

October 15, 2020

Sent via email

Clerk.HomelessnessandPovertyCommittee@lacity.org

Homelessness and Poverty Committee
200 North Spring Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Re: Objection to Motion relative to the feasibility of using the Hollywood Recreation Center facility at 1122 Cole Avenue as interim housing for persons experiencing homelessness in Council District 13;

Council File No. 20-1179: Agenda Item 13

Honorable Chairman O'Farrell and Members of the Committee:

Please include this letter and attachments in the record for the above-referenced matter.
Please include in the record for the council file AND all supplemental records.

The motion presented by Councilmember O'Farrell proposes:

"...City Administrative Officer (CAO) and Bureau of Engineering, with assistance from the Department of Recreation and Parks be instructed to evaluate the feasibility of using the Hollywood Recreation Center facility at 1122 Cole Avenue as interim housing for persons experiencing homelessness in Council District 13."

It also proposes:

"...that the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority be requested to work with staff from Council District 13 and the CAO to identify a service provider and execute a service agreement for the operation of this site as an interim housing facility."

Although the effort to help our unhoused neighbors with shelter is sincerely appreciated and welcomed, the location you have in mind is inappropriate, ill-conceived, and **illegal**. Under City of Los Angeles Charter § 594(c):

"Restrictions on Transfer of Dedicated Parks. All lands heretofore or hereafter set apart or dedicated as a public **park shall forever remain for the use of the public inviolate...**"

Under the Charter, you have no legal right to turn the use of the Hollywood Recreation Center into any type of housing for any length of time. So, any effort toward a feasibility study is a waste of taxpayer money and City resources. Separately, I object to the Community Impact Statement in support of the motion submitted by the Central Hollywood Neighborhood Council ("CHNC"). It's clear the CHNC had no intention of considering what stakeholders had to say on the matter or expected to spend any time for people to voice their opinions in opposition. The September 29, 2020 meeting agenda clearly states:

"Motion to write a CIS in SUPPORT of CF 20-1179....(5 min)" (**See Exhibit 1.**)

During the September 29, 2020 meeting, that discussed the motion, there were more stakeholders that voiced their objections to the motion versus those that were in favor of it. In fact, 2/3 of commenters in favor of the motion work for service providers; only 3 were residents (and even 1 of

those residents also works for a service provider). At a bare minimum, the CHNC board should have remained silent and not submitted any statement whatsoever so as to represent a more accurate position of the community that commented - opposed. Several stakeholders unable to attend asked (as was their right) to have their letters of opposition read out on the forum – they were not. The chair person had a clear conflict of interest as CEO and founder of a business designed to provide a solution to homeless in Hollywood. This was definitely a form of gerrymandering if not as some have said, corruption.

Councilmember O'Farrell seems to forget that families with children and seniors live in Hollywood. His motions and approvals have been geared solely in entertaining tourists and visitors to the area and high-income renters, while completely ignoring and even pushing out the long-standing low and middle income residents. His choosing to consistently pick on the low income Latino families and elderly Russian families shows a complete lack of understanding diversity and equality.

The Hollywood Recreational Center ("HRC") is the **only** one of its kind in Central Hollywood. There are no other parks or Rec centers in Central Hollywood that provide community activities such as afterschool tutoring or indoor basketball or have the sizeable green space that allows for field play such as adult kickball or little league. (**See Exhibit 2.**) There are many residents that live in apartment buildings with no green spaces available to us. Just because the HRC isn't being used due to COVID-19 restrictions doesn't mean that will always be the case. The community intends to make full use of our public spaces as soon as it is safe to do so. To take away the limited amount of outdoor space that exists in Central

¹ The video of the meeting can be found at the following link. I formally request that the clerk download the video from the link to include in the record as required by Consolidated Irrigation Dist. v. Superior Court (2012) 205 Cal.App.4th 697

<https://www.facebook.com/797660056920393/videos/331869947876620>

Hollywood is to tell all residents - housed and unhoused² - that our quality of life can be substantially reduced at any time for any reason.

Your focus should turn to fixing the City's broken shelter system rather than adding to it.

The community shouldn't have to pay the price for the short-sighted project approvals by Councilmember O'Farrell. His endless support and greenlighting of luxury housing in Central Hollywood is part of the reason we have so many unhoused community members. Are we expected to praise him for attempting to "fix" a problem he created?

A new report - The Vacancy Report - by SAJE, ACCE, and UCLA Law (**see Exhibit 3**) has mapped how actions like those of Councilmember O'Farrell directly correlate to the rise in the population of unhoused community members. There seem to be a good number of vacant units throughout the City of LA to house the unhoused. It's simply a matter of the Councilmembers of this Committee redirecting their efforts towards using what's available rather than taking away essential facilities like the HRC from community members. The following are excerpts from The Vacancy Report:

"Simply put, new expensive housing remains disproportionately vacant, thereby failing to free up units for lower-income families....the system of housing production in Los Angeles has created, on the one hand, a surplus supply of high-rent housing with elevated vacancy for new and higher-priced units, and on the other hand, a **massive shortfall of low-cost housing that has contributed to the houselessness crisis.**"

“Vacancy in Los Angeles also has a particular geography. ...vacancy is concentrated in areas with hot housing markets and gentrification, including Downtown, Hollywood...”

