

If We don't Speak Up Our Neighborhoods will Grind to a Halt

Coffin's Corner

By David Coffin

Last week our neighborhood council was asked to re-approve the EIR for Playa Vista Phase II and on a vote of 18-2 the neighborhood council supported the 2,600 mixed use development. I was the only person on the council to speak against any further development and 1 of 2 that voted against it. While my vote was on this project, my real message was towards the community, our city council and the mayor on future and soon to be heard projects.

Here are my comments:

On November 4th, 2003 our neighborhood council voted to support Playa Vista Phase II 13 to 10. At the time Playa Vista had greatly down-sized their original plans in response to the community concerns and we commended them for that.

I was one of the members of the board at the time that supported the EIR. I liked the plan because of the mix of retail and lower residential density than the original proposal.

The retail component was important to me because it completed the package giving the Playa Vista community their own local place to shop without having to leave the community and create an additional traffic burden on Sepulveda or Lincoln.

With our neighborhood council's support, former council member Cindy Miscikowski took that project downtown where the Los Angeles City Council deliberated and with the Mayor they approved the project and work began.

However., a lot has transpired since 2003 that has challenged the notion that we can continue to grow and grow and provide housing to meet Sacramento's growth projections for Southern California.

It is these growth projections that drive development. These projections are not based on reality and they ignore very real constraints to our regions infrastructure. Likewise, L.A.'s planning policies ignore the same restraints.

Since the time that our neighborhood council first approved Playa Vista Phase II, we've seen the rolling power blackouts and brownouts of 2004. We've seen soaring levels of traffic gridlock and impractical solutions to solve it. We've seen our reservoirs, lakes and rivers slowly draw down and emergency water conservation ordinances imposed on us and on residents from other cities throughout Southern California. And this was –without- the construction of Phase II.

Between 1970 and 2008, the population of the City of Los Angeles has gone from 2.81 million people to just over 4 million and our water deliveries have remained essentially static at less than 700,000 acre feet. The water supply has not grown with population growth and it won't. In fact, between equal parts of below average rainfall, court ordered reductions and excessive growth, the best we can hope

for is making do with much, much less.

The most recent projections by the California State Department of Finance is that Southern California's population will double by 2050. According to the DOF, we will need housing for another 15 million people. If we build it... they will come.

Since 1997, the City of Los Angeles has been bending over backwards to meet the States projected population growth and housing requirements by approving permits for 10's of thousand of new housing units each year. Even during this period of emergency water conservation enforcement, the City of Los Angeles still has not imposed a moratorium on development.

We've seen that growth here in Playa del Rey, Westchester and in Playa Vista. We've seen the loss of Acapulco Restaurant at Pershing and Manchester to a 49 unit housing complex. We've seen the arrival of a 288 housing unit complex at Manchester and Tuscany. We've seen L.A.'s first so-called smart growth project - the 539 unit Playa del Oro, and high density projects near transit stops such as the 37 unit complex that replaced B'nai Tikvah and the 43 unit condo project on Arizona. It's happening here and it's happening all over the city.

Neighborhood councils were created to give regular people like us a voice in the direction of their community. We are not expected to be rubber stamps for our elected officials housing policies.

If we don't speak up..., One parcel at a time, our neighborhoods will slowly grind down to a halt as people are squeezed into smaller confines, traffic gridlock will extend longer into the day and evening, and more severe water conservation efforts will imposed on us. I fully expect the City of L.A to raise the enforcement level to at least a Phase IV or higher this year.

Having said this, Under today's conditions, I cannot support large housing projects, let alone a project that proposes 2,600 new housing units. If this was 2003 I might have a very different position. However, it's 2009 and the region is overdeveloped and the city has over committed our resources including water, power and streets. Unless there is a way for the city to resolve these infrastructure issues without further eroding our quality of life, I cannot support new housing.

We may not be able to control rainfall, we can control growth. If you have the tolerance for more traffic gridlock, tightening water supplies and penalties for not meeting water restrictions vote yes.

If you want to send the city a message that unsustainable growth is NOT acceptable, Vote No.

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