



United Neighborhoods for Los Angeles

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May 18, 2020

Mayor Eric Garcetti
Councilmember Mitch O'Farrell
Director of Planning Vince Bertoni
Los Angeles City Hall
200 N. Spring St.
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Re: Hollywood Center EIR, Case No. ENV-2018-2116-EIR
REFUSAL TO EXTEND DEIR COMMENT PERIOD

Mayor Garcetti, Councilmember O'Farrell and Director Bertoni,

I am writing to you on behalf of United Neighborhoods for Los Angeles (UN4LA), to express our amazement over the fact that the Department of City Planning has refused to grant an extension of the review period for the Hollywood Center Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR). The project is a massive one, consisting of residential and commercial uses and encompassing over 1.2 million square feet. It includes two 11-story buildings and two skyscrapers, one rising 35 stories and another rising 46 stories. It will have numerous significant impacts on the Hollywood area. The body of

the DEIR runs over a thousand pages, and the appendices include thousands of pages more.

The City has claimed over and over again that it makes every effort to encourage public engagement in an open and transparent planning process. Unfortunately, the City's actions in this case make it absolutely clear how empty those claims really are. First, the City of LA chose to release the DEIR in the middle of a deadly global pandemic that has closed schools, offices, shops and restaurants across LA. Second, instead of setting a comment period that runs the full 60 days allowed by the CEQA Guidelines, the City chose to allow only a 45-day comment period. Third, after receiving requests from numerous groups and individuals asking the City to extend the comment period due to the disruptions caused by the pandemic, the City released a letter rejecting an extension.

You say that the City of LA does everything within reason to engage stakeholders, but let's look at the facts....

On April 16, the day the DEIR was released, LA County reported 782 new infections and 60 new deaths, bringing the totals to 15,683 and 607 respectively. On that day the news was dominated by stories about the pandemic. As a result of the Safer at Home order issued by the Mayor just weeks before, thousands of businesses across the City were closed and tens of thousands of people lost their jobs. Fear and anxiety were growing throughout LA as residents realized that the health impacts of the coronavirus were going to be compounded by painful economic impacts.

And this was the moment that the City chose to release the Draft Environmental Impact Report for one of the most complex and controversial projects ever proposed for Hollywood. If this was not a deliberate attempt to avoid scrutiny, it still raises questions about the judgement of City officials. Thousands of Hollywood residents were scrambling to deal with the disruptions caused by the coronavirus. How can the Department of City Planning credibly claim it's seeking stakeholder input when it dumps a massive environmental assessment on the public at a time like this? Do you seriously believe that in the middle of an unprecedented health and economic crisis Angelenos are going to put everything else on the back burner so they can wade through a mountain of verbose analysis and dense technical reports?

In its response to pleas for an extension of the review period, the DCP argues that the EIR is readily available on-line and that interested parties can obtain a copy on CD-ROM or flash drive. Apparently City Planning doesn't realize that many Hollywood residents have other matters that they need to focus on right now. Unemployed workers have no money for food or bills. Business owners are trying to figure out how to keep from going under. Parents are struggling to be both teachers and entertainers for their school-age children. Adults with aging parents are trying to ensure the well-being of their mothers and fathers. And Neighborhood Councils, the most important community forum for development issues, are just now beginning to meet again, having been shut down for the month of April by the pandemic. But the DCP apparently believes that none of this should deter anyone from submitting comments on the Hollywood Center Project by the current deadline.

Let's also look at the City's claims of transparency. The Mayor and the City Council have told us repeatedly that they base their planning decisions on the merits of the project. It would be reassuring to be able to take this claim at face value. Employees of Millennium Partners have given many thousands in campaign contributions to elected officials over the years, including to you, Mayor Garcetti, and to you, Councilmember O'Farrell. The developer has also spent large sums of money on lobbying LA City officials. So it would be great if we could truly believe that all this money has had absolutely no impact on the decision-making process.

Unfortunately, the recent headlines regarding the on-going Federal corruption investigation make it clear that the planning process in LA is anything but transparent. First we have a guilty plea from a former Councilmember who served on the Planning & Land Use Management Committee, in a case that involved a trip to Vegas, an envelope containing \$10,000 in cash, escort services, \$34,000 in bottle service at a nightclub and \$1,000 in gambling chips. Then another guilty plea from a real estate appraiser and former member of the City Planning Commission who admitted to acting as a middleman in an arrangement to pay a \$500,000 bribe to a Councilmember. And just last week the Department of Justice posted a press release announcing that, 'A real estate development consultant has agreed to plead guilty to a federal racketeering offense for participating in a wide-ranging "pay-to-play" scheme in which developers bribed public officials – including a member of the Los Angeles City Council – to secure official acts that would benefit their projects.'

And you claim the planning process is transparent? Please forgive us if we say we don't buy it.

We will not ask you to extend the comment period for the Hollywood Center DEIR, because you have already shown that you are deaf to such requests. We will only remind you that as officials of the City of Los Angeles, your job is to serve the people of Los Angeles. Not wealthy real estate investors. Not well-connected Downtown lobbying firms.

The people of Los Angeles.

Sincerely,
Casey Maddren, President
United Neighborhoods for Los Angeles

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