



Santa Monica Coalition for a Livable City

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December 16, 2014

Dear City Council Members:

RE: Resident Involvement in Selection of New City Manager

**INTRODUCTION**

The hiring of a new city manager is one of the most important decisions our community will make. Beyond sound fiscal management, our already built-out city needs a city manager who recognizes that his/her success depends on a genuine partnership with Santa Monica residents, who will want to be meaningfully involved (and heard) in the future land-use decisions that will impact our limited infrastructure. A well-run city also depends upon the “hands on” involvement of a city manager; walking the halls, engaging staff, and frequently reviewing every city department to make each more efficient, more responsive to residents’ needs, and more transparent.

Our city is at a historic "overload" from over-development. It is now also under assault from the cumulative impact of other powerful surrounding communities, including Playa Vista and West Los Angeles. Santa Monica voters sent a powerful message with both the Hines referendum and our recent election, that over-development is viewed as our number one problem. The advent of the Expo line only exacerbates the development pressures our community is facing to the detriment of preserving affordable neighborhoods and diverse neighbors.

Given this, our next city manager must have proven experience in planning for the long term, not merely the short term. The next manager must recognize that as a steward for the city, his/her role is not solely to unlock the maximum value of economic development, as has occurred in Santa Monica over the past twenty years, but to give equal importance to the long-term consequences and negative, unmitigable impacts of more and more new development. Here is our suggested criteria and process to hire a new city manager:

**1) Resident Input in Recruiting and Evaluating City Manager Candidates**

**Our new city manager must understand that staff and developers' views of development are not entitled to greater weight than that of the**

**residents who know their city's problems intimately.** Our next city manager must have a proven record of good relations with his/her community, not just the ability to monetize every development opportunity that comes along regardless of the lack of sustainability, lack of resident support and adverse environmental impacts, including soul-crushing traffic and lack of mobility. For many of us, the city's interpretation of LUCE has overemphasized development as demolition and new construction, rather than the adaptive reuse and upgrading of existing buildings -- the sustainable approach.

The 2009 city manager recruitment application read like more like a marketing brochure than a realistic job description: "Whether you live, work or visit in Santa Monica, you can expect vibrancy and excitement." Missing was any real mention of LUCE objectives, development pressures, and citizen involvement. The application describes the relationship of our city manager to residents as one merely of "facilitating" input from residents, which falls far short of valuing such input and acting on it.

To rectify this, there first needs to be **a well-publicized City Council hearing for residents to weigh in on the city manager recruitment profile and qualifications criteria prior to those criteria being circulated by the recruiting firm.** In addition, as occurred in the past, the recruitment firm should contact a representative of the various community groups about the qualifications before finalizing the recruitment profile.

**There also should be diverse resident participation in the selection committee evaluating the final three candidates,** subject to the signing of confidentiality agreements. We understand that this procedure worked well for the hiring of an SMMUSD School Superintendent. It's vital that anyone seriously being considered hear a resident's perspective on what the ongoing problems are with City Hall and how they can be solved through good management. The various city groups could nominate a few representative residents to serve.

There is no impediment to the city council choosing a panel of residents to interview the finalists, especially when subject to confidentiality agreements. Even a brief Google search confirms that many cities larger and smaller than Santa Monica in California and throughout the country currently hold open interviews without confidentiality agreements or select a panel of residents as we are suggesting ("The four [El Paso] city manager finalists today will be interviewed by the mayor and City Council, a panel of city employees and members of a citizen advisory group." Elpasotimes.com, 5/8/14) See also, "Oxnard residents pack the room to meet finalists for city manager,"

vcstar.com, 4/2/14. Our neighbor city, Redondo Beach, also follows this practice as does Tucson and other cities.

Our city already includes non-city employees in evaluating top city positions. Earlier this year Debbie Lee – then a non-city employee – was on the panel who interviewed candidates for a top position in our city manager’s office.

What SMCLC is urging is more modest than what other cities do: not open meetings, but a panel that would be subject to confidentiality to protect those finalists who are not hired. Surely Santa Monica’s involvement of residents in this key decision for the most powerful position in the city should not be less inclusive and less transparent than these other cities.

## **2) Review of Other Comparable Cities’ Salary and Benefits Packages in Setting Our City Manager’s Salary & Benefits Package**

We are concerned that the current city manager’s compensation package may be excessive and should be brought into line with other similarly situated cities. Not only does excessive compensation put a burden on the city to raise revenue to pay the salary and benefits, but it also impacts the city manager’s credibility in negotiating other city employees’ compensation demands.

## **3) Set a Fixed Term for the City Manager, Renewable Only after Full Public Discussion and Annual Performance Reviews**

Presently, our city does not have **ANY** written performance guidelines for reviewing the city manager (as we learned in response to a public records request last year by the Transparency Project). As the CFO overseeing a \$540 million dollar budget, we think performance criteria are critical to clarify and achieve the expected goals. It can readily be crafted from the recruitment profile and publicized before annual performance reviews. The public should have the opportunity to comment on the city manager’s performance in tandem with the annual closed session Council evaluation procedure our city currently follows.

## **4) The Job Description Should Include Examination and Control of Excessive City Staff Positions & Salaries**

The City Manager needs to realistically look at the number of city staff and their salaries, particularly of upper management and consider making adjustments. Our research shows that for a city our size, the number of city staff and their salaries seems excessive in comparison to similarly situated cities (e.g., Santa Barbara). As a consequence, our city is driven to increase development in order to meet the obligations of paying salaries, pensions and

other benefits.

**CONCLUSION:**

Any consideration of a new city manager should include a discussion of each of these issues. Residents are entitled to know exactly where a new city manager stands on these issues and whether he/she will be accountable to the residents of this City.

We are excited about a new era of living in a truly sustainable Santa Monica, one in which residents' voices are heard and respected. We will work productively with you in the selection process for a new city manager who will exemplify these qualities and work effectively with you and our community.

Sincerely,

Victor, Diana, Sherrill, Jeff

Cc: Neighborhood and Resident Groups