



Alejandro Huerta <alejandro.huerta@lacity.org>

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## Crossroads Hollywood Project, Draft Environmental Impact Report Comments Case No: ENV – 2015-2026 – EIR

1 message

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**Margot** <margot@americancinematheque.com>  
To: "alejandro.huerta@lacity.org" <alejandro.huerta@lacity.org>

Wed, Jul 26, 2017 at 1:12 AM

July 25, 2017

Alejandro A. Huerta  
Environmental Review Coordinator  
Major Projects & Environmental Analysis  
Dept. of City Planning  
City Hall, City of Los Angeles  
200 N. Spring St., Room 750  
Los Angeles CA 90012

**Re: Crossroads Hollywood Project, Draft Environmental Impact Report Comments**  
**Case No: ENV – 2015-2026 – EIR (SCH NO 2015101073)**

Dear Mr. Huerta:

I am deeply concerned about the ramifications of the Crossroads Project on Hollywood, an area where I have worked in for the past 25 years. I've come to know this area quite intimately at all hours of the day and night, as a result of having worked out of the Roosevelt Hotel (when Hollywood was so desolate, that even the panhandlers left, because there was no one to panhandle); 1717 N. Highland (demolished for Hollywood & Highland) and 1800 N. Highland (just north of the Boulevard). Hollywood is an area that just can't seem to catch a break. Every time it looks like the neighborhood is starting to thrive, we start losing independent restaurants and other small businesses again.

My office is currently located at the landmark Egyptian Theatre at 6712 Hollywood Boulevard, an address that has been on the Boulevard for 95 years come October 18<sup>th</sup>. You could truly say that I was educated about Hollywood, on the streets (of Hollywood). My observations of life in this area are from first-hand experience. When I began to acquaint myself with this development project, it became clear that it is based on a very seriously flawed conception of how land should be used in Hollywood.

Harridge Development has an opportunity to help build a real residential neighborhood, but they insist on over densifying an already congested area and bringing in a monstrous hotel that will create vice in the neighborhood. At present, I can walk to Selma and Las Palmas at 4 AM and it is a quiet, EMPTY residential street. There are not criminals or menace lurking around every corner - once the club kids disappear. During the day we have a large population of Musicians Institute and Make Up Academy students, as well as school kids from Hollywood High and the local elementary schools

walking around the area. These streets are not suffering from urban blight, in fact, they are quite the opposite with their beautiful bright yellow and pink flowering trees!

“Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody.”

— **Jane Jacobs, [The Death and Life of Great American Cities](#)**

The legacy of author/activist Jane Jacobs in New York City in the 1960s, is probably well known to City Planners, but the story of how she challenged NYC City Planner Robert Moses’ destruction of organically derived neighborhoods, to build a “modern city” - that ultimately didn’t work, was new to me, as a native Los Angelino. My discovery of her work was through the recent documentary, CITIZEN JANE: BATTLE FOR THE CITY, directed by Los Angeles native and journalist, Matthew Tyrnauer. I highly recommend that the L.A. City Planning Department watch this film (available on Netflix), because the trajectory of the urban planning story told in this film is very relevant to what is going on in L.A. right now. It also goes into the case study of how the urban “projects” that low income New Yorkers were forced into, bred crime, vandalism and resentment and are considered a huge failure. On some level, this seems like a cautionary tale for L.A., even though we are mostly talking about so called “luxury,” not section 8 housing.

Essentially developers are deciding how people should live in Los Angeles. They are wiping out the very lifestyle this city is known for – the garden apartments, the proximity to nature when you walk out your front door, the low-rise cityscape that doesn’t block the sun... These developments are even privatizing the view of the Hollywood Sign, a reason those 11 million tourists the statistics cite, come to Hollywood. This development will block the sign from general view, but if you pay for their \$1000+ bottle service on the roof of the hotel, you can glimpse this public landmark.

The trend in residential development appears to be nothing more than figuring out how to fit as many “human containers boxes” into the overall footprint of a giant generic fortress of a “housing box.” It squeezes every last inch out of the land parcel in all directions. Tower living is not native to Los Angeles with some very rare exceptions.

So why do I care about this?

