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November 20, 2017

The Honorable José Huizar
Chair, Planning and Land Use Management Committee
Los Angeles City Council, c/o City Clerk, Room 395
City Hall, 200 North Spring Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012-4801

Via email: clerk.plumcommittee@lacity.org

Dear Councilmember Huizar,

This letter is in regards to the South Los Angeles (SLA) Community Plan and Southeast Los Angeles (SELA) Community Plan. The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (DPH) would like to provide you with the following information concerning key subject areas captured in the Community Plans that affect the health outcomes of individuals and communities in these regions. I hope the information provided serves to enrich the Community Plans' existing health considerations as well as help us achieve our mutual goal of promoting public health and welfare.

As you know, community design as well as social and economic conditions have a profound impact on the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities. Well-designed communities that encourage physical activity, protect against environmental health threats, and provide adequate opportunities for housing and employment can reduce risk for chronic diseases, respiratory diseases and other illness, and provide the economic resources to afford health expenses and other basic needs. Given these important connections, DPH has a strong interest in ensuring that health-informed research and strategies are considered in community planning processes.

The communities covered by the SLA and SELA Community Plans have some of the highest economic risk factors associated with poorer health status and outcomes. The Community Plans also note that unhealthy land uses are concentrated in these communities. Improving the overall social and economic conditions as well as built environment of these regions could have substantial benefits for the health, longevity, and economic vitality of Los Angeles. We hope the following information assists in ensuring that relevant health determinants are considered in the development of the Community Plans and will support healthy, sustainable neighborhoods in SLA and SELA.

Affordable Housing

It is well known that affordable, stable housing can help buffer families from health issues while unaffordable, unstable housing, including from displacement, contributes to a multitude of health concerns across physical health, mental wellbeing, and ability to afford essential health services.

- Without affordable housing, people are often unable to afford medical care, mental health services, medical prescriptions, and proper nutrition. In LA County, adults who report unaffordable housing are three times as likely to be unable to obtain their prescribed medication.
- People facing unaffordable housing are more likely to describe their health as fair or poor and experience higher rates of depression, stress, and anxiety. In Los Angeles County, adults who report unaffordable housing have more than twice the risk of suffering from major depression.
- Displacement and financial strain contribute to chronic stress, which impacts a range of physical and mental illnesses, such as anxiety, depression, hypertension, obesity, and diabetes.
- Moving frequently leads to housing instability and negatively impacts children, contributing to absenteeism and poor educational achievement, which in turn affect future health outcomes.
- Disruption of social networks, such as from displacement, can lead to additional health risk factors, including fragmented social environments. Cohesive neighborhoods can help buffer adults from stress and contribute to better self-reported physical health.

The Community Plans provide an important opportunity to ensure that SLA and SELA are able to increase and preserve their affordable housing opportunities and ultimately support the health and wellbeing of residents. DPH commends inclusion of some of the comprehensive affordable housing strategies included in the plans to-date, such as affordable housing incentives reflecting Measure JJJ and the Transit Oriented Communities (TOC) guidelines, tenant protections and rights programs (such as right of first refusal for low-income tenants), and policies aimed at tracking and recovering affordable housing loss (i.e. no-net-loss programs). In DPH's health impact assessment on Measure JJJ, DPH found evidence supporting the potential of policies like these in promoting affordable housing and protecting low-income residents from displacement. Provisions that maximize the protection of affordable housing at risk of becoming market-rate, such as policies that ease condo conversions (particularly near transit) may also be beneficial for preserving affordable housing opportunities. Condo conversion policies can include right of first refusal for low-income tenants to purchase individual units or buildings and limiting the number of conversions. The SLA plan includes policy language related to condo conversions while the SELA plan does not.

Economic Opportunity

Economic conditions and socioeconomic status play a profound role in health outcomes and disparities. People with higher socioeconomic status—including higher incomes and stable employment—experience lower rates of chronic disease, live longer, and have better access to care compared to their lower-income counterparts.

- With insufficient income, families are typically forced to forego basic needs, such as medical care or healthy food, and/or move into overcrowded housing to make ends meet.

- Higher levels of economic hardship in Los Angeles County cities and communities is associated with lower life expectancies. Los Angeles City Council Districts 8 and 9 fall within the top 20% of economic hardship as well as the bottom 20% of life expectancy out of Los Angeles County cities and communities.
- In Los Angeles County, women living in poverty are four times more likely to report fair or poor health and twice as likely to be obese or at risk for major depression compared to women with higher incomes.
- Childhood poverty is linked to long-lasting effects limiting life expectancy and contributing to poorer future health outcomes, even if socioeconomic status improves in adulthood.

These connections are particularly important given the high cost of living in Los Angeles. Policies and programs in the Community Plans can help support opportunities for SLA and SELA residents to earn incomes that adequately support their families and contribute to their quality of life and health. The Community Plans have incorporated living wage programs as well as local hiring and job training policies, with an emphasis on those facing barriers to employment. Policies such as these can help increase the income and employment prospects for the regions' most vulnerable residents. Expanded strategies could also include protecting the economic security of small businesses as development increases and rents rise, which aligns with community themes in the SELA and SLA plan to revitalize corridors and support the growth of small and medium-sized businesses. Human Impact Partners, in their health impact assessment on the Reef Development Project slated for SELA, recommended that to reduce financial strain on and displacement of local residents, the City should establish policies to protect small businesses from displacement; and/or developers should provide a share of retail space at discounted rents for community-serving businesses.

