



Santa Monica Coalition for a Livable City

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September 5, 2007

Dear Planning Commission,

SMCLC has seen the letter sent to you by the Friends of Sunset Park and agrees with its position regarding "decoupling" parking from rental housing rates.

What is particularly disturbing about this item is that it is being agendaized separately from the LUCE and that it is also up for discussion without a staff report that includes any historical view of the very real and ongoing problem that "decoupling" parking from rental units" has led to in our community.

If implemented, this idea would certainly mobilize developers to buy up downtown properties and build more rental housing more cheaply but it would do a real disservice to the downtown residential community and our city as a whole. This experiment has already been tried in various parts of our city, most notably in the Wilmont area. Their experience has shown that the basic assumption underlying this idea is incorrect. Providing renters who live near public transit with fewer parking spaces does not result in fewer auto trips being generated. Renters use their cars as much as others.

A recent LA Times study went further and put to rest the planning myth that those who live near "transit hubs" do not use their cars as much to go to work, or run errands. (*LA Times*, June 30, 2007, "Near the Rails but Still on the Road", Sharon Bernstein).

More recently, on July 26, 2007, a panel of traffic experts convened at Rand for a public policy forum "Gridlock in LA: Getting Past the Standoff". That discussion acknowledged the Bernstein study as significant and irrefutable.

Downtown Santa Monica is not a transit hub now, nor is it likely to be one anytime soon. The subway to the sea is a fanciful hope, not a funded reality, and there is no Expo line either (or any study that believes it will decrease downtown congestion if it ever ends there).

What has been allowed to develop in downtown Santa Monica is an unprecedented amount of five-story rental housing, extending from block to block, for example, between 4th, 5th and 6th Streets south of Santa Monica Boulevard, with little or no public input. And much more of this type of development is planned. So much market rate rental housing has been built downtown so quickly, that it has been mentioned repeatedly as a concern during the LUCE process. The council even revised the development review thresholds under an "emergency" ordinance.

We all know that our downtown is traffic-clogged days, nights and weekends, with steadily increasing intersection gridlock and little street parking. So this proposal would add more automobiles and also pit the parking needs of downtown residents and their guests against the parking needs of other residents, visitors, businesses, and commuting workers. It will also cause nearby neighborhoods to become parking meccas for these rental units lacking sufficient parking, exacerbating scarce parking in those neighborhoods.

The long-term negative impacts of this proposal and the spillover neighborhood impacts are sufficiently dire that this entire discussion should be preceded by a comprehensive staff report that takes into consideration the experiences of renters without parking spaces in Santa Monica, the *LA Times* study, and whether there are any adequate solutions for Wilmont renters who have complained of severe parking shortages for years, without relief.

Sincerely,

Diana Gordon

cc: Eileen Fogarty  
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Jeanne Dodson  
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