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Dialogue on Diversity with Venice Stakeholders

Regarding

VNC Diversity Vision Goal*

This version was prepared Saturday, October 24, 2015 by Joseph D Murphy

The emails on pages 3 through 5 below were distributed to the VNC Board of Officers at its April July and August meetings and then sent via bcc to my email list requesting comments and insights regarding the issues and questions asked in the context of the below [US Census data documenting loss of diversity in Venice**](#).

Each email included the following note:

Please note that your response will be compiled into an email which identifies you by name and provides your contact information as the responding individual. At my discretion, I may comment on whatever response you send me. I intend to exercise this discretion for the primary purpose of clarifying what I perceive as misunderstandings. If you disagree with my comments, you will have the 'last word' by responding to my comment. The final version will consist of a compilation of your responses, my comments if any, and your 'last word' without further 'counter-comments' from me. The final version will also be sent to my email list.

* VNC Diversity Vision Goal

Consider strategies that encourage & facilitate realistic recommendations designed to increase economic diversity, including affordable [less expensive *] housing, etc. [* Clarification inserted November 24, 2014 by Joe Murphy]

** US Census data documenting loss of diversity in Venice 90291 (Walgrove to beach, Washington to Dewey)

LAMSA

	50 year period	1960	2010	% Change
Total Population		35,409	28,207	-20
Total Population		6,746,356	12,840,726	+90
Dwelling Units		16,320	16,190	-1
Dwelling Units		2,501,432	4,498,576	+80
MHI (inflation adjusted)		+/-41,646	+/-70,859	+70
	10 year period	2000	2010	% Change
Total Population		31,097	28,207	-9
Dwelling Units		16,311	16,190	-1
MHI (inflation adjusted)		+/-60,228	+/-70,859	+18
0 – 55 Years of Age		26,761	22,746	-15
55 – 100 Years of Age		4,257	5,595	+31
Black-African American		2,087	1,491	-27
Hispanic or Latino		7,834	5,668	-28
Housing for Seasonal, Recreational, or Occasional		79	342	+333
	18 year period	1996	2014	% Change
SFR avg price/sq. ft.		198	1,037	+523
Condo avg price/sq. ft.		171	750	+438

Dialogue on Diversity with Venice Stakeholders

Distributed by Joe Murphy to the Venice Neighborhood Council Board at its April 21, 2015 Board Meeting and then to his email list

Hi.

To see if there is common ground which can be used as a foundation upon which to begin a dialogue on how to move in the direction, over time, of achieving the intent of the [VNC Diversity Vision Goal*](#), I ask each of you to review my below analysis and decide whether you feel it can be so used.

JDM Venice Diversity Analysis

There are at least two ways to undermine the diversity and creativity of a human settlement like the Venice Community:

Walls or Laws

One difference between **Walls** and **Laws** is that **Laws** are flexible creatures which can be changed in a way that can encourage both diversity and creativity.

Laws can also be changed in a way that encourages the retention of cherished recognizable elements of a community – elements which must exist in order to provide us with the psychologically critically important distinctive and stable identity of our Venice Community which can be pointed to by many as “my home town” or “this is where I grew up”, etc.

The Venice Community has experienced significant erosion of diversity – a phenomena which may be related in some measure to **Laws** which may have had the unintended impact of eroding both diversity and creativity.

These **Laws** appear to mandate, rather than allow and/or encourage, the diversity and creativity their supporters intend to stimulate. The paradox is that, to date, this approach hasn't worked and has had the opposite effect in too many instances.

This is not just a Venice Community paradox. The lack of affordable (ie, less expensive) housing affects many jurisdictions across the country and even internationally.

I believe this phenomenon is, in large measure, rooted in the natural human tendency to act upon “fast non-holistic impulses” rather than upon “slow holistic deliberations” as the predominant approach to making decisions.

Ref: [Thinking, Fast and Slow](#) by Daniel Kahneman, 2011

In order to reverse this 55-year-trend of the erosion of diversity in the Venice Community, it seems mandatory that we do what is required to encourage the construction in Venice of large quantities of significantly less-expensive housing capable of attracting & stabilizing the influx of the economically diverse families which can restore & expand the diversity we have lost – diversity which we continue to lose due to gentrification pressures in our increasingly vulnerable Venice Community.

Ref: US Census (compiled by Frank Murphy) **

If you agree, then we have the common ground necessary to begin a dialogue on how to move in the direction, over time, of achieving the intent of our [VNC Diversity Vision Goal*](#).

Do you agree?

Sincerely,

Joe Murphy
[310-305-1444](tel:310-305-1444)
joedmur@gmail.com

Dialogue on Diversity with Venice Stakeholders

Distributed by Joe Murphy to the Venice Neighborhood Council Board at its July 21, 2015 Board Meeting and then to his email list

Hi.

To see if there is a strategy capable of achieving, over time, the intent of the [VNC Diversity Vision Goal*](#), I ask each of you to review and comment on the below listing of [Diversity Implementation Strategies Submitted To Date](#) and to contribute further such strategies for consideration in choosing one which we can agree upon as most likely to achieve, over time, a shared strategy to help us move forward towards implementing the intent of the [VNC Diversity Vision Goal*](#) – to protect & recover drains on diversity in Venice.**

List of Diversity Implementation Strategies Submitted To Date

1. **LAWS:** The current legal framework focused primarily on the **Physical Character of Venice**.
2. **NEW/AMENDED LAWS:** A modified legal framework to incorporate a focus on the **Social Character of Venice**.
3. **BOARD RESOLUTION:** Adopted at its June 23, 2015 meeting to qualify for future funding using DONE form:

Approval of 2015-2016 VNC Strategic Plan (2 minutes) Ira Koslow on behalf of REC, Budget & Election Committees
(ira.koslow@venicenc.org)

[EXHIBIT]

MOTION: The Venice Neighborhood Council approves the following strategic plan for 2015-2016:

VENICE NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL STRATEGIC PLAN 2015-2016

THE BIG VISION: Encourage and maintain the diverse community of Venice.

THE BIG GOALS:

1. Involve more Venice stakeholders in civic participation to improve the daily life in Venice.
2. Increase the community awareness of the Venice Neighborhood Council.
3. Improve relationships with government officials.
4. Promote active and engaged participation in the Venice Neighborhood Council election.
5. Cultivate public safety for all stakeholders.

THE BIG SOLUTIONS:

1. Broaden community participation in VNC committees and activities.
2. Increase outreach through electronic, written and personal contact with the Venice stakeholders.
3. Strengthen the effectiveness of the VNC and stakeholder interaction with government officials by developing a more proactive relationship.
4. Increase participation of underrepresented communities by increased outreach in the VNC election process.
5. Involve more individuals and community groups in the neighborhood watch program.

THE BIG SCORE:

1. Participation by all Board members in VNC outreach through Farmer's Market and community events.
2. Development of expanded outreach materials by the Outreach Committee.
3. An increase in candidates and voters in the 2016 election.
4. Increased public use of the VNC website and social media.
5. Increased number of neighborhood watches in the Venice community.

RECOMMENDED at a joint meeting on May 26th by REC- 2-0-0, Elections 2-0-0 and Budget 3-0-0.

ACTION: Motion passes (IK/KV 12-1-1).

IN FAVOR: Marc Saltzberg, Kristopher Valentine, Hugh Harrison, Robin Rudisill, Jed Pauker, Mike Bravo, George Francisco, George Gineris, Ira Koslow, Abigail Myers, Max Sloan, Bud Jacobs

AGAINST: Joe Murphy

ABSTAIN: Mike Newhouse

Which strategy do you consider most likely to achieve the intent of the [VNC Diversity Vision Goal](#)?

Sincerely,

Joe Murphy
[310-305-1444](tel:310-305-1444)
joedmur@gmail.com

Dialogue on Diversity with Venice Stakeholders

Distributed by Joe Murphy to the Venice Neighborhood Council Board at its August 18, 2015 Board Meeting and then to his email list

Hi.

Of the three strategies submitted to date, my preference is “**NEW/AMENDED LAWS**: A modified legal framework to incorporate a focus on the **Social Character of Venice**”. Of the three, I believe this is the only strategy **capable of achieving, over time, the intent of the VNC Diversity Vision Goal**. I ask each of you to review my below analysis and decide whether you agree and, if not, to choose or suggest an alternative strategy.

JDM Preferred Diversity Strategy

Venice Diversity Dilemma

[150811InitialDialogueWithStakeholders](#)
[150810TheWashingtonPostKuzniaArticle-ChangeTensions](#)

JDM Analysis Diversity in Venice requires encouraging the construction in Venice of large quantities of significantly less-expensive housing capable of attracting & stabilizing the influx of the economically diverse families which can restore & expand the diversity we have lost – diversity which we continue to lose due to **gentrification** pressures in our increasingly vulnerable *Venice Community*. This phenomenon is exacerbated by the underlying causes of **income disparity**.

