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HARBOR GATEWAY NORTH NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL

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August 14, 2020

Councilmember Joe Buscaino
Council member Marqueece Harris-Dawson
City Hall
200 N. Spring Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Re: Need for interim control measures for duplexes in the R2 zones

Dear Councilmembers Buscaino and Harris-Dawson,

On August 11, 2020, our Board voted -- to request that you immediately place interim control measures on the R2 zones throughout the South Los Angeles and Southeast Los Angeles Community Plan areas. This will give you and the Department of City Planning time to create additional comprehensive ordinances to protect our low intensity residential neighborhoods which are currently being taken over and destabilized by large, over-sized duplexes owned by LLCs and corporations, which are completely changing the character of these neighborhoods where the older homes were designed and built in the 1920's and 1930's. Allowing the building of these "mansionized" duplexes is resulting in a transfer of wealth and property-owning potential from these neighborhoods of color to wealthy corporations. None of these new duplexes are family-owned.

During the updating process for the South LA and Southeast LA Community Plans, we requested that the R2 zones located particularly within our internal Districts 7 and 8 be placed under CPIO (Community Plan Implementation Overlay) protections. However this was not done. We were told that the City needed more housing, even though on many of those lots older one-story duplexes which blended in with the existing single-family homes already existed and had affordable rents.

In the staff report dated June 22, 2017, to the City Planning Commission on the two Community Plans, it was noted on pages A9 and A10 in regards to "Protection of Residential Neighborhoods" that "Stable low density neighborhoods are among the communities' strongest assets. Comments regarding the protection of residential neighborhoods primarily focused on maintaining the existing scale and neighborhood character and preventing further densification. Additional comments focused on preventing spillover impacts from commercial corridor uses or new large-scale development projects. Interest in preserving cultural and architecturally significant neighborhoods was also strongly felt, in particular in South Los Angeles."

Additionally, the staff report noted under “Zoning and Land Use” that “the community’s residential neighborhoods are not expected to change significantly as growth in other parts of the community occurs. The Proposed Plans seek to direct growth away from low scale residential neighborhoods and towards transit-oriented districts and corridors in commercial centers.”

Additional Design Standards for the duplexes are needed. Each duplex needs to be limited to three to four bedrooms and two to three bathrooms. Instead, most of the new duplexes are five bedrooms and five bathrooms so that instead of providing housing for larger families, the units are used as rooming houses and sometimes used as very low-cost housing for the disabled with very limited on-site supervision or supportive services. “The Design Standards included in the Community Plan Implementation Overlay (CPIO) Districts are aimed at preserving the scale and character of three different residential typologies: 1) Legacy Single-Family, 2) Multi-Family Residential, and 3) Character Residential. Legacy Single-Family refers to R2 (two-family) residential neighborhoods that generally retain a single-family density, character, and scale. It is the first type, the Legacy Single-Family parcels that we are most concerned about. For example, there is a need to revise the design standards so that there is a set back of the upper story and a smaller floor to area ratio so that the buildings do not over-shadow existing single-family homes or existing one-story duplexes

“R2 neighborhoods that contain modestly sized second units behind primary units have seen an influx of projects that are out of scale, particularly the large two-story duplexes. In the Multi-Family CPIO subarea, described in further detail below, design standards are proposed for certain higher density residential areas, generally located near transit, in order to require higher quality architectural design and pedestrian orientation for new projects. Character Residential areas include design standards that protect the historic character of certain identified neighborhoods in the South Los Angeles CPA (Community Plan Area). These neighborhoods exhibit architectural homogeneity and/or may include homes of a similar historic period. In addition, the Community Plan policy documents include Design Guidelines that can be used to further guide residential development projects.”

From three years ago, the staff report noted “a community concern of increasing urgency within the R2-zoned neighborhoods is the intrusion of by-right, two-story duplexes that are out-of-scale and character and are creating significant quality of life and aesthetic conflicts within these residential areas. Numerous comments from residents and certified neighborhood councils have been received that not only raise concerns with the out-of-scale, cookie-cutter design of these projects, but also, more importantly, the life safety issues including excess trash generated by these developments, multiple families living in each unit, and the overwhelming number of cars parked along streets, all which contribute to severely overcrowded conditions. Comments were also submitted from Bureau of Sanitation personnel about the trash issues stemming from these properties. These duplex projects are circumventing the two-family dwelling density limitation of the R2 zone by constructing two units with four or five bedrooms each (for a total of up to ten bedrooms on each lot) on parcels that previously contained single-family homes or small, one-story duplexes. Because there are technically only two units, the projects are only required to provide four on-site parking spaces for a project consisting of 10 bedrooms. Residents that live near or adjacent to this type of development state that they have been blocked in or out of their driveways on many occasions. They have also witnessed conflicts amongst the residents within the duplex properties as cars in the driveway are blocked in by other vehicles. Although they do provide additional housing in the community, these duplexes do not provide the livable and sustainable living conditions that these communities desire. Furthermore, these two-story projects are compromising the character of these neighborhoods that are largely

comprised of single-family homes and smaller scale duplexes. The R2 residential areas of South and Southeast Los Angeles are being targeted for this type of development due to availability of lower-priced or foreclosed single-family homes.

Three years later, our stakeholders who live in these areas, which are communities of color, are even more upset about the impact of these over-sized buildings on their quality of life. These duplexes allow for a density which is unsustainable in relation to parking on the streets and room for trash and recycling bins. The current policies of the Department of City Planning are placing an unfair burden on those who live in these R2 zones, policies which are ostensibly to create more affordable housing.

Our Neighborhood Council is currently receiving about one demolition notice per month for the R2-zoned properties. We request that you work with us and our impacted stakeholders to address their concerns by placing an immediate moratorium on these duplexes until additional ordinance language is created and passed.

Sincerely,

David Matthews, Chairperson
Harbor Gateway North Neighborhood Council

cc: Vince Bertoni, Director of City Planning
Aksel Palacios, Planning Director – Council District 15
Kristen Gordon, Planning and Economic Development Deputy - Council District 8