

## DENY MURALS IN LA

By Gerald A. Silver

The Los Angeles City Council will take up a proposed city-wide Mural Ordinance sometime in July. This ordinance would permit the creation of new Original Art Murals on private property all over the city. The proposal establishes new definitions for "Original Art Mural" to replace the old definition of a "mural sign." It exempts new and existing Original Art Murals from the requirements and prohibitions which apply to murals when regulated as "signs". The proposed ordinance adds a new definition for "Public Art Installation" to ensure that all public art (whether a mural or other object) is treated similarly and not to overlap with the City's regulations pertaining to commercial messages and signage.

What all this means is that, if approved, any commercial or residential property in the city becomes an open canvas to display pictures, drawings, artwork or paintings that any "artist" deems worthy of public display. The concept of publicly displayed murals raises many questions as to what is "art", where, when and how it can be displayed and what rights do individuals have to control what is seen in their field of view? A resident can turn off a distasteful TV show, tune to a different radio station or not read a book or magazine that contains content or images that one feels is distasteful. But under the proposed mural ordinance, residents will be forced to look at images, drawings, pictures or signs on residential property without the ability to "turn off" the image.

Most people do not object to what is considered art when displayed in a private art gallery. Some might object to what art can be displayed in a publicly funded art gallery. But a clear line needs to be drawn on what can be publicly displayed on city streets, commercial buildings and homes. Some believe graffiti is a form of "street art", and that every open space, wall, building or fence is a canvas for "street artists." But should this "artistic expression" be legitimized in a city-wide mural ordinance?

As first proposed by the Planning Dept., murals were excluded from residential properties with fewer than five units. The City Planning Commission reduced the ban on residential properties of two or fewer units. At the Planning and Land Use Management Committee (PLUM) on January 15th the City Attorney was directed to draft an ordinance with no carve-out or exceptions for R1 residential properties. This would permit murals, including those digitally printed on all residential properties to be displayed for a minimum of two years.

This proposed ordinance will have enormous negative impacts on all residential neighborhoods in the City. It would allow tasteless and distracting "artwork" that exceeds the height of a structure to be painted on the sides of homes, garages, fences and facades of single family dwellings. While the ordinance includes a provision that requires those planning to "install" an art mural on their property to do community

outreach, there is no requirement to respond to, act upon or implement comments received from neighbors or the community.

Residents should request that the mural ordinance be revised to not permit murals on any residential buildings anywhere in Los Angeles. Further the proposed ordinance should not apply to any commercial property within the Cahuenga-Ventura Blvd. Specific Plan. The Specific Plan currently does not permit murals on property along Ventura Blvd. This should not be undermined by this ordinance.

To learn more about this proposed ordinance, Council File 11-0923, go to:  
<http://cityclerk.lacity.org/lacityclerkconnect/index.cfm?fa=ccfi.viewrecord&cfnumber=11-0923>

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