The VNC has minimal power to mitigate the impacts of **gentrification** or **income disparity**.

JDM Conclusion The VNC can influence the laws so that they encourage construction in Venice of large quantities of significantly less-expensive housing.

Housing & Downzoning Dilemma

[150724LATimesGregoryMorrowOpEd-LAAffordableHousingAnalysis](#)
[150723AtlanticGabrielMetcalfArticle-WhatsTheMatterWithSanFrancisco](#)
[150724LATimesPaulHabibiOpEd-EasingLAsHousingCrunch](#)

JDM Analysis * For much of the last 40 years, planning in Los Angeles has been guided by the idea that growth is bad, that more people mean more congestion, pollution and social ills. The city has emphasized “downzoning” — reducing the number of units allowed to be built on properties — to actively curb growth. Embracing growth rather than fighting it can create a city for everyone, not just the most fortunate among us. We will likely need to change or suspend some land-use regulations to make it easier to create more housing and shelter options.

* **The text in this section is extracted verbatim from the referenced articles.**

JDM Conclusion The VNC can influence the laws so that they encourage construction in Venice of large quantities of significantly less-expensive housing.

Housing & Homeless Dilemma

[150715LATimesMorrisonInterviewAliceCallaghan-PushingOutTheHomelessIsntASolution](#)
[150809AtlanticAlanaSemuelsArticle-TheResurrectionOfAmericasSlums](#)
[150723LADailyNewsBoninArticle-HomelessNeeds](#)

JDM Analysis * The number of people living in high-poverty areas—defined as census tracts where 40 percent or more of families have income levels below the federal poverty threshold—nearly doubled between 2000 and 2013, to 13.8 million from 7.2 million. That’s the highest number of Americans living in high-poverty neighborhoods ever recorded.

Every city and town must ensure that new housing construction reflects the income distribution of the metropolitan area so that more housing is available to people of all incomes in different parts of town. If we are serious about breaking down spatial inequality, we have to overcome our political gridlock and chart a new course toward a more geographically inclusive society. We will likely need to change or suspend some land-use regulations to make it easier to create more housing and shelter options.

* **The text in this section is extracted verbatim from the referenced articles.**

JDM Conclusion The VNC can influence the laws so that they encourage construction in Venice of large quantities of significantly less-expensive housing.

Social & Physical Character Dilemma

[150715ArgonautOrenSafdieArticle-DwellificationOfVenice](#)

JDM Analysis In communities such as Venice which have been shaped by the above factors, opposition to changes capable of encouraging construction in Venice of large quantities of significantly less-expensive housing have been successfully and strongly argued. This will inevitably lead, over time, to the creation of the equivalent of a wealthy and sterile gated Venice community.

JDM Conclusion The VNC can influence the laws so that they encourage construction in Venice of large quantities of significantly less-expensive housing.

Do you agree?

If not, please submit (or select) an alternative preferred strategy.

Sincerely, Joe Murphy [310-305-1444](tel:310-305-1444) joedmur@gmail.com

Dialogue on Diversity with Venice Stakeholders

Venice Diversity Dilemma

On Fri, Apr 10, 2015 at 7:40 PM, Rick Feibusch <rfeibusch1@gmail.com> wrote:
In a word, Joe;

Where???? The last viable place was the Lincoln Place property, and after a decade of court battles and a bogus historic designation, we now have a bunch of substandard, outdated, and VERY EXPENSIVE market rate housing and a few new modern buildings..... Plays Vista, that is close and used to be available to consider is now all being built upmarket.... As I said, Where????

Best,

Rick Feibusch

JDM Response: Rick, the implementation of the [VNC Diversity Goal](#) requires providing additional housing **in Venice**. There is no realistic alternative. Either we figure out a way to do this or the [VNC Diversity Goal](#) is meaningless.

On Fri, Apr 10, 2015 at 8:51 PM, Nancy Lamb <nancy@nancylamb.com> wrote:

Agree.
But where will this housing be built?
Nancy

JDM Response: Nancy, once there is an acknowledgement that this housing must be built **in Venice**, only then can we explore alternatives for getting it done.

On Wed, Apr 22, 2015 at 8:49 PM, Nancy Lamb <nancy@nancylamb.com> wrote:
I agree.
We need diversity!
Nancy lamb

and

On Mon, Apr 13, 2015 at 9:41 PM, Molly DeBower <mollydebower@yahoo.com> wrote:
In a one word answer, yes.

JDM Response: Molly and Nancy, your responses are the most direct I've received. All other responses, without acknowledging the reality that implementation of the [VNC Diversity Vision Goal](#) requires providing additional housing **in Venice**, provide remarks which raise all of the concerns which I have heard repeatedly and with which I have no quarrel. The only question is whether those multitudinous concerns are going to prevail over any effort to implement the [VNC Diversity Vision Goal](#) so as to render it pointless to even begin. I am unwilling to assume that; but I am aware that it is not going to be easy to accomplish the implementation of our [VNC Diversity Vision Goal](#).

I believe, however, that such an effort must begin with across-the-board acknowledgments that:

- The implementation of the [VNC Diversity Vision Goal](#) is desirable; and
- It must occur **in Venice**.

Without these starting acknowledgements, the distractions that will inevitably arise will erode it with a thousand cuts and undermine efforts to create a realistic implementation plan.

Dialogue on Diversity with Venice Stakeholders

Venice Diversity Dilemma

On Sun, Apr 19, 2015 at 12:53 AM, <anonymous> wrote:

Joe,

Just some thoughts on the prospect of creating more units that are less expensive. .

1. Lots that currently have those cute bungalows will eventually be sold for a lot of money. The seller may have bought on spec within the last 10 years. The seller may have owned for years and can no longer live by himself. In the former case, it is what many now do for a living. In the latter case, the sale price dictates the seller's standard of living for the rest of his life.
2. Much of Venice is zoned for single family dwellings - R1. My observation is that people who live in R1 areas are generally opposed to increasing density there (rezoning).
3. My observation is that much of Venice is opposed to increasing density period because of the corresponding increase in traffic.
4. Flyers circulated by realtors, showing lists of sale prices and the amount of time on the market, show that many people are willing and able to pay \$1,000,000+ just for a single family lot in Venice.
5. No one is going to pay around \$1,000,000 for a lot and build something to sell to anyone with low or even moderate income.
6. When building apartments, luxury units are more profitable than affordable units.
7. Short term rentals, especially if hotel tax is not paid, are more profitable than long term rentals. And visitors ARE renting them. In some cases, the income is desperately needed. But I suspect that in most cases it is a business.
8. Put all together, I see the diversity challenge as "How to convince people to deliberately make less money than is possible". Mello Act tries to force this, in order to make sure "affordable" units do not become extinct.

JDM Response: You raise a number of the arguments which have been and will be made to suggest that trying to implement the [VNC Diversity Vision Goal](#) is not going to be easy or is unlikely to succeed.

I can't determine whether you are simply raising warning flags (and they are certainly valid warning flags) or suggesting that we should give up and not make the effort.

The listing of 'warning flags' is appreciated. But if you are suggesting that we should not make the effort, I respectfully disagree.

I specifically take issue with the suggestion that the [Diversity Challenge](#) boils down to "**How to convince people to deliberately make less money than is possible**".

Dialogue on Diversity with Venice Stakeholders

Venice Diversity Dilemma

On Thu, Apr 30, 2015 at 7:43 PM, <[anonymous](#)> wrote:

Okay, Joe. According to the by-laws,

"ARTICLE II: PURPOSE

A. Mission Statement: To improve the quality of life in Venice by building community and to secure support from the City of Los Angeles for the resources needed to achieve our goals.

B. Purpose: The purpose of the VNC shall be:

1. To engage the broad spectrum of Stakeholders for collaboration and deliberation on matters affecting the community including events, issues and projects.
2. To work with other organizations in Venice and other Los Angeles Neighborhood Councils that want help in accomplishing their objectives or projects that the Venice Neighborhood Council desires to support.
3. To promote Stakeholder participation and advocacy in Los Angeles City government decision-making processes and to promote greater awareness of available City resources.
4. To be an advocate for Venice to government and private agencies."

Why DO you abstain so much, as a VNC Board member?

JDM Response: Implementation of the **VNC Diversity Vision Goal** is the subject of this discussion. I doubt that anyone will deny the importance of this to the long-term future of the character of Venice and to the Venice Community. This is why the **VNC Vision Goals** were adopted unanimously by the Board of Officers in 2009.

Over the past 11 years that I have been involved with the Venice Neighborhood Council, LUPC has focused primarily on the **Physical** Character of Venice. The **VNC Diversity Vision Goal** is focused primarily on the **Social** Character of Venice, a relatively new political focus of the Venice Community.

