

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Send comments to editor@smdp.com

Not so fast, City Council

Editor:

Dear Mr. Mayor and City Council Members, Though out of California on business, I've just heard of new developments in the efforts toward arriving at our city's next General Plan, and have been moved to e-mail you with my concerns ...

As you may recall, I've both spoken before you and written to you of the very great travesty I think it will be if much more inappropriate development continues in our small community. And you also likely know that I am not alone in that view. I attended many of the LUCE study workshops. At virtually all of those, a telling number of residents voiced many-sourced pleas advocating a stop to development that would further increase the density and building-height profiles in our city (and further the traffic growth and congestion that generally accompanies such, as well). And still, if I've been accurately informed, recommendation now seems to be proceeding toward acceptance of standards that would sanction much higher building height and base caps than could ever be worth the many harms such development policy must consequently bring to Santa Monica if permitted.

Apparently only councilmembers Genser and McKeown still hold some clear sense about the threat this poses.

With environmental news everywhere adding more and more facts in support of what scientists have been warning, and with winner-loser economies everywhere showing more and more the signs of what wasteful consumption can produce, it is amazing that everyone else on council doesn't also see this. Equally amazing that the RIFT initiative, offered as a tool to assist council, seems viewed instead as a threat and obstacle to its complicated city managing efforts.

The old story of clashing agendas, I guess.

But, trading the quality of life of the residents of a city such as ours for some presumed minority benefit to be gained by answering the endless, destroy-and-rebuild siren call of "more must be better," is a risky gamble to take.

Santa Monica enjoys a special micro-climate. It is no coincidence that Route 66 brought so many precisely here to enjoy its offerings. It flies in the face of reality to continue to think that endless building will bring endless more good commerce and living opportunity here, without causing more great harm to life in this small city than has already occurred.

Call it "bad nimby" or "rational nimby," but a home can accommodate only so many at one time. Glut Santa Monica with development, and it will cease being the place we came here to enjoy. It has even been said that such action will destroy this little "oasis" in L.A.

Beyond just being a gem of a city, Santa Monica aims to be a sustainable city. Unfortunately, much more poorly land-scaled, large and dense, market-rate building here will guarantee the loss of what little remains in this city's stock of truly affordable, repeat, truly affordable housing (low-income or workforce), and make it anything but sustainable.

So ... Please ... Consider further this latest direction in setting development policy.

As always, with great respect for the difficult planning challenges you all face ...

David Latham
Santa Monica



My Write
Bill Bauer

Send comments to editor@smdp.com

LUCE update places walkers before drivers

THE CITY COUNCIL IS STILL REVIEWING the Land Use and Circulation Element (LUCE) update to the city's general plan.

During his presentation last Tuesday, Jeffrey Tumlin, a principal in Nelson\Nygaard, the land use and traffic management consultant working on LUCE, told council that "no new net peak vehicle trips" was a stated LUCE goal. "The transportation system is running up against the peak capacity limitations of our ability to move cars through it. So, we can't accommodate more peak period trips, so lets not plan to."

What? Councilman Ken Genser joined in. "There isn't room to put much more cars, unless we start widening streets which I don't think we are going to do" We don't have to widen streets, Mr. Genser, we just need to undo the damage that you and your political cronies have fostered in your many years on the dais. Then, we could increase street capacity, accommodate more trips and maybe even serve some of those other transportation modes, too.

Over the years, Santa Monica has narrowed and removed vehicular traffic lanes, installed landscaped medians on major thoroughfares, added speed bumps and turn inhibiting, corner curb bumpouts, refused to coordinate traffic signals and more, much more. For years, a "car free Downtown" was a goal of the Santa Monicans for Renters' Rights political organization whose members (including Genser) make up the majority on the council. With this history and now LUCE, there's only one way to change course. I'm talking elections.