I care about the fact that this is a total missed opportunity to invigorate Hollywood. As proposed, this is not the type of housing that builds community in the form of a population of long term residents. It promotes transience and the rise of ghost apartments (defined as housing that is not inhabited, but serves as a tax shelter and can have adverse effects on rents or real estate prices). The realities of living in a building like this, is that it is not a lifestyle that many people will tolerate for an extended period of time.

THIS AREA COULD BE SO MUCH MORE IF THE RIGHT TYPE OF HOUSING WERE BUILT - HOUSING THAT EMULATES THE GARDEN APARTMENT DESIGN OF THE THREE EXISTING BUILDINGS THAT HAVE BEEN ON PART OF THIS LAND SINCE 1939. THESE PRE-WAR APARTMENTS ARE LARGER THAN MODERN APARTMENTS. THEY OFFER A PLEASANT GARDEN FOR FAMILIES TO USE. THEY LET IN LIGHT AND ALLOW PEOPLE TO BE IN TOUCH WITH THE ENVIRONMENT, AS OPPOSED TO ISOLATING THEM IN THE SKY. IT WOULDN'T BE AS DENSE, BUT THIS TYPE OF HOUSING IS WHAT HOLLYWOOD NEEDS. IT CAN FUNCTION AS A LONG-TERM HOME FOR PERSONS WHO CANNOT AFFORD TO BUY A HOUSE IN L.A. KEEP THE APARTMENTS AND BUILD MORE LIKE THEM.

No one is likely to actually live in these planned tower apartments for more than the duration of one lease cycle, once they experience the challenges of living in a 30-story tower where they will have to wait too long for the elevator to go downstairs when the residents of the entire building are trying to get to work, or get upstairs after work - or when they realize they have to run down an excessive number of flights of stairs in the event of an emergency - or they experience their first earthquake while living high in the sky (and this area does shake – just check out the photos of the damage to the Egyptian Theatre after the 1994 quake). Or perhaps they don’t like living next door to a giant hotel with several

throbbing discos – or next to an Air B & B that crops up in a vacant unit. Or maybe life just changes for them and they marry or have children and need amenities this tower cannot provide.

It is human nature to pull up stakes and move on when conditions become challenging, adverse, inconvenient or demoralizing. Just fighting to get through crowds of drunk club-goers when you walk home from that metro station will eventually be enough to signal “It’s time to move.” The lifespan of a tenant satisfied by life in the middle of a 24-hour wild party is probably pretty short lived.

A 30-story building is not safe for the disabled or elderly or small children, because they are unlikely to be able to get down all those stairs in the event of an emergency.

This type of housing is a way station. Its sustainability depends on thousands and thousands of new people moving to L.A. every year, to replace the persons who came before - and so on and so on. And this is only one of many apartment, loft and condo complexes flooding the market. There is literally one on every corner.

Hollywood does not need a mega-development with few full-time residents populating the units and a giant Las Vegas type of hotel that will create a public nuisance and actually drive tenants of the residential part of the development OUT! There are already about 18 planned and completed hotels within a mile of this proposed project. Once they attract the high roller tourists, where are these tourists going to go in Hollywood? Until the Boulevard gets the promised (since at least 2004 based on an old newsletter I found recently) adaptive re-use going, tourists are most likely to hop a train to Universal Studios or take the redline to downtown LA which offers a hipper, more authentic experience (not to dismiss our beloved heritage restaurants Musso & Frank’s and Miceli’s in this immediate vicinity.

Even so, my friends and I frequently go downtown for events and to drink and dine in the cool historic buildings that have been adaptively re-used. If you look at popular bars, they are ALL in historic buildings. It ain’t hip to drink in a mixed-use new construction development.

Harridge Development can look at stacks of statistics on how many tourists come to Hollywood or how many people are projected to move to Los Angeles by 2024 who need to live by a subway station, etc., but what they can’t do is get an eyes on the street perspective of what it is like to be in Hollywood at all hours of the day and night, to really understand what COULD make Hollywood a better place, and what could make it worse.