During this time, two factions have dominated Venice politics. Once, and only once, have they agreed for a brief moment on how to deal with homeless people living in RVs in Venice residential neighborhoods. Before and after that brief interlude, the two factions have dominated political discussions with their contentious and protracted quarrelling – it continues today.

I believe this has been detrimental to the reputation and influence of the VNC – **in the Venice Community**. Although the VNC may have convinced the rest of the world that It is demonstrating the best example of NC 'success' which other NCs should emulate, **within our Venice Community** it is becoming the equivalent of the 'rattlesnake in the middle of the room' which no one wants to talk about. We talk a lot but with scattered focus.

My reason for starting the **Discussion Forum Committee** was to search for a way to reduce this contentiousness by finding common ground upon which a broader consensus could be formed to deal with the issues over which these contentious factions seem to fall into these negative nonproductive patterns.

As a VNC Board Member, I abstain when I see this negative dynamic 'under the surface' in matters which come before the Board. When I do so, I believe I am Building Community by abstaining from becoming a partisan of either faction.

The introduction to the **VNC Vision Goals** states:

Although the VNC is a political body, and inevitably it may become embroiled in issues that divide the community, these goals are designed to promote a more proactive, collaborative vision for VNC Committees to include in their deliberations as they formulate recommendations for Board consideration. The **intent** is to create a working framework of integrated strategies capable of achieving, over time, broader consensus and increased: **<Diversity, as one of 7 listed goals>**

I agree with this statement. LUPC, unfortunately, hasn't been able to break free of the **Physical Character** of Venice 'framework' in which it functions. I abstain from LUPC actions because this narrow framework is leading the Venice Community into a dead end that ignores the need to even consider alternative strategies which are perhaps more realistic approaches to achieving the **Social Character** of Venice.

What it has done in the past has won a number of 'battles' over the **Physical Character** of Venice but that hasn't won the 'war' – gentrification is on track to win the 'war', but even more depressing is the inevitable loss of the **Social Character** of Venice.

Even the recent State Supreme Court decision authorizing local governments to require developers to fund 'affordable' housing fails to achieve the desired objective of requiring the construction of that 'affordable housing' **in Venice** – developers are authorized to pay into a fund which, if it works, will build that 'affordable housing' somewhere **outside of Venice**.

If we allow this approach to continue, we are likely to eventually make Venice into a '**Gated Community**'

Dialogue on Diversity with Venice Stakeholders

Venice Diversity Dilemma

On Wed, Apr 22, 2015 at 8:49 PM, Robert Aronson <r_aronson@ureach.com> wrote:
Hi Joe,

Having lived in Venice for just over 30 years, it is my opinion that the conversion of rental housing stock into vacation rentals has significantly reduced the availability of rental housing stock and driven up the rents, making Venice less affordable. On my block alone (Catamaran Street), 10-15% of the apartments are now vacation rentals. I am strongly supportive of the efforts of Judy Goldman and Keep Neighborhoods First. Assuming diversity and affordability are related, the conversion of rental units into vacation rentals is affecting diversity.

Under the theory of supply and demand, I would guesstimate that every tenant in Venice is paying an extra 10%-20% in rent due to reduction in rental housing stock. That money is going into the pockets of those who rent apartments as vacation rentals, and is an obscene, and illegal, transfer of wealth.

Robert

JDM Response: Robert, I agree that ‘conversion of rental housing stock into vacation rentals reduces the availability of rental housing stock and drives up the rents, making Venice less affordable*’ and that ‘diversity and affordability* are related’.

The question, however, is not whether diversity and affordability are related but, rather, whether the recent rise in popularity and use of vacation rentals caused the erosion of **Diversity in Venice**.

Erosion of **Diversity in Venice** has occurred over the entire 50 years preceding the Short Term Rental problem we face today. The Short Term Rental problem certainly accelerates the erosion of **Diversity in Venice**, but it is gentrification which has and continues to fuel it.

For this reason, focusing efforts on curbing Short Term Rentals will have little or no long-term impact on **Diversity in Venice**.

The ‘enemy’ is not ‘them out there’. It’s the lack of broader collaboration on the ‘common ground of the need for **Diversity in Venice**’.

* The words ‘affordable’ and ‘affordability’ are confusing since the intent of the **VNC Diversity Goal** was not to limit that term to what is legally classifiable as ‘affordable’ (or to ‘moderate’ or ‘low income’) housing but, rather, to ‘less expensive housing’ of all sorts. With this in mind, let me make what I consider to be an important distinction between **Implementing Diversity** and providing housing for **Homeless/Low Income People**:

- **Implementing Diversity** requires building housing **in Venice**.
- **Providing housing for Homeless/Low Income People** does not require that it be built **in Venice**.

Dialogue on Diversity with Venice Stakeholders

Venice Diversity Dilemma

On Thu, Apr 23, 2015 at 9:27 AM, NC Support <ncsupport@lacity.org> wrote:

Hey Joe,

This is an amazing study of what has been happening in Venice area.....my mouth dropped open with the statistics you present.....

Good luck with this discussion

Tom H.

JDM Response: Tom, you have put your finger on a major factor in this analysis of Diversity. Over the 50 years from 1960 to 2010, some sort of pressures in Venice have dramatically eroded its diversity, and all efforts to stem this trend have failed.

I believe we can agree that a major cause has been the incremental but consistent increase in the value of land in Venice and its inevitable incremental gentrification which has only recently been recognized as the central cause of the erosion of the pre-existing Venice Diversity.

During that 50 years, efforts to stem that trend have been tried and failed. In general, these efforts have consisted of demands for enforcement of laws requiring 'affordable' or 'moderate' or 'low income' housing or rental restrictions protecting current renters from increases in rents.

A recent contributor to this erosion is the issue of STRs (Short Term Rentals); but that factor was not a factor existing during the above 50-year-period and therefor, even if 'fixed', would not stop the continued erosion of Venice Diversity by the inevitable increases in land values and the consequent and equally inevitable gentrification.

On Fri, Apr 24, 2015 at 12:56 AM, Robert Aronson <r_aronson@ureach.com> wrote:

Greetings,

I don't often send a mass email to the Board, because you surely get enough emails as part of your service to our community. However, I believe we have some serious problems with the City Attorney and the Planning Department that are having a negative effect on our community, and I wanted to share one of my opinions with y'all. Below is my response to our Councilman's survey on mansionization. "Mansionization" is shorthand for compatibility of a proposed building's mass and scale with the surrounding neighborhood.

Robert Aronson

Hi Mike,

I am deeply concerned that you are not doing enough to substantively address several serious planning problems in Venice. They are: (1) the City Attorney's absolutely incorrect advice that the City is not permitted to consider mass and scale when evaluating a project under the Venice Coastal Zone Specific Plan; (2) the City Attorney's absolutely incorrect advice that no conditions may be imposed on a conditional use application to serve alcoholic beverages; (3) the City's failure to effectuate the intent of the Venice Coastal Zone Specific Plan when calculating the number of parking spaces required for a proposed project.

This survey is for mansionization, so today I am only going to address the mass and scale issue.

I am a lawyer and I am fairly familiar with land use law, as is your fantastic planning staff. The City Attorney is providing you with incorrect legal advice, to the point of legal malpractice. The advice that the City Attorney is giving you is better characterized as the advice of a buffoon, and it would be laughed out of Court. I have personally met with him several times, and something is seriously wrong. I am not smart enough to figure out the motivation of the City Attorney for doing this, other than Mr. Feuer's personal inexperience and lack of familiarity with land use law.

Dialogue on Diversity with Venice Stakeholders

Venice Diversity Dilemma

You recently brought a West L.A. Area Planning Commission decision back to the City Council to overturn it, based in the City Attorney's advice. For many years, the WLAAPC has been making determinations based on compatibility of the mass and scale of a proposed project with the neighborhood. That is the function of adjudicative bodies like the WLAAPC - they make subjective determinations.

The City Attorney is telling you that the compatibility of a proposed project's mass and scale can not legally be considered, and that the building envelope outlined in the Venice Coastal Zone Specific Plan is the exclusive criteria for assessing the compatibility of a proposed development with the mass and scale of the neighborhood. This is a reasonable interpretation of the VCZSP, but the other interpretation, which has been applied for many years, is an equally reasonable interpretation. It is simply wrong for the City Attorney to advise you that only one interpretation is legally correct.

If you are going to accept the City Attorney's position, then you owe it to your constituents to fix the problem immediately, with an ICO pending final resolution of the problem, for the Specific Plan area west of Lincoln.

I strongly dislike ICO's. I think an ICO shows that the City is not doing its job in a timely manner. Unfortunately, that is our situation.

Nearly all property owners who want to build a larger home on their property will consult with their neighbors, show them their plans, and seek feedback. Otherwise, they will be living next door to people who are angry with them, and very few people would purposely put themselves in that position. I have been the lawyer in numerous property boundary disputes. Having your neighbors dislike you is no way to live.

