

Zev's Crusade Against Developers-Act II

By Bill Boyarsky (Lifted from the LA's leading blog: LAObserved)



Maybe the housing slump and the mortgage mess will give us a respite from the tear downs, condo conversions and expensive apartment projects that are ravaging Los Angeles low income and middle class neighborhoods.

If developers can't finance new projects for a while, it will amount to a moratorium that would allow Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and the City Council to figure out a way to retain apartments affordable to people of moderate means while still permitting needed construction.

I got interested in the subject through my column in the Jewish Journal. Condo conversions, often requiring the destruction of apartment buildings, were hitting the Jewish community hard. Many people, including large numbers of seniors, were being forced from stable neighborhoods where they had lived for years, often in rent-controlled apartments.

The impact on Los Angeles is severe. The Los Angeles Times reported that between 2001 and 2006, 12,364 rent controlled apartments were removed from the housing market. Most were torn down or converted to condos.

A while back, I joined a bus tour of low-income housing threatened by demolition to make way for more expensive units. The tour was sponsored by the Liberty Hill Foundation, an organization that does many good things around town, including providing money to Project Acorn and the Campaign for Economic Survival, groups have worked hard to save affordable housing.



Just west of downtown, in an area that will be the next to be gentrified, we stopped at an old apartment house. Rents are \$750 a month for a one- room apartment with a bath. The apartment house looked clean. I've seen much worse in the neighborhood. But the owner was planning to tear it down.

Earlier in the month, while working on my Jewish Journal column, I visited an apartment in the Pico Robertson area and talked to tenants Mary Ellen Satterfield, Brenda Lara and Rachel Minkove. Their affordable housing is destined to turn higher priced condo.

They are perfect examples of how the middle class is being squeezed out by the wave of condo conversions sweeping through the city. Satterfield is a portfolio administrator for a financial company. Lara is assistant principal in a Los Angeles public elementary school in Echo Park. Minkove is a fifth-grade teacher at Harkham Hillel Hebrew Academy. Their rents range from \$850 to \$1,680 a month.

These are among the people Los Angeles County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky had in mind when he opposed a city proposal that will give developers a huge break. It would permit tear downs if the developer promises to put affordable housing in the new building. Of course, the developer could get away with putting in only one such unit.

In return for putting in a laughable minimum of lower rent housing, a developer could build bigger, taller and more profitable projects. "This is a wolf in sheep's clothing," Yaroslavsky said.

Developers have huge power in city hall. But the mayor and the council should think about the kind of Los Angeles do we want. We don't want a city where the working class and middle class are forced out.

And if city hall doesn't care, maybe Yaroslavsky can take his fight to the ballot, as he did several years ago with a successful measure that imposed development controls that the mayor and the council had refused. (Bill Boyarsky is a columnist for LAObserved.) _