

Communication from Public

Name:

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Council File No: 25-1083

Comments for Public Posting: I am writing in opposition to the letter arguing that additional housing near the Expo/Bundy Station should be curtailed in order to protect the remaining single-family pocket west of Bundy in Sawtelle. The historical context raised is real and important. Sawtelle absorbed density due to exclusionary land-use practices that pushed Japanese and Latino families into this area when other Westside neighborhoods were closed to them (City of Los Angeles Planning Dept., Sawtelle CPA Profile; Mapping Inequality Project, Univ. of Richmond). That history deserves acknowledgment. However, it does not justify freezing land-use patterns today in a way that restricts access to one of the most transit-rich locations on the Westside. Equity requires expanding access, not preserving scarcity. Protecting a small single-family enclave within a half-mile of high-capacity rail disproportionately benefits existing property owners while constraining future residents, including working-class households the City claims to prioritize (California Housing Partnership, *Confronting the Housing Affordability Crisis*, 2023). Sawtelle cannot be exempted from growth on the grounds that it “already absorbed density.” Density is not a one-time obligation. Infrastructure investments like the E Line fundamentally change land-use responsibility, and zoning should reflect present-day access to jobs and transit, not past planning failures (SCAG, *Connect SoCal*, 2020). Claims that SB 79–style upzoning is exclusionary because it produces mostly studios and one-bedroom units misidentify the problem. Smaller units reflect market feasibility and unmet demand in high-cost, job-rich areas (Keyser Marston Associates, *Affordable Housing Feasibility Analysis*, 2022). Many seniors, single parents, service workers, and young adults actively seek smaller, transit-oriented housing (UCLA Lewis Center, *Housing Demand and Household Formation*, 2021). Blocking this housing pushes these households farther from jobs, increasing displacement, commute times, and emissions (CARB, *SB 375 Progress Report*, 2022). Single-family zoning does not protect families. High land values, maintenance costs, and inheritance pressures routinely displace multigenerational households regardless of zoning (Turner Center for Housing Innovation, *Exclusionary Zoning and Family Displacement*, 2023). Allowing moderate multifamily housing near transit creates more options for families to remain in place

over time. Most critically, arguments to limit growth must be evaluated against the City's failure to deliver housing under existing programs. Los Angeles is required to plan for approximately 456,000 new units this RHNA cycle, including over 180,000 lower-income units (SCAG, RHNA Final Allocation, 2021). Actual production is far behind, particularly for affordable housing (CA Dept. of Housing and Community Development, APR Review, 2023). The Citywide Housing Incentive Program (CHIP), frequently cited as an alternative to by-right density, has produced limited housing relative to need. Its reliance on discretionary approvals, overlays, and environmental review introduces years of delay and significant project risk, undermining feasibility near transit (LA Planning Dept., Housing Element Implementation Progress Report, 2024). Similarly, local affordability programs continue to underperform, with entitlement timelines often exceeding three to five years and many projects failing to break ground (LAHD, Affordable Housing Pipeline Report, 2023; UCLA Lewis Center, Entitlement Delay and Housing Production, 2022). Declining LAUSD enrollment further reflects this failure. District enrollment has fallen roughly 40–45% since its early-2000s peak (LAUSD, Enrollment Trends Report, 2023). Families are not leaving transit-rich neighborhoods by choice; they are being priced and zoned out (PPIC, California's Housing Shortage, 2022). Preserving low-density zoning next to rail pushes families to distant regions, undermining climate, equity, and mobility goals. Protecting the last single-family homes west of Bundy is not a neutral act. Given the City's consistent inability to deliver housing at scale, blocking assemblage and density near one of the Westside's most significant transit investments entrenches scarcity and exclusion. Allowing additional housing near the Expo/Bundy Station is not a rejection of Sawtelle's history — it is a commitment to ensuring that future generations are not excluded from opportunity by repeating past mistakes under a different name.

I am writing in opposition to the letter asserting that further housing opportunity near the Expo/Bundy Station should be curtailed in order to protect the remaining single-family pocket west of Bundy in Sawtelle.

The historical context described in that letter is real and important. Sawtelle did absorb density as a result of exclusionary and discriminatory land-use practices, and Japanese and Latino families were pushed into this area when other Westside neighborhoods were closed to them (City of Los Angeles Planning Dept., *Sawtelle Community Plan Area Profile*; Mapping Inequality Project, Univ. of Richmond). That history deserves acknowledgment. However, it does not logically support freezing land-use patterns today in a way that continues to restrict access to opportunity-rich, transit-adjacent neighborhoods.

Acknowledging past exclusion should lead to expanding access — not limiting it. The conclusion that the last remaining single-family area west of Bundy should be protected from change effectively preserves a low-density enclave within one of the most transit-rich locations on the Westside. That outcome disproportionately benefits current property owners while constraining future residents, including many of the same families and communities that housing policy is meant to serve (California Housing Partnership, *Confronting the Housing Affordability Crisis*, 2023).

