitments on a few key issues.

As with any reorganization of this scope, the devil is in the details. We appreciate our working relationship with the City, in particular the Departments of Planning and Building & Safety, and applaud the City's verbalized commitment to form a Blue Ribbon Commission consisting of key stakeholders to guide the implementation of this Realignment if approved by Council. This group should meet regularly and include those who have a vested interest in making this realignment a success. We hope the next report on this issue will include next steps on the formation and composition of a Commission. While the conversation has focused on management and organizational changes, that only gets us part of the way towards comprehensive solutions.

Therefore, following a presentation by Mr. Michael LoGrande and Mr. Bud Ovrom at the Chamber on April 24, our members have adopted the following recommendations for the Departments of Planning and Building & Safety to incorporate into their next reports and actions for the Realignment proposal:

1. Prioritize Case Processing

- Prioritize staffing to focus on case processing to move projects out of the pipeline. Positions should include as responsibilities the requirement to explain to project applicants the totality of steps and paperwork involved in approval.

- Establish time frames for case processing - from application submittal to decision - and hold responsible parties accountable when those goals are not met.
- Establish an Enterprise Fund for fees and revenues received from individual cases and ensure that such fees and revenues are utilized only for case processing and not other General Fund expenses (development-related or other).

2. Provide proposed organizational chart

Given the different cultures between departments, we would like to understand who will lead various functions and how the Realignment will address cultural differences and change responsibilities to address the improvements suggested in the plan.

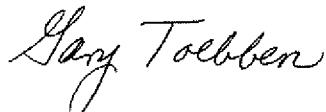
- 3. Identify key process changes along with expected performance improvements supported by metrics and timelines.** Examples of key process changes to aid businesses include:
- Updating and Integrating Applications and Forms (integration of applications along with instructions and policies) – should be completed within 6 months.
 - Eliminating requirement for all projects seeking discretionary approval through the Department of City Planning to no longer be required to have additional Zoning Review through the Building & Safety Department.
 - Eliminating the use of “to the satisfaction of” utilized by commenting departments such as Bureau of Engineering/Public Works.
 - Identification of which fees and processes can be reduced (elimination of duplicative reviews, reduced delays in reviewing conditions, case processing, plan check, inspections, PTOS, etc., should result in fee and time reductions.)
 - Develop and include in reports use of key metrics to track progress and efficiency gained for project applicants through functional realignment of departments. Included in such metrics should be average case processing time at various approval stages to identify areas of potential improvement or efficiency gains.
 - Plan for including LADWP into the Realignment Plan as they are a critical part of the project approval and construction process.
- 4. Allow Use of Third Party Consultants** (plan checkers, EIR consultants, reviews, inspections) and/or expedite hiring process for period of 1 year while staff implements the Realignment process. As the economy continues to improve, we would like assurances that management’s attention to Realignment does not adversely impact the efficient processing of pending entitlement and permit applications.

5. **Maintain Commitment to Long Term Planning Efforts:** While Realignment occurs, we must have assurances that the investment and staff related to long term planning efforts does not suffer. Completion of the Comprehensive Zoning Code Update should not be delayed beyond the 5 year timeline established by Council, and emphasis on completing all the Community Plans should remain a priority, with an emphasis on those Plans that cover areas with the highest level of development activity

We appreciate our strong working relationship with the City Council, the Mayor's office, and the key departments involved in the proposed Realignment; we look forward to continuing this partnership in order to achieve our common goals and boost Los Angeles' economic growth.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Tina Hossain at 213.580.7531 or thossain@lachamber.com.

Sincerely,



Gary Toebben
President & CEO

CC:

Hon. Jose Huizar
Hon. Mitchell Englander
Mr. Michael LoGrande
Mr. Bud Ovrom
Mr. Chris Pearson