Physical Environment and Environmental Quality

As acknowledged in the Community Plans, the built environment, including available parks, opportunities for active transportation and proximity to pollution sources, strongly contributes to physical health and wellbeing.

- In Los Angeles County, park area per capita is associated with childhood obesity. According to research by DPH, Council District 9 falls within the bottom 20% of park area per capita and the top 20% of childhood obesity prevalence by city and community.
- People who live within walking distance of a park are more likely to meet their minimum weekly exercise recommendation. Walking/bicycling to and from public transit can also help meet recommended physical activity levels. In turn, increasing physical activity daily, even moderately, can reduce risk of chronic disease.
- Recreation-based violence prevention programs at parks have been shown to immediately improve the perception of neighborhood safety, and after several years of implementation, show potential to reduce crime.
- Living near heavily trafficked roads is associated with childhood asthma, greater asthma severity and hospitalization for asthma attacks, impaired lung function, reduced lung development in childhood with lifelong implications, lung cancer, and cardiovascular disease and mortality. These associations decrease at greater distances from the pollution source.
- Exposure to air pollution can lead to increases in preterm births, birth defects, school absences and lost work days.

- Motor vehicles are frequently the major contributors of particulate matter and other pollutants. Diesel trucks specifically emit particulate matter with the potential to lead to cancer, premature death, and other health effects.
- Chemical byproducts of oil development activities can lead to a variety of health issues, such as eye, nose and throat irritation; headaches; and worsening of asthma and other respiratory conditions. These risks are heightened for vulnerable populations, such as young children.
- Environmental studies of urban oil drilling have shown that even with emission control measures, drilling operations are associated with health impacts and should not be located close to residents and schools.

The SELA and SLA Community Plans have taken steps to address the connections between the built environment and health by including policies aimed at improving walkability, promoting parks and green space particularly in underserved communities, and protecting residents from sources of air pollution, among other examples. DPH would like to provide additional information related to air quality and sensitive uses near freeways for further consideration as the plans are finalized. Overarching recommended strategies to reduce exposure to air pollution involve separating housing, schools and other sensitive land uses from sources of pollution (such as freeways, refineries, and distribution centers); improving emission standards for vehicles and decreasing motor vehicle dependence; and utilizing mitigation measures (filtration systems, landscaping barriers, etc.) to reduce exposure to air toxics at existing sites near pollution sources. Concerning air quality and siting sensitive land uses near freeways, DPH provides the following additional considerations.

- The CA Air Resources Board recommends that freeways be at least 500 feet away from housing, schools and other sensitive land uses.ⁱ Other research entities, such as the Health Effects Institute, state that exposure to unhealthy traffic emissions may in fact extend to 984 to 1640 feet away from the pollution source.ⁱⁱ
- Both plans include a policy to locate schools 500 feet away from freeways while the SLA plan includes a program mentioning a CPIO ordinance requiring mitigation measures, such as a health risk assessment, for freeway adjacent projects that include residential uses, the SELA plan does not include similar language.
- Consideration should be given to extending a minimum buffer zone based on site-specific conditions given that unhealthy traffic emissions are often present at greater distances. Exceptions to the buffer zone should be made only upon a finding by a decision-making body that the benefits of the development outweigh the public health risks.
- New schools, housing or other sensitive land uses built within 1500 feet of a freeway should adhere to best practice mitigation measures to reduce exposure to air pollution, such as the use of air filtration to enhance heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems.
- New parks built within 1500 feet of freeways should adhere to best practice mitigation measures to minimize exposure to air pollution, such as placing athletic fields and other active outdoor facilities as far as possible from the pollution source.

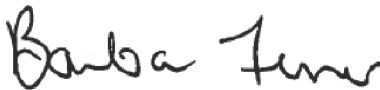
DPH appreciates the extent to which the Community Plans have thus far incorporated health considerations to create goals, policies and programs that will foster sustainable, health-promoting communities in SELA and SLA. I hope that the information provided in this letter may help strengthen health-informed strategies to support the health, longevity, and economic wellbeing for SELA and SLA residents. Additional information on the connections between

socioeconomic status, housing, and health as well as the potential benefits of housing strategies included in Measure JJJ may be found in the following DPH reports available on our website: [*Housing and Health in LA County*](#), [*How Social and Economic Factors Affect Health*](#), and [*Initiative Ordinance JJJ: Affordable and Transit-Oriented Housing Policies for the City of Los Angeles—A Health Impact Assessment*](#).

Thank you for the time and effort the City of Los Angeles has dedicated to the development of these community plans as well as for the City's commitment to working toward the community-driven visions for SELA and SLA. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like additional information on any of the public health topics included in this letter.

Please let me know if you have any questions or need additional information.

Sincerely,



Barbara Ferrer, Ph.D., M.P.H., M.Ed.
Director

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c: Planning and Land Use Management Committee

ⁱ California Environmental Protection Agency. California Air Resources Board. Air Quality and Land Use Handbook: A Community Health Perspective. April 2005.

ⁱⁱ Health Effects Institute. 2010. Traffic-Related Air Pollution: A Critical Review of the Literature on Emissions, Exposure, and Health Effects. HEI Special Report. p.1-11.