

Monday, March 17, 2008

The Coming City Superstorm

For far too long, the masses napped while Los Angeles was plundered. They're awake now, [grouchy and suspicious](#), and ready for a fight.

-Steve Lopez

You know that I am generally in favor of the type of real estate development being pursued in Los Angeles. However, that's not the focus of this piece.

No, its sort of a warning and it may be one that's too come late - [the masses are pissed and the politicians need to watch out](#).

[A series of significant real estate developments and planning decisions](#) have various communities up in arms. Even when some residents may support various developments or some aspect of the projects, [they're annoyed, bothered, upset and downright disappointed in their elected leaders](#). They're [showing up to public meetings in droves](#) and making their voice heard. And their voice says we vote and we're not happy. These residents are distressed by - whether real or perceived - [a lack of transparency, candor and dialogue with their elected officials](#). Yet developers and moneyed interests seem to be able to buy the type of access to government officials taxpayers feel they deserve.

At the same time many real estate developers and business interests behind these controversial projects have failed to adequately engage the surrounding communities and in many cases have actively alienated neighbors. A notable exception is developer [J.H. Snyder](#) who has worked closely with local leaders in creating three separate projects to revitalize North Hollywood and has received high praise from every corner from the local Chamber of Commerce to very active and aggressive homeowner associations.

At the opposite end of the extreme is [Home Depot](#), most notably with their plans to open a controversial store in [Sunland-Tujunga](#). The retail chain has failed to enter into conversations with community leaders, was [caught in a major phony astro-turf effort](#) and most recently decided to [file a multi-million dollar lawsuit against the City](#), leading to a [secret backroom deal with City Attorney Rocky Degladillo](#).

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Among a few of the most controversial developments in Los Angeles:

[Metro Studio@Lankershim](#)

NBC Universal announced plans to create its West Coast News and Content Center at Metro Studio@Lankershim, and also intends for Metro Studio@Lankershim to serve as home to NBC Network News' Los Angeles Bureau, KNBC, KVEA, and Access Hollywood. Nearby residents are concerned about traffic and the resulting changes to the local skyline. Historical advocates are worried about the fate of the nearby Campo de Cahuenga, the site where the agreement was signed between the US and Mexico leading to the eventual end of the Mexican-American War in the 1840s.

[Universal Studios Expansion](#)

NBC Universal announced plans to create a long-term vision plan for the approximately 400-acre Universal City property, home to Universal Studios, the largest motion picture and television production studio in the world, CityWalk and Universal Studios Hollywood. Again, traffic, noise and other potential annoyances have neighbors in an uproar.

[Southwest Museum](#)

Site of a controversial move to merge the venerable museum with the Autry National Center in Griffith Park. Supporters of the museum say the Autry wants to loot the Southwest's collection and its property could be developed.

[Autry National Center](#)

Home of the organization some folks are saying is going to loot the Historic Southwest Museum; and possible future real estate development such as a hotel.

[Sunland-Tujunga Home Depot](#)

The controversial site where the national retailer has attempted to build an outlet in a former K-Mart has become ground zero in the battle between residents who want to control the destiny of their community and the city officials and developers they are battling.

[The Las Villas Entertainment Center](#)

The Las Villas Entertainment Center in Lincoln Heights is a proposed themed-restaurant with a banquet facility component and video arcade. The building permit application to the City of Los Angeles includes a conditional use permit for a "full liquor" license and zoning variance for 140 video games (which will be open to youth during school hours).

[Las Lomas](#)

Las Lomas, a proposed community of 5,553 homes and 2.3 million square feet of commercial space, lies in unincorporated Los Angeles County territory.

Developer Dan Palmer wants the city of Los Angeles to annex the land so his Las Lomas project - opposed by the neighboring city of Santa Clarita and nearby residents in the City of Los Angeles - can move forward.

There are but only a few of the "hot spots" in the coming superstorm over development in the City and the growing feeling by residents that their elected leaders are not hearing them. Though it appears these are all isolated projects in isolated neighborhoods, residents are getting smart and realizing there is strength in numbers, particularly through [creating alliances via Los Angeles' system of Neighborhood Councils](#).

A few weeks ago the Mid Town-North Hollywood Neighborhood Council teamed up with Councils in Valley Village, Valley Glen, Toluca Lake and Studio City to hold [a town hall meeting attended by nearly 700 residents](#) to discuss various developments planned for the region. The result of this collaboration was an agreement amongst the Councils to partner and support each other's goals and aims.

At a hastily called meeting following the revelation of the [secret backroom deal](#) on the Home Depot in Sunland-Tujunga, [nearly 200 residents showed](#) up to ask questions, make their voices heard and to affirm their resolve. Representatives of the community surrounding [Southwest Museum](#) were in attendance, and like the signers of the Declaration of Independence who promised that they would "mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor" both sides swore to assist one another in their battle against a common foe.

This scene has and will continue to repeat itself all over the City. And if the Mayor is concerned about his re-election chances, he needs to know is that this environment will make it very easy for a ["white knight" like Zev Yaroslavsky](#) - who has significant street cred on standing up to over-development - to come along and ride the wave of dissatisfaction to Getty House.