The current situation exists because developers are building spec houses in Venice and their goal is to max out square footage, neighbors be damned. Your decision to accept the City Attorney's advice allows spec builders to build large houses that block the sunlight and ocean breezes of the neighbors, and destroy their privacy with roof decks looking into yards and windows. Your decision to follow the advice of the City Attorney is only helping spec builders, and the rare property owner who does not consult with or care about their neighbors when they build. Your decision to follow the City Attorney's advice is hurting the community that you have been elected to serve.

Under the City Attorney's new advice, City Planning is going to allow a VSO for any building west of Lincoln that is 30' tall with a sloped roof and is set back 5' from the neighbors on both sides, except for the walk streets neighborhood in Milwood. If we have spec builders coming to Venice and putting up three-story boxes of this size, we might as well be Manhattan Beach. All character of Venice will be lost, not to mention the sunlight and ocean breezes of the neighbors.

Please assist the community in working with the City to address mass and scale. Please convene a Community Meeting on this subject. You have an amazingly talented planning staff. Please put them to work on this, with urgency.

Thank you for considering my opinion.

Robert Aronson
[\(310\) 278-8018](tel:(310)278-8018)

JDM Response: Robert, the relationship between the development standards and whether they constitute mass & scale (as Feuer suggests) or constitute a framework upon which mass & scale can be superimposed (as you suggest) is not a new issue. Regardless, would you agree that it makes sense to explore other ways to achieve shared objectives? I've framed this strategy in my analysis as follows:

Laws are flexible creatures which can be changed in a way that can encourage both diversity and creativity[; and they]can also be changed in a way that encourages the retention of cherished recognizable elements of a community – elements which must exist in order to provide us with the psychologically critically important distinctive and stable identity of our Venice Community which can be pointed to by many as “my home town” or “this is where I grew up”, etc.

Dialogue on Diversity with Venice Stakeholders

Venice Diversity Dilemma

On Sat, Apr 25, 2015 at 8:35 PM, Elaine Spierer <espieler@verizon.net> wrote:

I found the approval by VNC to encourage topless on Venice's beach's entertaining. Why some people would be a bit exercised about this frivolous subject when Rome is burning around this town is understandable. But, really, Joe--you had no opinion on the loss of Venice's housing stock because of the extraordinary proliferation of STR's by owners who once rented to people who actually want to live in Venice and who form the backbone of our community. And I won't even get into the pressure on rent controlled unit occupants to get rid of those who are often old and weak and who don't have the stamina to fight back to save their homes. There is a reason why less than 30 days rentals are against the law. For a person dedicated to quality of life issues in Venice, the loss of masses of rentals and the destabilization of our neighborhoods should worry you and I am surprised with your abstention.

I enjoy reading your emails.

JDM Response: Elaine, I have lots of opinions on the loss of Venice's housing stock and the various causes of it and they do worry me.

I believe I have responded to your concerns in my responses above. Would you be willing to review my above responses and let me know of any remaining concerns you may have? I would much appreciate that. Sincerely, Joe.

JDM Response: I chose to not respond to the below emails but I appreciate receiving them.

On Fri, Apr 24, 2015 at 12:10 PM, soiam3 via Board of Officers <board@venicenc.org> wrote:

Dear Robert,

Thank you so much for this letter to Councilman Bonin and others. I have been so very upset and frustrated with the building of the monstrosity next door to me at 417 Sunset Avenue. It is massive -- taller than the 2-story apartment building west of my home on the corner of 4th and Sunset Avenue.

When the Ramos' moved away in 2013 two women showed up stating they were the new owners of the property. They borrowed items from me as they set up house and pretended they were going to be residents.

Shortly after different people every weekend were occupying the house and I discovered my neighbors did not live there at all. Instead they were using the house as a vacation home for people visiting from all over the world - South America, Japan, Germany, etc. When I asked them what was going on they said they were going to tear the house down and build side by side single family residence. She also told me that she was part of a development company that was building houses throughout the Venice community. They were at that time already building two such homes on Rennie Avenue.

When this building next door to me is finished it will be a three-story mansion blocking sun and view, from front to back, allowing top down viewing into my kitchen, dining area and family room. I have had to remind the workers that they are not to begin work before 8am because at time they begin with the hammering and use of power tools as early as 7:15 am.

I am so disgusted that as I walk or drive my community I see changes so intrusive, counter to our architecture and community culture, and as you stated, so indifferent to the voices of the indigenous community, it is sickening. I hope that Councilman Bonin hears and listens to you. This is too much to bear.

Naomi Nightingale [310-663-6694](tel:310-663-6694)

On Fri, Apr 24, 2015 at 2:03 PM, g <soiam3@aol.com> wrote:

Yes, I agree and I thank you for your continuing pursuit of inclusiveness, dialogue and action regarding extremely important and life-changing issues in the Venice Community.

Naomi

P.S. I am overwhelmed with too much to do but in the face of laws and walls effecting and potentially eradicating all that is meaningful to me in Venice -- tired or not, I have to actively involve myself. Thank you for your lead.

Dialogue on Diversity with Venice Stakeholders

Venice Diversity Dilemma

On Wed, Apr 22, 2015 at 10:05 PM, <nacount@aol.com> wrote:

This obsession with "diversity" and the expectation that a "discussion group" can successfully address this is with all due respect, ridiculous.

The discussion group needs to be a discussion, nothing more and nothing less.

Unless the committee becomes more of a discussion than a policy mandate that cannot -- and will not be implemented, I have to reconsider my continued participation.

Nick

nacount@aol.com

On Thu, Apr 23, 2015 at 3:01 AM, Arnold Springer <ulanbator@venice-ca.com> wrote:

Forget it. Just let me and us Venice people transpire in peace. Stop dreaming about big projects which create lots of problems for those of us who live here.

These dreams you promote are nothing more than a Trojan Horse to line pockets of local landowners who already have large parcels of land which could be developed, and local ideologues and self interested small fry developers who enjoy and in fact thrive on the psychological aura and high produced by large project fantasies. And all of this under cover of the promise of diversity and helping poor people. Rubbish.

Arnold

On Thu, Apr 23, 2015 at 8:23 AM, CharlotteRulesIC <charlotterules@me.com> wrote:

sounds like a theory that one would use if one were able to profit off of building these new units. who would profit? know anyone personally?

developers always get around affordable housing.

new units that are built are always at or above market 'value'.

besides that scam, venice is already one big traffic jam.

drive any of the following at rush hour and tell me otherwise: lincoln, rose, AK, riviera, washington, venice. and, developers never provide parking. they always scam that as well.

how many times must one be fooled before reality is visible?

Thank you,
Charlotte

On Thu, Apr 23, 2015 at 12:12 PM, Yolanda Gonzalez <firstmateyo@yahoo.com> wrote:

dear Joe I am going to respond to your question asked. But need to put my facts together. And this will be coming not only from me but several tenants and friends.

Yolanda

On Sat, Apr 25, 2015 at 9:58 PM, Barbara Lonsdale <barblonsdale@yahoo.com> wrote:

Nice Joe! I may be losing the place I live in n needed the laugh so thank you too Melissa :)

Barbara Lonsdale

On Sun, Apr 26, 2015 at 10:54 AM, Barbara Lonsdale <barblonsdale@yahoo.com> wrote:

And also it spreads awareness that the VNC even exists as many people are not aware of it - even local residents. And it goes far beyond that - it's about equality.

Barbara Lonsdale

Dialogue on Diversity with Venice Stakeholders

JDM Response: The below emails respond to my following email.

On Sat, Oct 8, 2015 at 1:58 PM, Joe Murphy sent the following DFC agenda:

Diversity & Housing

Discussion this month will be facilitated by Nick Antonicello

Research indicates a strong argument can be made that nothing the VNC Board has done since its formation has addressed the long-term impacts of the erosion of residential diversity in the Venice Community. Without change, the Venice Community is likely to become the equivalent of a gated community – diversity be damned! This is the same issue being faced by the City of Los Angeles except that the erosion of residential diversity in the Venice Community has been significantly more serious and has even accelerated under the additional pressures of Short Term Rentals.

**What is your opinion? What can the VNC do to deal with this issue?
Is the VNC missing an opportunity to lead in a constructive direction?**

On Oct 8, 2015 4:35 PM, "Rick Feibusch" <rfeibusch1@gmail.com> wrote:

Ya know Joe,

Maybe if you addressed something that people could do something about there would be more interest - Diversity in a beachfront community could only ever be addressed when Venice was still half slum and the demographics were different. Now it is, and will continue to be, an equal opportunity community based on how much money people are willing to pay to live here - There will be no way to add diversity (and I assume you are talking about economic diversity...) without lower income housing and there will be none of that until the City stops allowing developers to "buy off" or relocate these units elsewhere or Hell freezes over, whichever comes first...

