

April 12, 2012

Mr. Rod Gould, City Manager
Mr. David Martin, Planning Director
City of Santa Monica
1685 Main Street
Santa Monica, CA 90401

Dear Sirs:

We write this letter to object strongly to the proposed May schedule of development hearings for three huge projects before the Planning Commission as well as the "float up" of the Fairmount/Miramar hotel renovation at City Council on April 24.

This accelerated schedule must be changed to allow residents, Planning Commissioners and the City Council reasonable time to read, consider, discuss and give thoughtful feedback on these four massive projects that would forever change the look and feel of our City, if approved. (See attached schedule)

The schedule as proposed has the Planning Commission meeting every week in May on two Development Agreements (Hines and Village Trailer Park) as well as the vital master plan for the entire area known as the Bergamot Area Plan project.

It is unreasonable and unacceptable for the Planning Commission and residents to be expected to read complex materials, attend multiple hearings and make appropriate decisions on these projects, including the Area Plan itself within 30 or so days. Each of these projects, individually and cumulatively will have major, irreversible environmental impacts due to their size and mass and their location in an already gridlocked part of Santa Monica.

The Planning Commission's regular schedule of twice-monthly meetings over the years has worked well. It has enabled the Commission and the public the time needed to review complex materials in order to make reasonable and considered recommendations to City Council. And, when more than one session is needed for a large project before it, the Commission has conducted a second session as we saw recently when the Miramar hotel project came before the Planning Commission.

Likewise, these three massive projects will likely require more than one session before the Planning Commission given the extensive public participation and the desire of our conscientious Planning Commissioners to give sufficient time for meaningful review. Together these projects propose over 1.2 million square feet of new development. If you consider the other projects also being proposed within the Area Plan that figure easily doubles. And on top of that we have the Miramar project

– proposed to be the size of Santa Monica Place coming before the City Council at the same time.

At the heart of the matter before the Planning Commission is the unfinished, critical work of devising the Area Plan for this entire area. As a matter of good planning, that Plan must precede any of the specific projects being proposed there. Instead, here it is inexplicably “shoehorned” in between the Village Trailer Park (VTP) and Hines Development Agreement hearings. This fragmented schedule would frustrate robust, sustained public discourse and the critical review that occurred for the LUCE. The Area Plan is an essential part of the LUCE that was deferred in order to obtain a HUD Community Grant. The City has received the Grant for the Area Plan that has a 36-month timetable (until early 2014) due to the job involved. The Grant does not permit piecemeal planning or the rash schedule proposed here.

We strongly object both to the unseemly pace of these multiple hearings as well as the premature order in which they are proposed. Without this critical master plan, developers are controlling the mix of uses, placement of uses, alleged community benefits and the design of buildings with no standards other than the maximum limits in the LUCE. This is something the City Planning Department has already admitted is the case; unfortunately the cure – an Area Plan – is not yet completed. (See attached memo of 11/9/10, from Planning Director Eileen Fogarty to Planning Commissioners Jim Ries, Gwynne Pugh, Gerda Newbold: Architectural Review Board Members Michael Folonis, Lynn Robb; John Kaliski, AIA).

Significantly, developers of both the Village Trailer Park and the Hines sites are now proposing projects that are not the ones that were proposed at their “float up” hearings. Yet in both cases, these developers are still proposing projects with the same mass, size and unacceptable traffic impacts. Regrettably, neither developer has reduced its current project’s size in response to residents’ reasoned opposition at the float up. Nor have they conducted new community outreach before coming back to the Planning Commission, as should be the case. It is therefore vital that residents have reasonable access to a meaningful public process that raises these fundamental deficiencies in planning to achieve better projects with fewer environmental impacts than those currently being proposed.

There is no sound planning reason as to why the Hines project or the Village TrailerPark project should move forward until both the Planning Commission and residents in Santa Monica and throughout the Westside have a chance to look at these projects in the context of the Area Plan for both the Bergamot Transit Village and Mixed Use Creative Districts. Together these Districts comprise 120 acres of the Area Plan of 140 acres. There is also no sound reason to consider these projects individually instead of as a cumulative project with regional impacts.

For these reasons, we ask you to work with the Planning Commissioners to revise its schedule so that the Area Plan is discussed and completed prior to moving forward with any projects within its boundaries. In addition, projects proposed

within the Area Plan must be considered as a whole, not individually. We expect a process that prioritizes the Area Plan and affords the City Council, Planning Commissioners, residents and the City of LA the time to thoughtfully consider the options that will shape Santa Monica for the future. We would appreciate a prompt reply to our request.

Sincerely,

Friends of Sunset Park Board,
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Cc: City Council
Planning Commission
Marsha Moutrie, City Attorney
Santa Monica Coalition for a Livable City

Attachments