

February 12, 2020

TO: The City of Santa Monica
City Manager
City Attorney
City Council
Planning Commission

Clarett West (Frank Stephan)

FROM: The Boards of:
Friends of Sunset Park
North of Montana Association
Pico Neighborhood Association
Residocracy
Santa Monica Architects for a Responsible Tomorrow
Santa Monica Coalition for a Livable City
Santa Monica Mid City Neighbors
Santa Monica Northeast Neighbors
Wilshire Montana Neighborhood Coalition

RE: **The 4th and 5th and Arizona Project on our Public Land**

We are writing to notify you and Clarett West that organized resident opposition has formed to your proposed project ("The Plaza") on 4th and Arizona and we are committed to stopping it from going forward. We urge you to withdraw this plan before engaging in a protracted battle. If not, based on residents' strong feelings and our history with unpopular development proposals in our city, we are confident we will prevail.

The history of "The Plaza," is similar to another failed development solicited by the City. In 2004 the Macerich Company unveiled a proposal, largely shaped by city staff, for a massive high-rise development on public land at Santa Monica Place. The City presented a wish list for the site to the developer, and the company was led down a primrose path to believe that residents would not object to 21-story towers on that site and the traffic gridlock it would cause.

We did. Residents defeated the proposal but unfortunately, not before Macerich spent time and resources trying to accomplish what it thought the City wanted. (As did the City itself, which, among other things, was forced to pay the legal fees of the Santa Monica Coalition for a Livable City ("SMCLC") after SMCLC sued the City to obtain important public records unlawfully withheld.)

Upon withdrawing its high-rise plans, Macerich officials acknowledged they were surprised by widespread resident disdain for the project, saying "We misread the community."

<https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2006-jun-04-me-smdevelop4-story.html>

History now repeats itself with your project. Like Santa Monica Place, The Plaza is proposed on public land, and the developer was tasked by the City with incorporating a grab bag of ideas in search of a

constituency. Santa Monica voters have rejected such projects on public land before (Santa Monica Pier, a luxury hotel proposed for the current Annenberg Beach House site) as well as big developments that are large generators of traffic in already congested areas (the Hines project proposed for the Papermate site at Olympic and Cloverfield).

We have no doubt your project will suffer the same fate.

The 4th and Arizona property is the last major parcel of undeveloped public land in the heart of our city. As such, it must serve a predominantly public purpose. Your project does not do that and impermissibly would privatize our public space. When residents learn of this, they are appalled that our City would agree to such a plan, and partner with a private company for a private development consisting of a luxury hotel and office space.

Here are additional problems you and the City will not be able to overcome:

- 1) A seriously deficient draft environmental impact report (“DEIR”) that didn’t offer reasonable alternatives to the project; that studied an option to remove the proposed forty-eight units of affordable housing altogether; and that proposed a massive commercial project that would generate about 5,000 new car trips a day in the already gridlocked Downtown.
- 2) The City’s ongoing failure to comply with the Surplus Land Act which clearly prioritizes using public land for a public use, including open space. You do not appear to be exempt from this law. Since Santa Monica is one of the most densely populated cities on Los Angeles’ west side, open space is of paramount importance to residents and something many residents, as well as groups like SMA.r.t., have been urging be considered for that site for years.
- 3) If this project was built on private, not public land, the commercial uses would generate about the same sales and tax revenues for the City. Therefore, there is no economic benefit to the City or its residents to place these uses on our public land rather than keep this land open to the public. Thus far you have not provided ground lease terms or ANY profit participation that could possibly justify the City allowing our public land to be converted into a mega commercial space for the proposed 99 years.

We hope Clarett West will realize these fatal problems with your project and withdraw it. As has happened before, you were misled by the City. Santa Monicans are smart and organized and have realized that your project does not deliver anything desired or needed by city residents. Instead, it promises unacceptable levels of traffic; it is a giveaway of our scarce public open space and imposes an eleven- or twelve-story fortress spanning three hundred feet between two public streets that is the antithesis of Santa Monica.

Just as the Macerich Company wisely realized they would never see their project built, we hope you will reach the same conclusion now, rather than years from now. When the essential character of the City is at stake, residents will fight.

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