

Communication from Public

Name: SCANPH, Inner City Law Center, Abundant Housing LA, and partner organizations

Date Submitted: 06/06/2024 09:27 AM

Council File No: 23-0623

Comments for Public Posting: The Southern California Association of Nonprofit Housing (SCANPH), Inner City Law Center, Abundant Housing LA, and 12 partner organizations write to express our strong support for the Affordable Housing Streamlining Ordinance (CF 23-0623). We also want to share recommendations concerning recent proposals that we believe may hinder affordable housing development in Los Angeles. Please see the attached letter.

SCANPH
SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION OF NONPROFIT HOUSING



INNER CITY LAW CENTER

LA FAMILY HOUSING



June 4, 2024

Councilmember Harris-Dawson
Los Angeles City Hall Office
200 N. Spring St Room 460
Los Angeles, CA 90012
(213) 473 - 7008

Dear Councilmember Harris-Dawson,

We, the undersigned organizations, are writing to express our strong support for the Affordable Housing Streamlining Ordinance (CF 23-0623) and to propose improvements to the measure to ensure that it contributes to the development of affordable housing in all our communities, especially communities that have long excluded Los Angeles' Black, brown, and low-income families.

Both nonprofit affordable and privately-financed housing developers have experienced significant improvements in permitting and processing times thanks to Executive Directive 1 (ED 1). Project timelines have been streamlined, with many moving through development processes months faster. This improved efficiency not only enhances the viability of affordable housing projects but also reduces costs. As research by the Turner Center in December 2023 highlights, providing certainty in project timelines directly correlates with lower construction expenses.¹ We are therefore delighted that the City is progressing towards codifying these enhancements through the Affordable Housing Streamlining Ordinance.

We commend the City for incorporating feedback from the affordable housing development community and pro-housing advocacy organizations into the initial draft of the ordinance, particularly our request for greater flexibility regarding incentives. This responsiveness demonstrates a commitment to collaboration and a shared goal of fostering affordable housing development in our communities.

However, recent proposals to cap the number of qualifying affordable housing projects per Council district, exempt rent stabilized buildings from these streamlined approvals processes, and bar ED1 projects in historic preservation zones (HPOZ) threaten to limit the development of affordable housing our city needs. While we appreciate the intention to promote an equitable distribution of projects while protecting vulnerable renters—goals in line with the Housing Element's objective to spread affordable housing opportunities across the city, especially in higher opportunity areas—we fear these specific policies would impede rather than advance affordable housing development in Los Angeles.

Reporting from the LA Times found that ED1 has resulted in the permitting of over 46 affordable homes for every rent-stabilized unit that is proposed to be demolished.² LAMC 151.28 requires that the new projects replace RSO units and that the replaced units be rented at the previous rate while remaining rent stabilized. While efforts should be made to avoid the displacement of any

¹ Garcia, Carlton, Patterson, and Strawn; "Making It Pencil: The Math Behind Housing Development (2023 Update);" 13-14; [link](#).

² Zahniser and Pineda; "L.A. is fast-tracking affordable housing. Some say those projects are pushing them out;" [link](#).

family whenever possible, barring 100% affordable projects from this streamlining ordinance will only further the shortage of affordable housing, increase rents, and increase the likelihood that low-income tenants are displaced from their homes and communities. The city should focus on providing robust support to tenants to find new homes while their replacement units are built rather than implementing a blanket exemption for rent-stabilized buildings.

Barring the development of 100% affordable housing in HPOZs privileges historic buildings over people. While objective standards can be used to require that affordable projects meet desired design standards, discretionary processes have time and time again been used by wealthy community members to stop the development of affordable housing.³ Our city ought not to be a museum or a playground accessible only to the wealthy. Los Angeles should strive to be a city for all of our residents, young and old, poor and rich, Black, Latino, Asian, White, and Indigenous. But we cannot be a city for all without affordable housing for all.

Developing housing is a complex, lengthy process requiring meticulous planning and substantial investment long before seeking entitlement approvals. Ensuring permit availability from the project's outset is crucial for developers. Imposing a cap risks stalling projects needlessly or deterring developers from areas where caps are already met, which would undermine our city's housing production goals.

The zoning code of the City of Los Angeles results in multifamily housing being primarily developed in South LA, East LA, and low-income communities in the San Fernando Valley. Los Angeles needs more housing and affordable housing for all our current residents. We must eliminate policies that place the bulk of new development in low-income communities while wealthy communities are allowed to maintain the racist status quo. Urgency dictates a comprehensive approach to housing, encompassing all income brackets. However, encouraging development in high-opportunity areas without challenging single-family zoning lacks efficacy, given that approximately 76 percent of residential parcels in these areas are restricted to single-family use.

The historical record is clear: The preservation of single-family zones has been a key tool to enforce racial and economic segregation in the City of Los Angeles.⁴ Without addressing this fundamental barrier, true desegregation remains elusive. The best solution to reduce segregation in Los Angeles and ensure that affordable housing is built in every community is to allow the use of the Affordable Housing Streamlining Ordinance in single-family zones. This adjustment not only aligns with existing state and local incentives, facilitating greater density and flexibility for developers, but also shifts development capacity away from low-income communities. and corresponds with the city's commitment to furthering fair housing.

