



Your column here

Kevin McKeown

Send comments to editor@smdp.com

Why Santa Monica needs Proposition T

I'VE BEEN A SANTA MONICA RENTER FOR over 30 years, and have served on our City Council this past 10. Protecting renters and residents, and preserving and creating affordable housing, are among my top priorities.

Like most Santa Monicans, I know that traffic has grown out of control as we've become the shopping and office center for the entire region. That's why I support Prop. T on the Nov. 4 ballot.

Despite years of work on a new Land Use and Circulation Element (LUCE), and consistent concern from residents about traffic and continued development beyond the capacity of our transportation infrastructure, the LUCE still places no limits on cumulative commercial development. Prop. T augments LUCE by providing that desperately needed limit.

Prop. T puts a reasonable annual cap on commercial development in our city, helping to slow the growth in traffic congestion and curb the erosion of our quality of life. You get to vote on this, thanks to the petition signatures of over 10,000 residents — with full support from every one of Santa Monica's five major neighborhood groups.

Slick, deceptive mailers against Prop. T, funded by developers (many of them from out of town), use blatant old-school politics of fear — the same tactics, from the same backers, that we've seen before against a living wage for workers, and against rent control for residents (Prop. 98 last June).

Many of the powers-that-be in this town have personal or organizational interest in unrestrained commercial development. I'm glad residents have the pluck to challenge power. That's how we once saved our Santa Monica Pier, how we stopped ever more luxury hotels on the beach, how we won the protection of rent control.

Desperate to stem the resident rebellion against "business as usual" while traffic gets worse and worse, opponents now claim Prop. T will somehow threaten renters. That's just not true. If I thought Prop. T would hurt renters or affordable housing in our community, I would never endorse it.

Prop. T exempts all housing from the annual cap, because commercial development, not housing, creates the most traffic. Further, the sorts of small local businesses with housing above that we want to see along our transit-served boulevards will go

onto sites now occupied mostly by outdated single-story commercial buildings. Because such mixed-use improvements add housing but don't add commercial space, merely replacing it, Prop. T doesn't apply to them.

Under Prop. T, then, our new housing continues to go where we want it, along transit corridors, where traffic impacts are minimized. Claims that Prop. T would "force" developers into our existing residential neighborhoods, displacing renters, are political scare tactics and nothing more.

I already have a zoning proposal before the council that would preserve existing housing, protecting the scale and character of our neighborhoods.

Prop. T is neutral on housing. It focuses on commercial growth and the traffic it generates. It is the City Council that must act to further protect our residential neighborhoods.

Because Prop. T will limit huge new commercial projects, outside developers with great stakes in such massive construction are funding the scare campaign against Prop. T. Shouldn't decisions on major developments be up to those of us who live here, who must live with the traffic and other impacts?

Prop. T includes a mechanism to put such mega-projects on the ballot, where we residents can weigh the community benefits. Worthy projects will win voter approval.

Last week at a City Council meeting, watchdog residents revealed how tens of millions of dollars in past traffic mitigation fees may have been left uncollected, while developers built huge office complexes that have congested our streets.

If Prop. T were really a threat to funding for essential city services, wouldn't City Hall have been more thorough about collecting past revenues?

Schools, public safety, and social services remain protected priorities. The reality is that Prop. T does not have any effect on near-term city revenues, even by the opponents' own projections.

I think residents deserve a direct voice on massive development agreements. Don't you? Please join me in supporting Proposition T.

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