Best,

Rick (WatchDawg) Feibusch

On Fri, Oct 9, 2015 at 4:56 PM, <daudet@ca.rr.com> wrote:

Wouldn't it be nice to try to secure low income housing for artists, musicians, writers, etc. who need space to sharpen their talents before they make the big time and the big money that follows?

Dialogue on Diversity with Venice Stakeholders

Venice Diversity Dilemma

On Fri, Oct 9, 2015 at 6:44 PM, Mehrnoosh Mojallali <mehrnoosh@mehrnoosh.com> wrote:

I agree and willing to help.

On Fri, Oct 9, 2015 at 7:08 PM, joedmur <joedmur@gmail.com> wrote:

Yes, starving artists and other groups who are being forced out or who can't afford to move in.

On Tue, Oct 13, 2015 at 2:02 PM, [anonymous] wrote:

Joe, I cannot attend your meeting, but ask that you consider the following.

When my husband and I bought our home in 1974, the neighborhood was both blue and white collar, low middle to middle income, and racially a mixture of white and Japanese American, a very small number of Hispanics and other Asians. No blacks.

Today, everyone in my neighborhood is land-rich. As the property values have risen, those moving into the area have been higher on the economic scale and better educated. Also, a mixture of Hispanic, black, white, Asian, etc. Now we have low income (thanks to Mello and prop 13) to lower middle to middle to upper middle to wealthy people, all races and ethnicities. Isn't this diverse?

JDM Comment: Mello and Prop 13 did not prevent the pressures of gentrification from eroding either economic or racial diversity. Short Term Rental problems are merely accelerating the process of gentrification and the concurrent erosion of economic and racial diversity.

The smallest of lots in my neighborhood sell for almost \$1M. But looking around, **that is true throughout the coastal zone.** I believe that making lots smaller so more homes can be built would not offset the rising property values, it would just result in a larger quantity of expensive lots.

JDM Comment: Are you suggesting that I am proposing a solution or a strategy of "making lots smaller so more homes can be built"?

You have mentioned that your focus is Venice. I live in Venice.

IMHO a major part of what makes Venice Venice is the absence of high rise buildings and sprawling apartment/condo complexes near the open ocean. They exist in Venice, but near the marina, not the open ocean.

JDM Comment: Are you suggesting that I am proposing a solution or a strategy which assumes the construction of "high rise buildings and sprawling apartment/condo complexes"?

Several years ago, I was invited to USC, and part of the program was a presentation on alternative urban ideas developed by students. Their suggestions included narrowing very wide streets and constructing housing on strips about the width that could accommodate a single-wide house trailer. They would be on the street side of the sidewalk. One suggested building bungalow-type homes above large parking lots. Not completely covering the lots, but scattered so those parking would still feel comfortable. The one that has apparently taken hold is building high density near public transit. (An age old practice used in almost every urban center I can think of.) To address the lack of parks, there was one suggestion to turn the alleys behind homes into parks exclusive to the homes adjacent to them. There was also a suggestion to take away part of the backyards of homes without alleys and, likewise, turn that strip into a park for the exclusive use of adjacent homeowners. If I am not mistaken, these are the kind of non-conventional ideas you were seeking.

JDM Comment continued on next page

Dialogue on Diversity with Venice Stakeholders

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JDM Comment: I have no long-term solutions or strategies. All of the ideas which you mention in this paragraph are ideas which I hope will be considered by the Discussion Forum Committee or, if my motion below is supported by the board at its November 11 meeting, then by the board at one of the proposed 'retreat sessions'.

MOTION*: That the Board schedule several well-spaced successive retreats (using the **Collaboration Vision Goal** as a guide) to focus board discussion on the various ideas stakeholders have contributed regarding the **VNC Vision Goals** starting with **Walkability** and subsequently **Diversity** and **Creativity**.

- As stated in SR20 ... "The **intent** is to create a working framework of integrated strategies capable of achieving, over time, broader consensus and *[measurable steady progress in implementing the **VNC Vision Goals**]*".
- I'm suggesting, for starters, using the ideas contained in the **VNC Vision Goals Idea Matrix** since they are immediately available for stimulating a dialogue and do not preclude the introduction and consideration of other ideas. I further suggest that we begin with a review of the **Walkability** ideas generated by stakeholders over several years of DFC work. **Walkability** is the least contentious of the three and more likely to produce a viable strategy.
- Minimize confusion by scheduling all retreat meetings at one place (James Beach?) for no more than 3 hours per meeting (allow for continuances as appropriate).
- I personally want to hear what VNC board members think and I do not wish to hear what others 'think we should think'; so I strongly recommend that no time be allocated to non-board-members (politicians or experts or non-board stakeholders).

* This motion assumes that **Brainstorming** is inherent in **Collaboration** and that considerations of **Participation** and **Focus on Children** will naturally be incorporated into all discussions. This leaves **Walkability** and **Diversity** and **Creativity** as the candidates for retreats per the motion. Prior Board commitment to this concept is necessary to its implementation. Actual procedures to achieve a desirable consensus may vary, but a generic procedural approach appears on the last page of the **VNC Vision Goals Idea Matrix**.

On Tue, Oct 13, 2015 at 2:49 PM, Joe Murphy <joedmur@gmail.com> wrote:

<anonymous>

You provide thoughtful stimulating comments.

May I include this in what I said I would send to my email list? [**Permission was given**]

Thanks much.

Joe

Dialogue on Diversity with Venice Stakeholders

Venice Diversity Dilemma

The Washington Post

National

How Snapchat tech titans are harshing the mellow in Venice Beach

By Rob Kuznia August 10, 2015



Harry Perry performs on the Venice Beach boardwalk. (Bonnie Jo Mount/The Washington Post)

LOS ANGELES — Venice Beach is where Arnold Schwarzenegger toned his muscles, the Dogtown skateboarders launched a lasting movement and Jim Morrison conceived the Doors. The Dude lived here in “[The Big Lebowski](#).”

For decades, Venice has been the epicenter of weird, a beachy paradise with a gothic twist, where carnival freaks, homeless hippies, yoga instructors and fanny-packed tourists blend into a milieu as colorful as its famous three-story murals.

Now, thanks to real estate speculators and a tech boom featuring the likes of [Google](#) and Snapchat, Venice’s mellow charm is under siege.

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“There are a lot of shenanigans going on to hyper-gentrify this area, almost make it a beachfront resort,” said Laddie Williams, a third-generation Venice resident and community activist. “They are killing our community.”

Is Venice losing its charming weirdness?



The mellow, bohemian appeal of the Venice neighborhood in Los Angeles is under siege, locals say, because of gentrification and a tech boom.

As skyrocketing real estate prices push longtime residents out of this oceanside district of Los Angeles, corporate chains are replacing funky shops, and tech geeks are emerging as a dominant part of the scene. Meanwhile, the area’s already robust homeless population is rising, leading to controversial police crackdowns.

Similar trends are transforming much of coastal California. Across Los Angeles, middle-class home buyers are losing out to speculators who plunk down cash offers. And in San Francisco, median home prices have soared from \$700,000 to nearly \$1.1 million in three years, making it one of the least affordable cities in the world.

But in bohemian Venice, the shake-up has been particularly upsetting, especially since the arrival of Snapchat, the tech giant whose app enabling users to send each other disappearing photos and messages has proved irresistible to teens.

Dialogue on Diversity with Venice Stakeholders

Venice Diversity Dilemma



Snapchat's offices are just off the boardwalk in Venice Beach. (Bonnie Jo Mount/The Washington Post)

Snapchat's presence here has swollen from 14 employees to 200 in two years, expanding this spring into office buildings throughout the densely populated, three-square-mile hamlet. One building near the beach spans an entire block.

Among the dozens of tenants displaced by Snapchat was the Teen Project, a nonprofit organization that provides housing to homeless young adults.

"They shoved us right out and treated us like redheaded stepchildren," said founder Lauri Burns. A few months before the move, a Snapchat executive told her he had noticed one of her homeless clients sweeping the street with an old broom, so he offered to buy the organization a new one.

"You could have just slapped me in the face at that point," Burns said.

Slapped in the face is exactly how many Venetians are feeling by the tidal wave of new money. And the local tech boom, prompting "Silicon Beach" references around town, is just one source of it.

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Venice Diversity Dilemma



Abbot Kinney Boulevard. (Bonnie Jo Mount/The Washington Post)

The main thoroughfare in Venice, Abbot Kinney Boulevard, has been transformed from a funky lineup of artisan shops and antique stores to a ritzy outdoor mall of upscale corporate brands, such as Scotch & Soda, Hyden Yoo and Sofia Kaman Fine Jewels — the shop where Lindsay Lohan was caught stealing in 2011.