It is also inaccurate to frame Sawtelle as having already “carried the district’s density burden” in a way that justifies exemption from further growth. Density is not a one-time obligation that can be satisfied and then locked in perpetuity. Cities evolve. Infrastructure investments such as the E Line (Expo) fundamentally change land-use responsibility (SCAG, *Connect SoCal*, 2020). The relevant question is not whether Sawtelle absorbed growth decades ago under discriminatory conditions, but whether today’s zoning allows equitable access to jobs, transit, and amenities in the present and future.

The argument that SB 79 and related state density frameworks primarily produce studios and one-bedroom units similarly misidentifies the problem. Smaller units are not evidence of exclusion; they are evidence of unmet demand. Regional feasibility studies prepared for Los Angeles County show that market conditions in coastal job-rich areas strongly favor smaller units due to land costs and financing constraints (Keyser Marston Associates, *Affordable Housing Feasibility Analysis*, 2022). Many households — including seniors, single parents, service workers, caregivers, and young adults from working-class backgrounds — actively seek smaller, transit-oriented housing near employment and services (UCLA Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies, *Housing Demand and Household Formation*, 2021).

Preventing this housing from being built does not preserve family life; it pushes these households farther away, increasing commute times, displacement pressure, and greenhouse gas emissions (CARB, *SB 375 Progress Report*, 2022).

Moreover, existing single-family zoning does not guarantee long-term family stability. High land values, rising maintenance costs, inheritance challenges, and speculative pressure routinely

displace multigenerational households regardless of zoning designation (Turner Center for Housing Innovation, *Exclusionary Zoning and Family Displacement*, 2023). By contrast, allowing moderate multifamily housing near transit creates more pathways for families to remain in place over time — including stacked flats, townhomes, and mixed-size developments — outcomes that are categorically foreclosed when assemblage is blocked.

Arguments for limiting growth in Sawtelle must also be evaluated against the City of Los Angeles’s documented failure to deliver housing under its existing policy tools. In the current 6th-cycle Regional Housing Needs Allocation, Los Angeles is required to plan for approximately 456,000 new housing units, including over 180,000 units affordable to lower-income households (SCAG, *RHNA Allocation Final Determination*, 2021). Yet housing production continues to lag dramatically behind those targets, particularly for lower- and moderate-income units (California Department of Housing and Community Development, *Annual Progress Report Review*, 2023).

Programs frequently cited as alternatives to by-right upzoning have not delivered meaningful results. The Citywide Housing Incentive Program (CHIP), adopted as part of the Housing Element to encourage housing through discretionary incentives and overlays, has produced limited housing relative to need (City of Los Angeles Planning Dept., *Housing Element Implementation Progress Report*, 2024). CHIP relies heavily on site-specific approvals, environmental review, and political discretion, all of which introduce years of delay, litigation risk, and financing uncertainty. These structural weaknesses significantly limit its ability to deliver housing at scale, particularly near transit, where predictability is critical to feasibility.

Similarly, local affordability programs have underperformed. Despite repeated updates to density bonus implementation, Los Angeles continues to produce a small fraction of the deed-restricted affordable units required to stabilize rents and prevent displacement (LA Housing Department, *Affordable Housing Pipeline Report*, 2023). Entitlement timelines frequently exceed three to five years, a delay that is widely cited by developers and nonprofit builders as a primary reason projects fail to advance (UCLA Lewis Center, *Entitlement Delay and Housing Production*, 2022).

The critique of the “15-minute city” as aspirational rather than operational does not argue against transit-oriented housing; it argues against continuing a planning framework that fails to align land use with infrastructure investment. SCAG itself notes that proximity-based access improves only when residential density reaches sufficient thresholds to support services, transit ridership, and local retail (SCAG, *Equity and Access Analysis*, Connect SoCal, 2020). Refusing to add housing near rail because amenities are imperfect today guarantees that those amenities will never materialize.

Declining LAUSD enrollment further reflects this failure. District-wide enrollment has declined by approximately 40–45% from its early-2000s peak (LAUSD, *Enrollment Trends Report*, 2023). Families are not leaving transit-rich neighborhoods because they prefer sprawl; they are leaving because zoning and housing policy have failed to produce enough attainable, appropriately sized housing near jobs and schools (Public Policy Institute of California, *California’s Housing Shortage*, 2022). Preserving low-density zoning next to high-capacity transit pushes families to

the Inland Empire and other peripheral regions, directly undermining climate, equity, and mobility goals.

Protecting the last remaining single-family homes west of Bundy may be framed as recognition of historical burdens, but in practice it entrenches a new form of exclusion — one based on who already owns property rather than who needs access to opportunity. When the City's existing housing programs have repeatedly failed to deliver at scale, blocking assemblage and density near one of the Westside's most significant transit investments is not a neutral act. It is a policy choice that exacerbates scarcity, displacement, and inequity.

True equity requires expanding access, not preserving artificial scarcity. Allowing assemblage and additional housing near the Expo/Bundy Station is not a rejection of Sawtelle's history. It is a commitment to ensuring that future generations are not excluded from it by the same structural barriers — repackaged under a different name.