



ERIC GARCETTI
MAYOR

September 5, 2016

Mr. Michael Weinstein
AIDS Healthcare Foundation
6255 Sunset Boulevard
Los Angeles, CA 90028

Dear Michael:

Thank you for helping to arrange my meeting with the neighborhood stakeholders interested in the issues raised by the Neighborhood Integrity Initiative. I think our discussion made clear that you and I – as well as these neighborhood stakeholders -- have the same goal: to create a fair and transparent planning process which will lead to a more livable city. I think the City Council shares that goal.

Together, the City Council and I have begun work towards improving our planning system, but there is more to do. Let me address the specific issues which you requested that I address, as set forth in the letter to me from the neighborhood stakeholders.

Environmental Review Process

You write, "Developers and their special interest lobbyists must no longer be permitted to choose the consultants who literally write their Environmental Impact Reports for their own developments." I agree.

I have directed the Department of City Planning to prepare options for expanding the City's oversight of the preparation of Environmental Impact Reports, including the option of requiring that the City select the environmental consultant instead of the developer. These options will require additional staff resources and oversight, but more importantly will ensure independent and impartial environmental analysis. I support expanding the role of the lead agency to include the selection of all environmental consultants involved in project review, and will direct the Department of City Planning and other lead agencies to implement this reform.

Los Angeles General Plan

You write, "There must be a clear and transparent process, including fast-tracked deadlines, for crafting the new Los Angeles General Plan...." Again, I agree.

My Fiscal Year 2016/2017 budget includes funding for the update of the various elements of the City's General Plan, including a new comprehensive update program for the City's Community Plans. The Department of City Planning already has begun background analysis on the General Plan and will be convening citywide open houses to solicit input and develop a new city masterplan for review by 2020. I have instructed the Department of City Planning to ensure that this newly updated General Plan is regularly reviewed at least every five years thereafter.

Furthermore, the City Council and I have funded an ambitious and long-term Community Plan update program that will update each of the 35 Community Plans over the next ten years. But I believe that we can and should update our Community Plans even more quickly. I have directed the Department of City Planning to prepare options for accelerating this process to completion within a 7 year period, which is the fastest feasible cycle to produce quality plans that our neighborhoods deserve. The community meetings, workshops, and open houses that are part of the process to develop neighborhood based masterplans do not happen quickly, but are necessary to ensure these plans reflect the aspirations and unique character of each of Los Angeles' vibrant neighborhoods. Following this initial cycle of updating, it is equally critical that our community plans remain current. Accordingly, I have instructed the Department of City Planning to update each community plan at least every five years thereafter.

Exceptions to the General Plan

You write, "Spot zoning exceptions to the General Plan ... must become the rare exceptions to the rule...." I agree.

We need to make our General Plan Amendment processes tighter and more transparent, while, as you agree, not closing the door on the ability of our communities to respond to unforeseen situations and new challenges. I am directing our Department of City Planning to develop procedures by which proposed General Plan Amendments for any Community Plan Area must be considered together. Reviewing proposed changes together for a given area would allow for careful analysis of the potential effects on a larger scale.

Ex Parte Communications

Finally, you write, "Ex parte communications ... must be eliminated." Again, I agree.

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Important land use decisions and recommendations are made by the Citywide Planning Commission and the Area Planning Commissions. These citizen appointees represent the diverse communities of the City and allow for the impartial and public review of land use proposals. Although the law may permit private conversations with commissioners, I recognize the importance of making sure all planning commission discussions are public discussions. To that end I will issue an Executive Directive prohibiting ex parte communications with planning commissioners, and ensure that all dialogue with private stakeholders is on the record.

The City Attorney's Office has advised that the City cannot legally prohibit elected officials from communicating with the City's residents. Still, I have directed my Legal Counsel to draft a policy for my Office ensuring that my staff and I disclose ex parte meetings on development projects.

Conclusion

I believe that these changes to our planning processes will accomplish our shared goal of a fairer and more transparent process. I hope you will agree that with the enactment of these changes, you will forego a costly and potentially divisive ballot measure campaign, and that we can work together moving forward on other ways to make our great City more livable.

As you know, the proponents of the Neighborhood Integrity Initiative can withdraw the measure any time up until the Clerk has finished the signature verification process. We, therefore, have a short window in which to conclude that these proposals address your concerns.

I would appreciate your response as soon as possible, and, as you know, have offered to set up another meeting to discuss these issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'E. Garcetti', with a horizontal line extending to the right and a small flourish at the end.

ERIC GARCETTI
Mayor