

DAILY PRESS EDITORIALS

Aren't they listening at City Hall?

At a time when city officials are fretting over looming budget deficits, the City Council has decided to waste another \$30,000 on a survey to see how residents feel about development in Downtown. Say what?

Has the council not been paying attention? What about all of those years of community meetings to develop the Land Use & Circulation Element, a planning document that is intended to dictate how land is used in the city by the sea for the next 20 years or more? What about meetings that have been held to develop a specific land use plan for Downtown? Are those not sufficient to gauge public opinion?

Apparently the powers that be aren't reading the Daily Press regularly. If they did they would know how residents feel about development. Many are in favor of slow-growth that keeps Santa Monica economically viable and liveable. They want to preserve views and ocean breezes. They do not want massive, dense development that brings in more traffic and sucks up more resources. They don't want project after project being approved without first giving thought to how they will impact a resident's ability to drive to the market or pick up their kids from school. They want construction to be better managed and they feel City Hall has let them down.

To call for a survey seems to be a slap in the face to all those residents who take time away from their families and their careers to participate in community and council meetings to express their views. It's as if the council is saying that the opinions of those who actually give a damn don't matter, while those who sit back and bury their heads in the sand are somehow more informed and educated and therefore should be given ample opportunities to express themselves. We can't got for that!

We agree that many of the same voices are

heard at community meetings, but that's because these are the people who actually care and have taken the time to research and develop informed opinions. They understand the repercussions of poor planning and are mad as hell that City Hall has failed to properly move forward with the implementation of their own land use document. That failure has let LUCE linger, so long in fact that now the council feels as if it needs to go back out to the community to learn what it already knows. Why? Aren't the opinions given during the LUCE process just as valid as they were three years ago? What's changed, aside from the increased pressure from developers to capitalize on their properties?

Skeptics who have lost faith in City Hall and members of the council will undoubtedly view this as an attempt to change the narrative, to produce manipulated results that favor larger, denser buildings. While the Daily Press isn't jumping to that conclusion — yet — we are watching closely. Surveys aren't always reliable and there are plenty of variables at play that can skew results in one way or another.

It would have been better if the council voted last week to instead support a freeze on processing development applications until proper area plans are fully developed and approved (Councilmembers Kevin McKeown, Ted Winterer and Tony Vazquez supported the freeze but couldn't gain support from their colleagues). Even if the move would have been mostly symbolic, it at least would have sent a message to residents that their concerns are being heard, that the council can sympathize with beliefs that Santa Monica is losing its character. Instead, those on the dais said to all those who have sacrificed their time by attending community meetings that their opinions have fallen on deaf ears.

What a waste.