

Growth: When is Enough Enough?

Voices

By Charles Tarlow

Los Angeles is experiencing unprecedented growth that is straining our existing infrastructure, demanding more resources, and negatively affecting the quality of life of everyone who lives here. Will there ever come a time to say “Enough!”?

Our leaders think they can continue increasing population density without addressing the problems of parking, congestion, and pollution ... not to mention the increased demands on water, power, emergency services, schools, and the myriad related services from waste disposal to mass transit. And God forbid they consider the quality of life in Los Angeles. More people mean more taxes and that, after all, is the mantra of City Hall.

It could be argued that the bulk of our problems is the result of irresponsible development and poor leadership and that development in general is a good thing; but the truth is that we live in a real world with finite resources that will, sooner or later, force us to see the folly of thinking we can grow our way to utopia. There will come a time when resources will be unable to support growth. If we wait until then, quality of life in Los Angeles will already be a moot point.

Some cities are already learning this lesson the hard way. Las Vegas, for example, is running out of water simply because they allowed too much development. As a result, they are suffering from lawsuits as they try to “steal” water from their neighbors in order to buy a little more time before the water is gone completely. Are we so different, so powerful, that we can avoid running out of resources forever? And even if we could, what kind of city will we have if we continue on our present course. New York without the subway? Three hour commutes in a never ending traffic jam; polluted air and wall to wall people 24/7 ... 365 days a year? Is that what we want? If we continue on our present course, that is what we will have ... if the resources do not run out first.

It is time for this city to examine every development project in terms of benefit and cost to the city (and not the developers). All new developments should enhance our city and make it a more desirable place to live. Quality of life should be considered before any project is approved.

We need to give more weight to the residents adjacent to new developments. They are the people most affected by them.

Responsible projects will have generous parking. Like it or not, we are a city of cars that has no viable mass transit. No project should go forward without adequate parking. If a project generates traffic that local streets will not support, then that project should not be built.

Let's concentrate on making Los Angeles better and not just bigger.

Will there come a time when we have to say “enough” to growth? Probably. In the meantime we have to say “enough” to irresponsible growth.

Los Angeles is a run down house. Let's concentrate on fixing the plumbing and the wiring and stop just adding more rooms. (Charles Tarlow is community activist and a member of the Mid City WEST Community Council.) _