In a stunner last month, a piece of commercial property on the boulevard sold for \$44 million to a New York partnership, forcing the ejection of Hal's, a landmark bar and grill. Jaws had also dropped when the same property sold for \$20 million two years ago. "Pretty good flip," said Carol Tantau, owner of a handcrafted-jewelry store that was priced out of its home of 30 years by the earlier sale.

Residential bungalows are also being emptied and flipped to highflying investors, many from overseas. In five years, the median home price has surged from \$832,000 to \$1.4 million.

Rents have also skyrocketed. Intensifying the housing squeeze is Airbnb, the sharing-economy app that enables people to rent out houses and apartments to short-term visitors (i.e., tourists).

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Venice Diversity Dilemma

Venice is often called the biggest tourist attraction in Southern California next to Disneyland; it is also the No. 1 Airbnb spot in Los Angeles. About 12.5 percent of all housing units there have become Airbnb units, taking a sizable chunk off the market, according to the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy, a labor-supported advocacy group.

Tony Bill, a producer who shared an Academy Award in 1973 for “[The Sting](#),” wonders why anyone is surprised that beachfront property in one of the nation’s largest cities would experience such growth. “It’s like, what did you expect? How long did you expect that Venice would be a depressed, inexpensive, inactive haven for people who can’t find a cheaper place to live?” said Bill, who owns one of the buildings that houses Snapchat.

“Venice is not known, and shouldn’t be known, for its starving artists,” Bill said. “It should be known for its accomplished artists. . . . If you’re accomplished, you can afford to pay the rent.”



Bathing suits for sale along the Venice Beach boardwalk. (Bonnie Jo Mount/The Washington Post)

Dialogue on Diversity with Venice Stakeholders

Venice Diversity Dilemma

George Francisco, vice president of the Venice Chamber of Commerce, said growing pains are to be expected. “I think of it as a continuum,” he said. “There were people who provided services for horses. Then the automobile came along. . . . Progress is a train. You can be on it, or you can be under it.”

As a district of Los Angeles, Venice has no mayor, city council or police force. It has just one elected local official, Los Angeles City Councilman Mike Bonin. (Bonin, a Democrat, did not respond to requests for comment.)

Long a destination for dreamers and doers, Venice is no stranger to volatile cycles of boom and bust. In 1977, the Los Angeles Times published a piece with a headline that reads like it was written last week: “Venice, Calif. — is Bohemia Still Affordable?”

But the influx of wealth over the past two years has been a bigger steamroller, longtimers insist.

“Gentrification right now is on steroids,” said Todd Darling, a member of the Venice Land Use and Planning Committee who argues that the district is essentially becoming a bank for investors from all over the world.

“People like to say the investors are Asian, but they could be from New York or Berlin,” he said. “In any case, it’s people who are not interested in living here. They are interested in an asset that holds value. That happens to be in Venice Beach, California, and it may just happen to cause the eviction of people who have lived there a long time.”

Ballet instructor Angelina Meany and her husband were booted three years ago from the bungalow duplex they had rented for 18 years. It was sold to a partnership from South Africa. The eviction completely disrupted their lives.

They moved 30 miles south to Long Beach and tried commuting back to Venice. But the new arrangement did not take with Meany’s husband. He departed for his native New York last year while Meany, 48, remained in the Los Angeles area. “It was devastating for both of us to have to make that choice,” she said.

Rene Kraus, 60, had lived in his cottage for 27 years when he received an eviction notice a few months ago from the new owners, an investment group going by the oblique name “664 Sunset LLC.”

“It’s a bunch of doctors,” said Kraus, a silversmith who makes belt buckles, rings and other “biker stuff.” He is fighting the eviction in court.

And if he loses? “I got friends, got some money saved — I’ll survive,” he said. “But a lot of other people, they just disappear, dude.”

Often, those people are artists. Sandy Bleifer, who helps organize a biannual tour of art studios called Venice ArtBlock, said her roster of artists had dwindled from 70 to 40 in a year. “We are an endangered species here,” Bleifer said. “Tech companies [are] very nice for the economy, but artists are part of the Venice brand. If we lose our artists, what are we?”

Dialogue on Diversity with Venice Stakeholders

Venice Diversity Dilemma

Sometimes, the wealthy do stop to notice the people getting pushed out of their way. After its ouster by Snapchat, the Teen Project found itself homeless for four months, Burns said.

But then two often-demonized real estate moguls came to its assistance: Carl Lambert made arrangements not only to relocate the Teen Project to another beachside property but also to get its rent waived. And Tami Pardee gave the group \$17,000 after police shot and killed a 29-year-old homeless man on the Venice boardwalk in May, enabling the organization to find housing for 16 homeless youths.

Burns speaks highly of Lambert and Pardee. But she has no kind words for Snapchat, which she said has donated to her center precisely one computer and one vacuum cleaner (but no broom).

Snapchat executives declined a request for an interview. Via e-mail, they offered a bullet-point list of civic donations. “We love being in Venice and we strive to be great neighbors within the community where we live and work,” the e-mail said.

Google has taken greater pains to fit in since its 2011 arrival. The company houses 600 employees in an iconic Venice building fronted by a massive sculpture in the shape of a pair of binoculars. Designed by architect Frank Gehry, the place is known, aptly enough, as the Binoculars Building.

Google hosts the annual Art Walk & Auctions, which showcase the work of local artists and benefit a free medical clinic, and has commissioned work from local artists for its offices. It has also donated 25 computers to the Teen Project.

Many longtime Venetians make no distinction between the two tech titans. “The locals hate Snapchat and Google,” said Don Calhoun, 45, a guitar instructor in a Spinal Tap shirt who was hanging out at a boardwalk oxygen bar. Calhoun tries not to use Google, he said, adding: “I’ve been on Bing! I’ve been Binging away!”

Dialogue on Diversity with Venice Stakeholders

Venice Diversity Dilemma



Andrina Castro, 26, center, dances during a weekly drum circle on Venice Beach. (Bonnie Jo Mount/The Washington Post)

Still, Thomas Williams, site lead for Google’s Los Angeles office, said he feels embraced by Venice. He recounted an interaction with a street performer on the boardwalk, a drummer named Ibrahim. “He just reached out and held both my hands, looked into my eyes and said, ‘I want you to feel welcome,’ ” Williams said via e-mail. “We spoke for a little while and he invited me to a performance, but his goal was really just about wanting me to feel welcome in being here.

“Really cool. Really Venice.”

Kuznia is a freelance writer.r

Dialogue on Diversity with Venice Stakeholders

Housing & Downzoning Dilemma

Op-Ed How to make Los Angeles more affordable and more livable



The L.A. River, with downtown Los Angeles rising behind it.
(Los Angeles Times)

By **GREGORY D. MORROW**

JULY 24, 2015, 5:00 AM

There is no easy answer for the housing affordability crisis in Los Angeles. But embracing growth rather than fighting it can create a city for everyone, not just the most fortunate among us.

For much of the last 40 years, planning in Los Angeles has been guided by the idea that growth is bad, that more people mean more congestion, pollution and social ills. The city has emphasized “downzoning” — reducing the number of units allowed to be built on properties — to actively curb growth.

It hasn't worked. According to the city's 35 separate Community Plans and census data, since 1970, half a million more people have moved to Los Angeles than were planned for. Housing supply simply has not kept pace with growth, so it should be no surprise that L.A. has become the least affordable city in the country — a city booming in gentrification (the rich displacing the poor) and busting in affordability (for everyone except the very well-off).

Despite L.A.'s image as a city of owner-occupied single-family houses, only a third of the city lives this way. The high cost of housing forces residents to double up. According to Affordability Matters, a 2008 UCLA-sponsored study, nearly 1 in 5 homes in L.A. is severely crowded, rising to more than 1 in 3 in some neighborhoods (such as Westlake, Southeast L.A. and Boyle Heights).

Downzoning has also widened disparities across the city. Affluent neighborhoods (Brentwood, Sherman Oaks and West L.A.) have been more successful at fighting density and change. That means the city's poorest areas assume most of the burden of growth, areas that aren't well equipped for it because they are already overcrowded, park poor and in many cases not near major employment centers or transit (Pacoima, Sun Valley and Mission Hills).

Dialogue on Diversity with Venice Stakeholders

Housing & Downzoning Dilemma

It's natural for homeowners to want to preserve their neighborhoods exactly as they are. But cities change whether we like it or not. Good planning accepts change and manages it to provide the greatest benefit with the fewest conflicts for the most people.

What would better planning look like in Los Angeles? To start, we would transform our busiest streets from a hodgepodge of mostly low-rise buildings and strip malls into genuine urban boulevards, with a lot more housing and local amenities closer to home.

It's natural for homeowners to want to preserve their neighborhoods.... But cities change whether we like it or not.

