

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Send comments to editor@smdp.com

Chamber contributes to gridlock

Editor:
I'd like to respond to your article "Chamber opposes potential initiative" (page 1, March 29, 2008) in which you reported on the Chamber of Commerce's opposition to the Residents Initiative to Fight Traffic (RIFT).

It appears as though the Chamber does not fundamentally understand or is choosing to ignore the overwhelming benefits of RIFT to Santa Monica residents, visitors, customers and small businesses.

RIFT is a local ballot measure that would cut the annual rate of traffic-generating commercial development roughly in half.

For those of us who live, visit, shop or work here, that means a drastic slow-down in the amount of additional traffic, more and more of which comes into our city every year.

Commercial developments cause three to four times the amount of traffic on Santa Monica streets than residential buildings. Over the past 25 years, more than 9 million square feet of commercial development have been added to our beach city.

It doesn't take a mathematician to realize that this adds up to unbearable gridlock on our streets. (Not to mention a daily battle to find parking.)

RIFT does not in any way impact existing Santa Monica businesses. In fact, RIFT will likely protect small business owners who increasingly face unaffordable rent hikes, displacement or eviction.

Do you think developers care about saving our small, locally-owned businesses when faced with an opportunity to redevelop their buildings and charge sky-high rents to chain stores?

It's nice of the Chamber to say that they're concerned about protecting Santa Monica's tax base. However, they ignore the strain that commercial development places on our city's precious public resources by requiring new services such as police, firefighters, traffic engineers and infrastructure.

According to the city, commercial growth since 1995 is consuming an increasing share of "energy use, water use, and waste generation [increased] largely as a result of new office construction and larger daytime populations resulting from higher occupancy rates in hotels and office buildings and the regionalization of the city's commercial districts" (OC Report, Feb. 25).

RIFT will enable City Hall to approve only those new commercial developments that substantially increase our tax base. With the passage of RIFT, Santa Monica can deny those developments that consume our services and bring in more traffic.

Let's see a quick show of hands from the Chamber Board: Who is in favor of more traffic and more government to service new developments?

If the Chamber has a better plan for reducing Santa Monica's traffic and controlling the commercial development that has run rampant for the past 25 years, then I'd like to see it.

I bet all five of Santa Monica's neighborhood organizations who endorsed RIFT, and the 10,000 residents who signed RIFT's petition would, too.

Elizabeth Riel

Chair of the North of Montana Neighborhood Association



My Write

Bill Bauer

Send comments to editor@smdp.com

Does Santa Monica care?

HAS ANYBODY ELSE NOTICED THAT

our two chief governing entities — the city and the school district — ignore the pain and suffering of our most vulnerable citizens including disabled children with special needs and seniors and the weak who depend on public assistance housing?

A review of the city's housing element during Tuesday's City Council meeting brought forth a litany of complaints about harassment and intimidation by their landlords from very low, low and moderate income tenants living in subsidized, Section 8 and deed-restricted housing. The majority of complaints came from "low income" renters at the Plaza at the Arboretum, 2200 Colorado Ave., and at the Sea Castle, 1725 Ocean Front Walk. Both properties are managed by Metric Property Management, a national property management firm whose Web site boasts about integrity and honesty.

Tenants complained of mold problems, odors, security issues, bad maintenance, shoddy repairs and dark, dank units. They said they were afraid to ask for even basic repairs. They also mentioned the intimidation and constant threats from building managers.

Denise McGranahan, with the Legal Aid Foundation of Santa Monica, told council they were working with 30 clients from four deed-restricted buildings who all had grievances. One example involved documents tenants were required to sign giving landlords entry to apartments at any time, day or night, to make repairs after a complaint was made. Such a contract is a clear violation of basic tenant rights.

McGranahan also revealed that vacated deed-restricted apartments were being re-rented out to Arboretum employees, which is a flagrant violation of the Arboretum's development agreement with the city.

These complaints are just the tip of the iceberg. I have good reason to believe that the city was well aware of these and numerous other tenant/landlord issues through its housing division which administrates many of the subsidized programs, rent control administration and the consumer division in the city attorney's office.

I've also heard the same kinds of horror stories about the low income/public housing properties owned and managed by the city's own Community Corporation of Santa Monica, for years. CCSM's complainers are ignored and dismissed as "troublemakers," according to one tenant I've talked to.

If the city turns a blind eye and deaf ear to these abuses, what else has fallen through the cracks?

How about residential space in mixed-use developments? By including condos or apartments in mixed-use developments, developers receive bonuses such as extra height and density, unavailable in strictly commercial projects. When completed and

"housing space" is leased commercially, that's a code violation and one that's rarely enforced. Worst of all, housing promised is never delivered.