Tumlin said, "Transportation is not an end in itself, but a means by which we achieve the larger goals of the community — particularly the sustainability goals imbedded throughout the plan. And, looking at sustainability, not just at it's ecological component but also its social component and economic component." No wonder City Hall does nothing positive about traffic. Transportation planning here isn't about transportation — it's about environmental movements, social interaction and the mixing of the masses. If only I knew.

At least one councilman feels about LUCE the way I do. Bob Holbrook responded, "The question of pedestrian movement trumping automobile movement ... No!" This prompted Tumlin to jump to his feet. "We don't say, 'No one mode trumps another mode.' It's about issues of balance. Is it appropriate to inconvenience one group to provide convenience to another?"

It is in Santa Monica where the city has "inconvenienced" motorists for three decades. We who depend on our own transportation are not only trumped, we're abused and tortured in the name of social justice. LUCE just ratchets up the pain.

Playing up to the bicycle lobbyists in the audience, Tumlin told council the Planning Commission suggested "every street should be a biking street." The commission felt that cyclists of all ages and abilities should feel comfortable on the streets "whether this be achieved by dedicated bike paths, dedicated bike lanes or sufficient traffic calming." Once

again, resources needed by the vast majority of us would be misappropriated for the exclusive use of an elite "pro-environment" few. And, this from our own Planning Commission, no less.

Holbrook responded, "We can't take more blacktop or concrete away from vehicles at this time Most of us [referring to the 90,000 people living in Santa Monica] need to get somewhere at some time during the day." It seems Holbrook has a better handle on planning than the dreamers on the Planning Commission and those working on LUCE.

Addressing concerns about significant slowing of vehicle speed and its impact on police, fire and ambulance response time,

WHILE PROMISING THAT PARKING WILL BE AVAILABLE TO ALL, A KEY ELEMENT OF LUCE IS DE-COUPLING PARKING REQUIREMENTS FROM NEW CONSTRUCTION.

Tumlin suggested adding additional response resources including new fire stations, reallocating personnel and traffic signal overrides to help maintain nationally mandated standards for emergency response. This is called fixing a mistake by expending even more resources. How sustainable is that?

All the double talk and contradictions about creating the perfect traffic mix extends to parking. While promising that parking will be available to all, a key element of LUCE is de-coupling parking requirements from new construction. Housing and commercial developers could provide less on-site parking on the specious theory that lower parking requirements lowers construction costs and cheaper housing, for example.

For years, local developers have been trying to do away with on-site parking because less parking means more space for leasing, ergo more profitable buildings. Where will vehicles go, on maxed-out streets where Tumlin and LUCE promise that parking will be easier for residents, workers and visitors? Go figure.

I don't like this vision of the future. More density. More development, Orange County style cookie-cutter neighborhoods with apartments above "neighborhood serving retail" (boutiques, Pinkberries, wine bars and trendy shops), less space for the primary mode of transportation and more cars searching for on-street parking.

The good news? We're "not trumping motorists." Yeah, and I have a bridge in Brooklyn for sale.

BILL BAUER can be reached at mr.billbau@gmail.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
Alexandra Bissonnette, Alice Ollstein, Michael Middlehurst-Schwartz, Christina Yoon, Nora Casey, Stephanie Taft
news@smdp.com

PHOTOGRAPHY INTERNS
Geoffrey Dunn
news@smdp.com

Morgan Genser
news@smdp.com

ADVERTISING SALES MANAGER
Rob Schwenker
schwenker@smdp.com

ADVERTISING ACCOUNT EXECUTIVES
Julie Martinez
juliem@smdp.com

Robert Hertel
roberth@smdp.com

Erin Collins
erinc@smdp.com

ADVERTISING TRAFFIC FACILITATOR
Amber Kessee
amberk@smdp.com

OPERATIONS MANAGER
Connie Sommerville
connies@smdp.com

PRODUCTION MANAGER
Robert Summa
summa@smdp.com

CIRCULATION
Keith Wyatt
Oswaldo Paganini
circulation@smdp.com

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

Visit us online at smdp.com



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