“Generally, ...the vast majority of vacant land and many vacant properties are vacant for no reason other than to pad the pockets of the richest investors and corporations, **at a huge cost to communities.**”

2This Council assumes that our unhoused neighbors don't take part in or make use of the HRC activities and facilities in the same manner that the housed community does. That assumption is incorrect.

“...Los Angeles' unbalanced production of luxury housing and the excess vacancy it perpetrates exemplify a speculative housing market that **prioritizes profit for a select few over housing justice for the rest.** ...the speculative housing market results in the overproduction of unaffordable luxury housing at the same time that existing affordable units are destroyed or converted to unaccountable corporate ownership and new affordable units are underproduced. This process is ... a root cause of increased houselessness.

“The inability of tenants to pay rents is a huge driver of houselessness.”

“Houselessness is increasing year after year, yet every night **there are more than enough units sitting vacant to house the entire unhoused population in the city.**”

A report from the Los Angeles Housing + Community Investment Department (“HCID”) (**see Exhibit 4**), referenced in The Vacancy Report, discusses the high number of vacant units in the City. If City Councilmembers would use the same energy put into approving luxury units as they do sheltering our unhoused community, we might actually make a dent in lowering the number of folks living on the street.

“HCIDLA estimates a citywide vacancy rate between 6% to 7% amounting to approximately 85,000 to 100,000 empty units...In analyzing vacancy data, HCIDLA found that higher-end, 4 or 5 star-rated dwelling units (as defined by CoStar) are disproportionately vacant while mid- and low-end units have especially low vacancy rates Further, neighborhoods with a greater proportion of new, high-end units have some of the highest vacancy rates in the City..”

The City of LA has endlessly broken shelter and supportive housing systems. Creating a new one will solve nothing. Councilmembers need to focus on restructuring existing systems and proper management of current supportive housing facilities so our unhoused neighbors can finally get the shelter, support and guidance they need for their physical and mental well-being.

In April of this year, housing advocates made a plea to Councilmembers Martinez and O'Farrell to repurpose a 22-story apartment complex with 299 units that has been vacant for more than 3 years!

“The activists are urging the City Council to use eminent domain to save thousands of L.A.'s unhoused residents from certain death, by opening the ...vacant units to families immediately.” (**See Exhibit 5.**)

Five months later, the building remains empty but this Committee sees fit to take away a community's Rec center rather than seek alternatives that are brought to the attention of its Chair.

Our unhoused community deserves better than whatever is planned for the HRC.

During the pandemic and even before, unhoused folks have steered clear of shelters because they're considered to be health hazards at best. The beds are too close together and the facilities are poorly maintained. Unhoused folks are not always allowed to bring all of their things with them, so they have to give up some or most of their belongings. Curfews make it difficult for employed folks to return to the shelter before doors shut them out. It's not a worthwhile trade from living on the streets.

"...[Hal] and his partner set up camp on the street around the corner from the shelter, just a few blocks from where they'd been before. Despite having gone through the system, and been at the site for more than 90 days, Hal was little closer to finding housing than he was when he first decided to move into the shelter." (See **Exhibit 6**.)

"Eve Garrow, who works on homeless issues for the American Civil Liberties Union, said she's heard complaints of homeless people getting sick in shelters with body lice, head lice and other communicable diseases like MRSA, an infection that is resistant to treatment with many antibiotics...

"Mold in the bathrooms, blood on the walls, just a variety of issues that are really unacceptable," she said. "People with disabilities may try to use shelters and very quickly decide they're unable to manage their mental health conditions in those shelter spaces." (See **Exhibit 7**.)

What kind of system would have people choose living on the street instead of under cover from the elements? LA's system - the same system that has done nothing but increase the number of people living in cars and in alleys and by the river year after year. Repurposing the HRC won't help. You're only harming the people that use it.

"I don't think we should take the approach that all the money should be invested in just emergency or bridge housing without an exit strategy. Because then what we're doing is we're essentially warehousing people indefinitely," said Maceri.... Maceri worries that more shelter beds means more people living long-term in congregate shelter settings, which are not a substitute for housing." (See **Exhibit 8**.)

The motion doesn't state a time frame for operating the "interim housing." How long will it take to construction? Is the idea to use the basketball court inside the HRC as a shelter, or build tents or pods on the fields outside? Will there be an environmental review? Maybe these issues will be addressed once the CAO and other departments "evaluate the feasibility" of the motion. For all the reasons I've stated above, such an evaluation should not take place. This Committee needs to **abide by the law**, make better use of taxpayer dollars, pay attention to the experts that have created the enclosed reports, and listen to constituents – not service providers. We have to live with the consequences of your decisions. Our housed and unhoused community deserve better.

Sincerely,

Gordon Fraser
Stakeholder