I'm not to sure what's going on but it seems like a lot of people aren't doing their jobs. It's inexcusable that "those in charge" have allowed these situations to happen, let alone continue in a community that says it cares about those in need.

Whether they be school district or city staff, elected politicians or their political appointees, it's a sure bet that if I've heard about these and other maltreatment issues, they have too. It's only after someone "goes public" that those in charge scramble, make excuses or plead outright ignorance. Pathetic, isn't it?

SMC CONSTRUCTION BOND IN THE WINGS?

Rumors are Santa Monica College will probably float another facility construction bond on the November 2008, ballot. I've been told boilerplate is now being drafted by SMC's Marketing Manager Don Girard for Board of Trustees review, possibly next month, so the total dollar amount is not finalized. SMC's press relations manager, Bruce Smith, denies any knowledge of it.

Costs of the bond, if placed on the ballot and approved by voters, will be born by all property owners and renters in the Santa Monica/Malibu Community College District. The college's most recent bond proposal, the \$135-million Measure S was barely approved in the November 2004 election. Measure U, a \$160 million bond proposal, was approved by voters in March 2002. College bonds have raised nearly \$300-million for campus capital improvements in the last six years.

HISTORIC DISTRICT PRESERVED

Last Tuesday, the City Council also told Mark Woollen to go back to the drawing boards. He's the property owner of 2617 Third Street who proposed building a modern, two story "addition" behind a classic 1905 period bungalow in the heart of the "early 20th Century" themed Third Street Historical District in Ocean Park

His neighbors and historic preservationists vigorously opposed the project. City council voted to advise Woollen that he and his architect must make the project more compatible with the surrounding neighborhood in order to get their blessings.

Everyone is happy council finally acknowledged that Woollen's project didn't comply with historic district guidelines. Good decision. It's a victory for preservation and keeps a door open for Woollen to propose an "addition" in an architectural style that's more harmonious with neighborhood character.

BILL can be reached at mr.bilbau@gmail.com

TELL SANTA MONICA WHAT YOU THINK!
WRITE A LETTER TO THE EDITOR
 EMAIL TO: EDITOR@SMDP.COM OR FAX TO (310) 576-9913
 Santa Monica Daily Press Visit us online at smdp.com

PUBLISHER
 Ross Furukawa
 ross@smdp.com

EDITOR IN CHIEF
 Kevin Herrera
 editor@smdp.com

MANAGING EDITOR
 Daniel Archuleta
 daniela@smdp.com

STAFF WRITER
 Melody Hanatani
 melodyh@smdp.com

STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER
 Brandon Wise
 brandonw@smdp.com

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS
 Bill Bauer, David Pisarra, Meredith Carroll, Kenny Mack, Jack Neworth, Lloyd Garver, Seth Barnes, Taylor van Arsdale, Dane Robert Swanson, Ryan Hyatt, Steve Breen, Elizabeth Brown, Maria Rohloff, Merv Hecht, Mike Heayn, Brian Hepp, Mariel Howsepian and Cynthia Citron

NEWS INTERNS
 Chiara Canzi
 news@smdp.com

Jon Haber
 news@smdp.com

PHOTOGRAPHY INTERNS
 Geoffrey Dunn
 news@smdp.com

Morgan Genser
 news@smdp.com

Alexis Hawkins
 news@smdp.com

ADVERTISING SALES MANAGER
 Rob Schwenker
 schwenker@smdp.com

ADVERTISING ACCOUNT EXECUTIVES
 Julie Martinez
 juliem@smdp.com

Robert Hertel
 roberth@smdp.com

ADVERTISING TRAFFIC FACILITATOR
 Amber Kesse
 amberk@smdp.com

OPERATIONS MANAGER
 Connie Sommerville
 connies@smdp.com

PRODUCTION MANAGER
 Robert Summa
 summa@smdp.com

CIRCULATION
 Keith Wyatt
 Osvaldo Paganini
 circulation@smdp.com

Santa Monica Daily Press
 A newspaper with issues

410 Broadway, Suite B
 Santa Monica, CA 90401
 OFFICE (310) 458-PRESS (7737)
 FAX (310) 576-9913

Visit us online at smdp.com

The Santa Monica Daily Press is published six days a week, Monday through Saturday.

19,000 daily circulation, 46,450 daily readership. Circulation is audited and verified by Circulation Verification Council, 2006. Serving the City of Santa Monica, and the communities of Venice Beach, Brentwood, West L.A. Members of CNPA, AFPP, CVC, Associated Press, IFA, Santa Monica Chamber of Commerce.

Published by Newlon Rouge, LLC

© 2006 Newlon Rouge, LLC, all rights reserved.