What else fosters community and entices people into an area? Maybe some unique small businesses housed in historic buildings? This development project instead will put the coffee house Javista (at Las Palmas and Sunset) out of business (their building is slated for demo and the owners say they don’t have the money to move and start again). In just a few short years this has become a beloved institution in the community with quality food and beverage and it is always packed. Then there is the chiropractor Dr. Jara who operates out of a perfectly maintained historic bungalow. Her building is also slated to be obliterated.

On social media there are no shortage of people who fancy themselves pro-development gurus. They throw out concepts they’ve heard about, like Los Angeles’ need for “affordable housing” and “density at all costs” credos. Then they talk about a carless utopia where everyone lives walking distance from work and they only use the subway. I am going out on a limb here, but I suspect most of these arm chair city planners own single family homes and a car, but they know what’s good for “other people” on the superhighway to L.A.’s utopian future.

This is not my reality.

Using myself as an example, I work in Hollywood and live about three miles south of the Egyptian Theatre. It can take me about 30-40 minutes on a bad traffic (usually caused by heavy construction these days) day to drive 3 miles to get to work (late at night I can get home in 8-10 minutes). Now let’s say that in about 18 months I wanted to try to rent an apartment in the Mill Creek housing that is currently being built directly behind the Egyptian Theatre. Sounds like a dream. I can walk to work, right? Then let’s say we already know that the developer is planning to charge \$2500-\$5000 (depending on unit size) per month, which is way out of my price range based on the salary my non-profit employer can

provide. So what am I supposed to do to be a good citizen in the new L.A.? I don't live within walking distance of a metro station. The bus or Uber or any form of surface street transportation is still adding to the congestion at the "F" rated intersections in the surrounding area. Do I get a new job closer to home since I won't have anywhere to park at work in a year's time and I can't afford to move and the traffic will make it really hard to get into Hollywood so driving my car probably isn't an option.

Then there is my assistant who has not experienced a housing shortage. She has experienced a shortage of housing that comes anywhere close to a rent she can afford, despite the fact that she works full-time. My assistant who is in her mid-20s, has been sharing a two bedroom apartment in Studio City between four young women for the past three years. She has finally had her fill of this lack of privacy and has gone to see almost 100 apartments all over the city, yet she can't find a one-bedroom in her \$1900/month price range. When she found one that sounded promising for \$1200, it turned out that it did not have a kitchen!

The middle class is being pushed out of L.A. I can think of at least ten friends who moved out of state in the last 2-3 years – to Denver, Tucson, Detroit, Palm Springs, and even France. Most of them owned property in L.A., but were tired of the struggle to survive here.

I was recently at an architecture conference that toured Detroit, Cleveland and Pittsburgh and they are still feeling the effects of losing their middle class in droves. L.A. isn't far from that. We are also racking up scores of vacant buildings all over town. Why aren't we trying to re-purpose those before we rampantly build more? Personally, I live my life in historic buildings, from where I live and work to where I go to the gym (Hollywood YMCA) and even the post office I use (Hollywood Wilcox Station). These are all viable buildings. I would like to see this Crossroads project adaptively re-use some of these unique historic structures to add texture and diversity to the block. This would tell the story of different eras of this section of Hollywood - from very early Craftsman houses to 1930s Hollywood Regency styles, brick storefronts and more.

When I introduce movies at the Egyptian Theatre, I often reference film industry pioneers associated with the building, by saying, "You are sitting under the same sunburst ceiling where Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks and Charlie Chaplin sat, on opening night, almost 100 years ago. Now, this is YOUR community theatre and you are part of the Egyptian's and Hollywood's history. Enjoy the show."

As you may or may not know, we were a CRA project and were the first "re-development" project at the Highland end of the Boulevard to open its doors, in late 1998. We took a silent movie theatre and we turned it into a state-of-the-art theatre inside an historic shell. We are able to contribute to the dual narratives of the past and present of Hollywood simultaneously. This non-linearity is truly a 21<sup>st</sup> century concept and can be at the crux of any development with a rich history on its site.

Sincerely,

Margot Gerber

American Cinematheque

Marketing/Publicity/Social Media

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See what's **onscreen** tonight at the Aero & Egyptian Theatres!



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Major Projects & Environmental Analysis  
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Margot Gerber  
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