

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Send comments to editor@smdp.com

Touting smart growth

Editor:
The Daily Press reported ("Chiefs ask for personnel," page 1, March 13, 2008) that Police Chief Jackman and Fire Chief Hone has requested funding from our City Council for additional staff "to better respond to a population whose needs have grown in the past few decades, all the while the number of personnel has remained relatively stagnant."

I trust our council will provide the funding the chiefs have requested. Public safety is one of the paramount missions of municipal government.

But why does Santa Monica need more fire and police personnel? We know that our resident population in 1980 was about the same as it is today.

Chief Hone notes that today his department has the same number of firefighters as it did in 1980 yet responds to twice as any emergencies as it did 28 years ago. Chief Jackman observes that while Santa Monica's population is roughly 88,000 residents, his department serves about 250,000 per day because of commuting workers and tourism.

So what's caused the additional stresses on police and fire services? It's largely the explosive growth in the past 20 years of over nine million square feet of commercial space, creating twice the number of emergencies calls to the SMFD and a larger daytime population for the SMPD to serve.

How did we get into this mess? Through a vicious cycle in which commercial development required more city services, which in turn begat more commercial development to pay for those services, which begat the need for more services, etc. And you can be sure that City Hall will want more traffic-generating commercial development to fund the latest increase in police and fire staffing.

But here's the reality: All commercial development doesn't necessarily generate net revenues to the city once the cost of providing new services required by a project is subtracted from gross revenues. Yet currently City Hall can't discriminate between those projects which would augment revenues and those which merely create more traffic and more government.

The Residents Initiative to Fight Traffic (RIFT) would cut the growth of traffic-producing commercial development in half while providing City Hall the tools to approve only those commercial projects that substantially boosted its tax base. Does 50 percent less growth and almost the same amount of revenue sound good to you?

Ted Winterer
Santa Monica

Reaching a win-win solution

Editor:
The City of Santa Monica, specifically the City Manager's Office spent thousands and thousands of taxpayer dollars to mail to virtually every resident and business their one-sided spin on the Second and Fourth Streets Pedestrian and Streetscape Improvement Project, mostly the ficus tree removal aspect of the plan. The problem is by not joining with Treesavers months ago to reach a business and environmentally friendly win-win solution the city is sending out many misrepresentations, half-truths and misleading information now that the overwhelming majority of residents and visitors don't want. The people, who the city should be listening to have so far been for the most part ignored and disrespected. There is still hope for a win-win solution, regardless of what the court rules.

Jerry Rubin
Santa Monica Treesavers



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Can't trust city on development?

THERE'S ONLY A COUPLE WEEKS LEFT for registered Santa Monica voters to sign the Resident's Initiative to Fight Traffic (RIFT) to qualify it for the November ballot. RIFT calls for a limit in future commercial development to a maximum of 75,000 square feet, annually, for the next 15 years.

Over the last 25 years, the city has approved over nine million square feet of new office, retail and industrial space — far in excess of city projections. This runaway development has substantially contributed to the traffic congestion and other quality of life problems we have here today.

The city seems to be pushing for expanded development, especially on major traffic corridors in its update of the general plan. And, there are already a number of larger commercial and mixed use projects in the pipeline — mostly in the mid-city area along the Broadway, Colorado Avenue and Olympic Boulevard corridors.

When City Council refused to impose the temporary moratorium on new commercial construction urged by some neighborhood groups last year, activists stepped up their game. RIFT, the brainchild of members of the Santa Monica Coalition for a Livable City, was created and is now being circulated to qualify for the ballot. In other words, the people are taking control where city government has refused to intervene.

In the meantime, it's business as usual. Tuesday night, Council will discuss approving a development agreement being proffered by a developer who owns the corner of Colorado Avenue at Stewart Street.

The 1.76 acre property is currently home to single story, mom-and-pop type industrial, repair and service shops with garage bays. The developer proposes replacing them with a three-story, 115,200-square-foot entertainment production building over a two-level subterranean parking garage with 412 parking spaces. The project was unanimously approved by the Planning Commission at its Dec. 12, 2007, meeting.

Two other sizable developments are under consideration in the immediate vicinity including at 2930 Colorado Ave. where a development agreement involving the Village Trailer Park is pending. That development is a mixed-use project with 240 condominiums, 109 single-room rental units, commercial and retail space and below grade parking for 503 vehicles. One block away at Olympic Boulevard and Stewart Street, a 300,000-square-foot, multi-story, mixed use/production facility is proposed for the former Paper-Mate property.

Based on the historical record and observing how the public Land Use and Circulation Element (LUCE) process has been manipulated to "push" more development with increased heights and densities, there seems to be little confidence that the city has a real desire to slow the cur-

rent pace of growth. Maybe that's why all five neighborhood groups have endorsed RIFT.

However, the Santa Monica Chamber of Commerce has gone on record opposing the initiative. The Chamber's board of directors voted unanimously to oppose RIFT claiming "it will do nothing to reduce traffic ..." I'm curious. Does the board know how much more development is needed to reduce traffic?

SMCLC Chair, Diana Gordon, reports, "SMCLC volunteers have collected over 6,000 signatures so far and are shooting for 10,000 which we expect to have by the April 23rd filing deadline." For more information: www.smclc.net

ANOTHER EATERY, LESS PARKING

Wednesday evening, the Planning Commission will consider granting a conditional use permit for beer and wine service and a parking variance for Corso Italia, a 113 seat full service, sit-down restaurant at 606 Broadway. This site is under construction and even though it's a totally new building, it apparently doesn't have enough on-premises parking as required by code. The code says the eatery must have 30 on-site parking spaces yet it has only 13 spaces.

Although the staff report for this item says La Botte at 620 Santa Monica Blvd. (with the same owner as Corso Italia) had no complaints on record, two complaints were filed against La Botte in the last couple years, both about its insufficient on-site parking.

A similar lack of on-site parking at Juliano's Raw, 609 Broadway, was the subject of a couple of my columns in 2006. The granting of on-site parking variances for one Downtown restaurant after another does nothing but exacerbate a critical shortage of street parking and moves us closer to the "Manhattanization of Santa Monica."

MORE OR LESS CARS. WHICH IS IT?

John McColgan seemed confused in a letter to the editor (April 2, Page 4) because, last Monday I criticized the "grow smart" proposal to make streets smaller (to accommodate less cars) while castigating Governor Schwarzenegger for wanting to build a tollway to accommodate more cars."

I only suggested we not reduce street vehicular capacity here and make our traffic even more intolerable. I'd normally support a new tollroad to accomplish reducing congestion such as in Northern San Diego County where remedies are desperately needed — but not through a beach front state park. So, No contradiction, John, but glad you asked.

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