In short, attempting to push ED 1 projects into these resource-rich neighborhoods without tackling exclusionary zoning will not address the root causes behind the inequitable distribution of

³ See examples in [Westchester](#), [Venice](#), and [Long Beach](#).

⁴ Mandel, "The Coveted Westside: How the Black Homeowners' Rights Movement Shaped Modern Los Angeles," 2022, [link](#); Seo, "HANCOCK PARK: As Urban Woes Threaten, Residents of This Exclusive Enclave Are Fighting To Preserve The Status Quo," [link](#); Meares, "When Nat King Cole moved in," [link](#).

affordable housing in Los Angeles. Instead, it will dilute the benefits of ED 1 altogether and create a further setback in how our City approaches affordable housing production.

Reforming restrictive zoning is a challenging task that will undoubtedly garner opposition. But, without fundamentally changing zoning to allow for a dramatic increase in multi-family housing throughout this City, we will never be able to truly address the critical shortage of affordable housing and solve the homelessness crisis. We urge you to spend the political capital to dismantle exclusionary zoning and we commit to standing with you as you face objections.

Beyond removing the single-family zone exclusion, we also urge you to grant additional design flexibility to projects that are challenging to produce financially, including those in high opportunity areas. Specifically we recommend that the City amend limitations on waivers and incentives in multifamily residential zones, exempting the following from limitations (i), (ii), and (iii) in the amended draft ordinance:

1. Projects in high or highest resource census tracts.
2. Projects offering accommodations or supportive services to tenants with special needs.
3. Projects with at least 60% of units having 2 or more bedrooms.
4. Senior housing projects.
5. Adaptive reuse projects.

This approach strikes a balance, by recognizing the city's desire to implement objective standards designed to preserve neighborhood patterns, while providing additional design flexibility for projects necessary to fulfill our legal obligation to Affirmatively Further Fair Housing.

In addition, we recommend two amendments that will increase the efficacy of the ordinance.

First, we propose removing Eligibility Requirement Two, which duplicates existing density standards in state and local programs, and leads to confusion due to differing base density definitions. This exclusion could prevent development on many RD2-zoned multifamily lots unless they are combined, and therefore would effectively require larger projects in lower-density neighborhoods compared to higher-density ones.

Second, we suggest refining the draft ordinance's new open space and tree planting rules. We commend the Department's commitment to expanding the city's tree cover and ensuring access to open space, but the current unit-based requirements pose challenges for affordable housing projects with many small apartments. Additionally, certain regulations limit options for providing open space, such as on roof decks. We propose allowing for alternative standards: one tree per 2,000 sq ft of total lot area, rounded up, and 20% of total lot area for open space. These adjustments would support a healthy tree canopy and sufficient open space without adding unnecessary costs or logistical hurdles.

In conclusion, we advocate for a thoughtful approach to address the affordable housing crisis in Los Angeles. We understand that long-standing policies have led to the inequitable distribution of affordable housing we see in our City today, and we welcome future opportunities to collaborate with City Council on this issue. At the same time, we believe that opening up ED1 processing for single-family zones and adjusting multifamily residential limitations can significantly contribute to achieving our desired outcomes without inadvertently stifling development.

We appreciate your dedication to this crucial issue and firmly believe that implementing our suggested changes will sustain the remarkable success of ED1. We urge you to support this initiative and schedule the ordinance for consideration with PLUM.

Sincerely,

Tiffany Spring
Policy Manager
Southern California
Association of NonProfit
Housing (SCANPH)



Scott Epstein
Director of Policy and
Research
Abundant Housing LA



Mahdi Manji
Director of Public Policy
Inner City Law Center



Stephanie Klasky-Gamer
Chief Executive Officer
LA Family Housing

Holly Benson
President and CEO
Abode Communities



Monique Davis
CEO
WORKS

Erich Nakano
Executive Director
Little Tokyo Service Center



Tara Barauskas
Executive Director
Community Corporation of
Santa Monica

Michael Ruane
President
National CORE

Sarah Letts
Executive Director
Hollywood Community
Housing Corporation

Kevin Murray
CEO
Weingart Center Association



Nella McOsker
President & CEO
Central City Association of
Los Angeles



Katie Hill
Deputy Director
Homeless Outreach Program
Integrated Care System

Dr. Ryan J. Smith
President and CEO
St. Joseph Center



Dexter O'Connell
Director of Youth Policy and
Advocacy
Safe Place for Youth

Cc: Mayor Bass
Councilmember Hernandez
Councilmember Krekorian
Councilmember Blumenfield
Councilmember Raman
Councilmember Yaroslavsky
Councilmember Padilla
Councilmember Rodriguez
Councilmember Price
Councilmember Hutt
Councilmember Park
Councilmember Lee
Councilmember Soto-Martinez
Councilmember De Leon
Councilmember McCosker