This is beginning to happen. For example, along Wilshire Boulevard in Koreatown and Sunset Boulevard in central Hollywood, more apartments, condos and mixed-use developments are going in, along with increased pedestrian, cycling and transit infrastructure. Not everyone likes these changes, but they absorb newcomers while preserving single-family neighborhoods, and they are beginning to make a dent in congestion.

It can be done with care. By limiting the height of buildings based on the width of the street, we can increase density without creating high-rise canyons. In Toronto, the rule is 80% of the street width, at the front of buildings. So smaller avenues, such as Normandie, could tolerate five stories along the street, stepping back to six stories maximum, while on larger boulevards, such as Sunset, buildings could be seven stories high along the street, stepping back to nine stories maximum.

Even within L.A.'s many single-family neighborhoods, we should not fear giving homeowners the choice to create small backyard units where space permits. The research shows that in most cases, such units will be used as multi-generational housing — an aging parent or a child living at home — but they could also support families by supplementing their income and creating affordable housing for long-term residents. Again, with good planning (controlling size, placement, parking and tenancy), this can enrich neighborhoods.

“Density bonuses” — in which builders set aside a percentage of units (say 20%) for lower- and moderate-income households in exchange for moderate increases in density — are another good tool. The common perception is that such bonuses are giveaways to developers, but they have been designed as a profit-neutral way of providing below-market-rate units. And research shows neighborhoods with mixed-income households provide the greatest opportunities for social mobility.

Cities function because all kinds of people, of all income levels, can live in multiple ways in them, and move in multiple ways through them. But the city has to plan for all that diversity, not fight it. Not everyone can afford low-density living; not everyone wants it. Expanding choice and increasing the supply of housing in Los Angeles is not an attack on homeowners. It's not either/or — it has to be both.

It's possible to create a more balanced, more livable and more affordable Los Angeles. It simply requires smarter planning and greater acceptance of our differences.

Architect, planner and urban designer Gregory D. Morrow developed a townhouse project in Echo Park, where he served on the neighborhood council. He is a professor at the University of Calgary, in Canada, and a homeowner in Los Angeles.

What's the Matter With San Francisco?

The city's devastating affordability crisis has an unlikely villain—its famed progressive politics.

GABRIEL METCALF

Jul 23, 2015



[kropic1 / Shutterstock.com](#)

I moved to San Francisco for its radical politics. Lots of people did, for generations. Maybe it was like moving to Los Angeles if you wanted to be a movie star: If you wanted to be part of the grand project of reconstructing the American Left in the petri dish of a single city, San Francisco beckoned.

The quirky, counter-cultural San Francisco so many of us fell in love with is almost gone now, [destroyed by high housing costs](#). We've lost not only the politics, but all kinds of cultural experimentation that just doesn't thrive in places that are expensive.

We are watching the old San Francisco slip away before our eyes. Every time a housing unit becomes vacant, it goes on the market at a price so high that no organizer, writer, teacher, activist or artist could dream of affording it. Trying things that don't have monetary potential just isn't possible anymore.

How did we get here?

Dialogue on Diversity with Venice Stakeholders

Housing & Downzoning Dilemma

There are lots of reasons San Francisco became so progressive in the first place. The city had a radical labor movement going back to the 19th century. It nurtured a literary and artistic bohemia. It was tolerant of kooks and outcasts. Its various racial and ethnic groups figured out how to get along. In the 1970s, the embrace of identity politics grew to incorporate gays and lesbians, and the city reveled in its diversity, with groups claiming distinct neighborhoods as their own in a modern twist on the tradition of ethnic urban enclaves.

Progressive San Francisco had a fatal, Shakespearean flaw that would prove to be its undoing.

At its apex, progressive San Francisco accomplished amazing things. It invented new models of delivering affordable housing and health care. It invested deeply in public space, from parks to bike lanes. It adopted a transit-first policy. It pioneered all kinds of equal rights for the LGBTQ community. It did its best to create a high-tax, high-service public sector that could generate the funds to provide a more generous social safety net, at a time when the national government was moving in the other direction. At times, it felt like San Francisco was working toward a form of social democracy in one city, proving to the rest of the country that a more European-style economic model could thrive within the confines of the United States.

It was also a haven for people from all over the world: Refugees from Central American wars, migrants from Asia and Latin America in search of a better life, gays and lesbians from across the country. A large chunk of the population moved here as adults; San Francisco was a consciously chosen destination.

But progressive San Francisco had a fatal, Shakespearean flaw that would prove to be its undoing: It decided early on to be against new buildings. It decided that new development, with the exception of publicly subsidized affordable housing, was not welcome.

At the outset, let's say the late 1960s, this stance seemed logical, even urgent. The previous era of city building had brought terrible projects of urban destruction: bulldozing black neighborhoods, ramming freeways through cities, building foreboding public housing towers. Across the country the movement to roll back modernist urban planning took on a preservationist bent: Since the bad guys were trying to destroy the city, the good guys needed to defend it from change.

But somewhere between 1970 and 2000, the context changed. It was, in fact, [one of the most profound cultural and demographic shifts in American history](#): after years of suburban migration, people started moving to cities again.

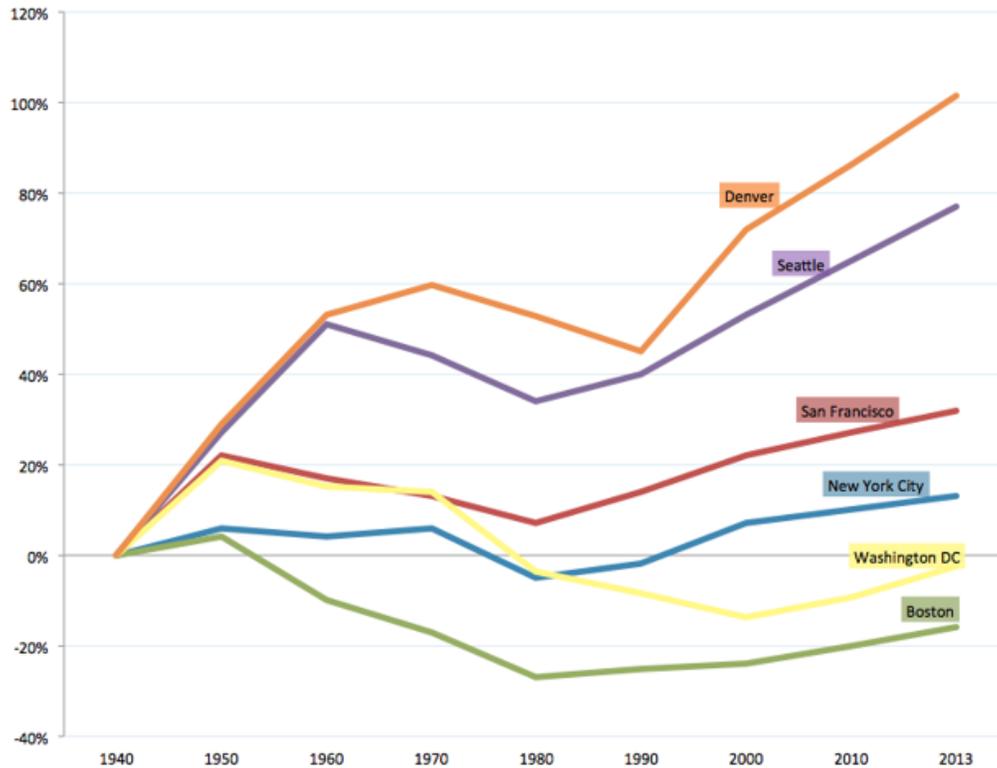
For decades, starting in the mid-1940s, virtually every major city in America lost population as families moved to the suburbs. For all the reasons we know so well—racism and white flight, the attempt to escape the influence of organized labor, or simply the desire for more space and the lure of single-family home ownership—both jobs and people moved out of central cities into the suburban periphery. Disinvestment was the defining urban problem which generations of liberal activists and politicians tried to solve.

But starting around 1980, New York and San Francisco, along with many other cities, began to grow in population again. This was not predicted or expected by most urban theorists of the time, but it was dramatic, and it has continued. Between 1980 and 2014, Boston grew by 16 percent, New York by 20 percent, San Francisco by 23 percent and Seattle by 35 percent. Denver started its turnaround later, but follows the same pattern.

