Communication from Public

Name:	Casey Maddren, President, UN4LA
Date Submitted:	07/16/2020 08:54 AM
Council File No:	20-0608
Comments for Public Posting:	United Neighborhoods for Los Angeles (UN4LA) submits the attached letter in support of the motion to create an office of Anti-Corruption and Transparency (LA ACT), Council File 20-0608.

United Neighborhoods for Los Angeles

www.un4la.com

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July 15, 2020

Members of the Los Angeles City Council
Los Angeles City Hall
200 N. Spring St.
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Re: Office of Anti-Corruption and Transparency, LA ACT
Council File: 20-0608
SUPPORT

Members of the Los Angeles City Council,

United Neighborhoods for Los Angeles (UN4LA) is a community group formed to foster better planning and better government within the County of Los Angeles, and all cities and unincorporated areas contained within the County's borders. UN4LA's goal is to reach out to all the diverse communities of Los Angeles County and partner with them on issues of concern to them. Among UN4LA's primary areas of focus are planning, development and ethics.

We are writing to voice our strong support for the motion recently presented by Councilmember Ryu, and seconded by Councilmember Koretz, which relates to the formation of the Office of Anti-Corruption and Transparency, LA ACT, Council File: 20-0608. For years citizens of Los Angeles have been voicing concerns that the

project approval process is actually a high stakes "pay-to-play" game. The events of the last few months seem to have confirmed our worst suspicions. As a result of the ongoing Department of Justice investigation, we have so far seen four plea agreements, including admissions of guilt from a former Councilmember, a former member of the City Planning Commission, a former CD 14 staff member, and a development consultant. In June Councilmember Jose Huizar was arrested. He's charged with participating in a long-standing and widespread conspiracy that involved shaking down developers in return for project approvals.

There have been expressions of alarm and disgust from some Councilmembers, but really we've heard way too little, way too late. No doubt some of you will reply that Huizar was an outlier, and that other Councilmembers would never give special consideration to a project as the result of a quid pro quo. Unfortunately, this claim doesn't appear to be supported by the facts. All you have to do is compare campaign contributions logged on the Ethics Commission's web site with a list of major projects that have been approved in recent years to see that there's a close correlation between the two. A quick survey of contributions to PACs seems to drive this point home even more forcefully. We have also noted that almost all projects receive unanimous approval by the members of the City Council, apparently due to the unspoken understanding that "I'll approve your project if you'll approve mine."

What has been the result? We have a glut of high-end housing and a dire shortage of affordable housing. We've seen LA City's homeless population almost double in nine years, from 21,047 in 2011 to 41,290 in 2020. We've seen transit ridership on both Metro and DASH decline steadily since 2013. We've seen the City grant Master CUBs in groups of 10, 20 and 30, with no apparent regard for public health or public safety.

These are the outcomes of an approval process which is not governed by rational planning principles, but instead by a deeply ingrained pay-to-play culture. Because of this, the City of LA is facing a number of crises on multiple fronts, and the public has lost faith in its elected officials. Let's face it. As a result of the DOJ's investigation, the City Council and the Department of City Planning have lost what little credibility they might have had when it comes to project approvals and land use decisions.

The only way to restore the public's faith is to create a watchdog to ensure that we have independent oversight of activities related to land use, development and construction. **We urge the members of the City Council to move quickly to create the Office of Anti-Corruption and Transparency.** Years of inaction on ethics issues have done serious damage to City Hall's credibility. The City Council needs to get its house in order and restore public trust.

Sincerely,
Casey Maddren, President
United Neighborhoods for Los Angeles