

Editorial

Can South Los Angeles do revitalization without gentrification and displacement?

<http://www.latimes.com/opinion/editorials/la-ed-south-la-community-plans-20171121-story.html>



Businesses along Crenshaw Blvd. in the Baldwin Hills/Crenshaw area of Los Angeles, Calif., on Feb. 5, 2016.

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For the first time in nearly 20 years, Los Angeles leaders are considering a new blueprint for development in South L.A.

The City Council is expected to vote this week on two new community plans for [South](#) and [Southeast](#) Los Angeles. The votes come as the city launches an ambitious push to rewrite all of the 35 community plans that regulate development in city neighborhoods. Most of L.A.'s community plans are woefully out of date, and so the rules have often been ignored and projects approved on a case-by-case basis with little regard to the larger community needs and desires.

New rules are especially important in South Los Angeles; as one of the last areas of the city with low-cost, underdeveloped land, it is gradually becoming a magnet for developers and investors. That's good; the region could use more housing, jobs and services. But longtime residents and businesses worry that the wave of new development could price them out.

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The drafting of the plans took 10 years, with countless hearings and working groups for people to weigh in. A coalition of community groups crafted their own strategy called [the People's Plan](#), laying out dozens of recommendations aimed at promoting affordable housing, local jobs, park space and a stronger voice for residents in the land-use planning process. The goal was to ensure new development doesn't displace longtime community members. Three-quarters of their recommendations made the final drafts of the city's proposed plans.

The process was excruciatingly long, but the results are impressive. The proposed community plans encourage investment, good architecture and design, and the kinds of development that South L.A. residents have been clamoring for — grocery stores, banks, sit-down restaurants and mixed-income housing — with laudable measures to limit displacement of low-income renters and businesses as property values increase. The plans set some of the most aggressive affordable housing incentives in a city that desperately needs more affordable housing. And they encourage developers to include publicly accessible plazas and parks on their projects. That's important in South L.A., which is one of the city's most park-poor regions.

The plans are well intended, but they won't get the desired results unless the council adheres to them. That means resisting pressure from both developers who want to be exempted from the rules and neighbors who don't want any change in the status quo.

And yet, the city shouldn't be satisfied with these plans as they are. The council should heed the call by community activists for stronger anti-displacement strategies for renters and businesses, such as a cap on the number of rent-controlled apartments that can be demolished in a year and a moratorium on apartments being converted to condominiums when the vacancy rate drops below 5%. Both are policies still being debated by the City Council.

The People's Plan also calls for new programs to help prevent the displacement of long-established small businesses that are vital to the culture and feel of a community — as well as providing an outlet for local entrepreneurs to ply their craft, build wealth and train the next generation of risk-takers. Community groups are already seeing an exodus of mom-and-pop shops in the neighborhoods south of downtown. Bakeries, repair shops, barbers, apparel makers — some of which have operated for 30 years or more — are getting evicted or seeing their rents double or triple, forcing them to close. Unlike residential tenants, who often have protections under the city's rent-control law, commercial tenants' only protection is their lease. Many smaller businesses have informal or month-to-month leases.

So far, city officials have incorporated some recommendations to assist mom and pops. The plans encourage developers to design space that could accommodate small retail operations. But the People's Plan included some innovative strategies that are worth exploring, such as a kind of "inclusionary zoning" for businesses. The city would let developers build bigger buildings if they reduced rent for community non-profits or provided long-term leases for established small local businesses. Yes, these aren't traditional land-use planning policies, but the unique challenges of gentrification and displacement require Los Angeles to try new tools to protect and preserve communities.

South Los Angeles is poised for a long-overdue transformation. L.A. leaders have an opportunity with these community plans to help ensure that existing residents and businesses get to enjoy the benefits of that transformation.