



Santa Monica Coalition for a Livable City

STEERING

April 11, 2011

COMMITTEE

& ADVISORS

The Honorable Jerry Brown  
Governor, State of California  
First Floor, State Capitol  
Sacramento, CA 95814

mark armour

peter davidson

gale feldman

victor fresco

susan giesberg

diana gordon

dan jansenson

sherrill kushner

mary marlow

bea nemlaha

jacob samuel

lorraine sanchez

susan scarafia

jeff segal

carol sobel

maryanne solomon

doris sosin

linda sullivan

peter tigler

bill zimmerman

The Honorable John Perez  
District Office  
320 W. 4th Street, Room 1050  
Los Angeles, CA 90013

Re: Upholding CEQA during the budget process

Dear Governor Brown and Speaker Perez,

Please stand strong in keeping CEQA intact during budget discussions. CEQA is an invaluable community planning tool that enables individuals and non-profit groups to take a seat at the governing table with huge corporations that want to dictate a neighborhood's future.

CEQA is our state's most important environmental law, allowing us to protect our air, water, and neighborhoods by compelling informed decisionmaking. An attack on CEQA limits the ability of groups like ours to uphold the quality of life in our community. We wonder why anyone would be AGAINST bringing full, accurate information to decision-makers. Everyone loses by hiding the true adverse impacts of large-scale projects in their community because the impacts are irreversible.

We need a strong CEQA as a cumulative information-gathering tool and an essential environmental safeguard. We Santa Monicans love our city. We understand why so many people want to live and work here, and why there is relentless development pressure for the only undeveloped area that is left in our 8 square mile city. We're an open-minded, openhearted group. Everyone is welcome to express his or her opinion as we hash out what's best for our city. But it must be done on a level playing field. That's why some of us got together and formed the Santa Monica Coalition for a Livable City ("SMCLC").

SMCLC is a 501(c)(4) nonprofit organization made up of thousands of Santa Monicans. We formed to help residents have meaningful input into how our

city grows and develops. We know that growth is part of the life cycle of a city. We want that growth to be MANAGED, DELIBERATE and WELL-THOUGHT OUT. Development decisions that affect our lives should be respectful of the current personality of the city, a welcomed addition to residents' lives, and environmentally sustainable. These values are at the core of CEQA.

Giving residents meaningful input means keeping them informed about issues that affect them. That's why we work to ensure full access to public records about proposed developments and to get complete information about a development's impacts and long-range consequences. Development decisions in our city must be based on accurate information about their environmental and social impacts on our daily lives.

CEQA enforcement by individuals or groups is an essential tool for our community. It:

- Gives residents a voice by enabling us to bring a lawsuit for all of the information needed for our decision makers to make fully informed decisions about a particular project. This is especially important when the information included in an Environmental Impact Report is inadequate or just plain wrong as it was in the case of the Playa Vista project, discussed below.
- Promotes democratic participation by ensuring that the people we elect and the staff they employ obtain accurate, complete information on a project's impacts before voting on it. This is a major part of our organization's mission.
- Gives the public a real voice in analyzing the true, significant impacts of projects, in how our neighborhoods are developed and how our community will grow.
- Helps Santa Monica and other residents do what an involved city and citizenry did when confronted with a substantially inadequate EIR for the Playa Vista development. That project included 3.5 million square feet of office and retail space along with 5,800 housing units. The City of Santa Monica, on behalf of residents, along with a local environmental group successfully sued the City of Los Angeles on the grounds that the EIR had failed to analyze adequately the land use impacts, mitigation of impacts, and wastewater impacts of Phase II of the project. (See *City of Santa Monica v. City of Los Angeles*, No. B189630.) The Court of Appeal agreed and invalidated the EIR. It's residents, as stakeholders, who do the painstaking work of analyzing EIRs, uncovering important factual errors and omissions and invoke CEQA when necessary in order to protect their neighborhoods and the environment.

The office of the Attorney General, like every part of our state government, is wrestling with how to serve the state with fewer employees and less money. Stripping residents of CEQA enforcement abilities would leave all responsibility

for overseeing and enforcing CEQA to the office of the Attorney General. This is more than moving local control to the state. It will effectively give developers free rein to overdevelop our communities, ignore pressing regional transit needs and create unhealthy cities and neighborhoods. The AG's office isn't designed or staffed to know the intricacies of each neighborhood in the state or able to hire the experts needed to challenge deficient EIRs. The result is that EIRs won't be enforced and CEQA will be toothless.

Real estate development pressure is relentless in communities like ours. California is expected to grow by about 14% over the next decade. A staggering 3,000,000 square feet of new, predominantly commercial development is projected over the next 20 years in Santa Monica – and this is just a projection. Over the past 20 years, our city greatly exceeded such projections in the General Plan and built over 9,000,000 square feet of commercial development, greatly exacerbating the jobs/housing imbalance and leading to the functional collapse of the 26<sup>th</sup> Street off ramp on the 10 Freeway. This development pressure is ongoing. Over 2,000,000 square feet of mainly commercial development is in the pipeline now pending approvals. Our community simply cannot handle this much development in the short term without mass transit; neither can anyone in the Los Angeles area who wants to get into our community in the morning, or leave it in the afternoon. Because CEQA requires a cumulative analysis of the traffic impacts of all known projects, it helps guide our City Council in selecting the best projects with the least environmental impacts and greatest benefits.

For years, throughout our great state groups like ours have relied on CEQA to shape their communities and keep them livable. We applaud and appreciate the leadership role both of you have taken in this regard and we support you fully.

Sincerely,

Diana Gordon  
Co-Chair, Santa Monica Coalition for a Livable City

Cc: Santa Monica City Council  
Santa Monica City Attorney  
Santa Monica Neighborhood Groups