Dialogue on Diversity with Venice Stakeholders

Housing & Downzoning Dilemma

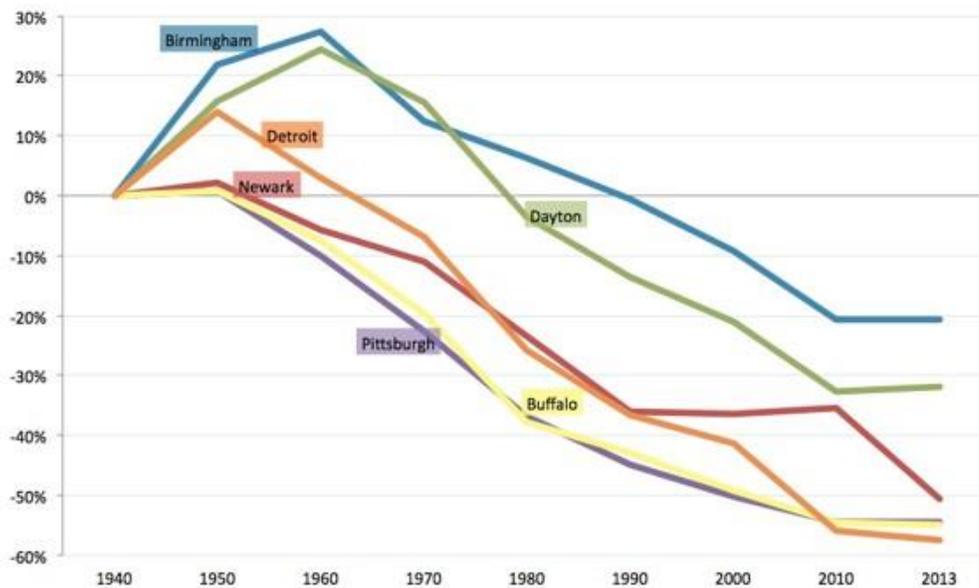
After Decades of Decline, Some U.S. Cities Saw Population Growth



This graph shows the change in city population relative to the base year of 1940.
(SOURCE: SPUR analysis drawn from U.S. Census data.)

Not all cities have turned around their population losses. Many of the places that are called “Rust Belt” cities have continued to shrink.

Not All U.S. Cities Have Affordability Challenges



This graph shows the change in city population relative to the base year of 1940.
(SOURCE: SPUR analysis drawn from U.S. Census data.)

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But for cities like San Francisco that now have 35 years of growth behind them, the urban problems of today are utterly different from what they were a generation or two ago. Instead of disinvestment, blight and stagnation, we are dealing with the problems of rapid change and the stresses of growth: congestion and, most especially, high housing costs.

When more people want to live in a city, it drives up the cost of housing—unless a commensurate amount of places to live are added. By the early 1990s it was clear that San Francisco had a fateful choice to make: Reverse course on its development attitudes, or watch America’s rekindled desire for city life overwhelm the openness and diversity that had made the city so special.

When San Francisco should have been building at least 5,000 new housing units a year to deal with the growing demand to live here, it instead averaged only about 1,500 a year over the course of several decades. In a world where we have the ability to control the supply of housing locally, but people still have the freedom to move where they want, all of this has played out in predictable ways.

Many cities faced the same set of dilemmas. But San Francisco’s challenge has been harder for the reason that our regional economy has been so strong. Regardless of what happened inside the city limits, we have had the most powerful engine of job creation in the country just a half hour to the south (a commute time that increases with economic growth). Over time, many of Silicon Valley’s workers have come to call San Francisco home. Moreover, in contrast to New York, San Francisco does not have a massive network of regional public transit connecting hundreds of different high-density, walkable communities to the city. In fact, neighborhoods that foster urban life and convenience are tremendously scarce in the Bay Area. All of this means the pressure on San Francisco has proven to be even greater than other cities in the country.

Regardless of these realities, most San Francisco progressives chose to stick with their familiar stance of opposing new development, positioning themselves as defenders of the city’s physical character. Instead of forming a pro-growth coalition with business and labor, most of the San Francisco Left made an enduring alliance with home-owning NIMBYs. It became one of the peculiar features of San Francisco that exclusionary housing politics got labeled “progressive.” (Organized labor remained a major political force throughout this time period, and has allied with both pro-growth and anti-growth forces, depending on the issue.) Over the years, these anti-development sentiments were translated into restrictive zoning, the most cumbersome planning and building approval process in the country, and all kinds of laws and rules that make it uniquely difficult, time-consuming, and expensive to add housing in San Francisco.

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A real state sign is seen near a row of homes in the Haight Ashbury neighborhood in San Francisco. (REUTERS/Robert Galbraith)

It's our own version of [What's the Matter With Kansas?](#)—the 2005 book in which Thomas Frank tries to explain how working-class Americans came to vote for right wing politicians against their own economic self-interest. In San Francisco's case, many tenants came to vote against new development in an attempt to show their disdain for monied interests. The problem is that this stance happens to result in very expensive rents in the long run.

As the city got more and more expensive, progressive housing policy shifted gradually to a sad, rearguard movement to protect the people already here from being displaced. No longer would San Francisco even try to remain open as a refuge for immigrants and radicals from around the world. The San Francisco Left could never come to terms with its central contradiction of being against the creation of more “places” that would give new people the chance to live in the city. Once San Francisco was no longer open to freaks and dissidents, immigrants and refugees, because it was deemed to be “full,” it could no longer fulfill its progressive values, could no longer do anything for the people who weren't already here.

San Francisco will most likely stay liberal for a long time. The richest cities in the United States—New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Seattle, Boston, Washington, D.C.—vote blue, just like San Francisco does. The tolerant culture of city life finds more affinity with the Democratic Party. But this city once had the ambition to be more than that. It wanted to push the envelope beyond anything that had been achieved in this country, to embrace ideas that would be politically impossible anywhere else.

No one made San Francisco the most expensive place in the country on purpose. That's the tragedy.

Observers from around the country shake their heads at San Francisco's approach to housing. But no one made San Francisco the most expensive place in the country on purpose. That's the tragedy. It was simply the unintended consequence of so many people wanting to live here, coupled with local policies that made it impossible for the amount of housing to grow enough to absorb the demand.

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We'll never know what would have happened if we had acted in the 1980s or 1990s, or even the 2000s, to change course—if we'd realized that our 1970s land use policies were turning San Francisco into a gated city that made it increasingly closed to newcomers.

Let me say very clearly here that making it possible to add large amounts of housing supply in San Francisco would never have been enough by itself. A comprehensive agenda for affordability requires additional investments in subsidies for affordable housing. Given the realities of economic inequality, there are large numbers of people who would never be able to afford market rate housing, even in a better-functioning market. [See SPUR's [complete set of ideas to make San Francisco more affordable](#).] In addition, while my focus here has been on San Francisco's own housing politics, many smaller Bay Area cities and towns have been even worse actors. A regional solution, in which all cities do their part to accommodate regional population growth, would be far more effective than trying to solve our affordability problems inside the boundaries of a handful of cities. But San Francisco has been part of the problem too, when it could have been a very big part of the solution. Our suburban communities never claimed to be progressive, never wanted to be a refuge for people from all over the world seeking cultural tolerance or an opportunity for a better life.

Soon after arriving here twenty years ago, I realized that my own politics did not match those of most San Francisco progressives. But I still have a lot of sympathy for many of their aims. I don't think it's fair to accuse anti-growth politics in San Francisco of being just a screen for homeowner interests. (Although I have certainly had neighborhood activists proudly tell me they oppose development in order to maintain the high values of their homes). I think the progressive anti-growth sentiment is earnest; it's people honestly trying to protect their city from unwanted change. It just happens to have backfired.

I know that the San Francisco I came here for was only a brief moment in the life of the city, and I know that cities are always changing. I also know that something new is emerging, and I plan to be here to find out what it is. Perhaps we are witnessing the birth of a new hybrid culture, drawing on aspects of the city's earlier radicalism and a youth culture focused on business innovation—a fusion of the counter culture and Silicon Valley.

I see both ambition and idealism in the new generation, and it's very possible that the culture being created in San Francisco today is going to be great, too. But this new version of San Francisco needs a revived reform agenda that grapples with the realities of now: a generational reinvestment in public transit, to make up for decades of under-investment in regional mobility; the introduction of widely-available ladders of economic advancement that will enable more people to participate in our incredible economy; and more than anything, an embrace of new building within the city. Let's celebrate the heritage of San Francisco's progressive tradition. But let's learn from our past mistakes.

Gabriel Metcalf is president of the urban planning and policy think tank, [SPUR](#).

Op-Ed Easing L.A.'s housing crunch



Residents take a stroll through their new complex as city and state officials gather in Vernon on July 25 to celebrate the grand opening of the Vernon Village Park Apartments, a private 45-unit affordable housing development. (Los Angeles Times)

How to make Los Angeles more affordable and more livable

By **PAUL HABIBI**

August 10, 2015

Los Angeles is stuck in a housing crisis with little hope for an easy escape. The standard definition of “affordable” is shelter that costs no more than 30% of a household's gross income; anything higher cuts severely into other types of consumption. Using that metric, to afford the median-priced home, the median household would require a staggering 52% raise, to \$96,000 a year from \$63,000. A more modest 14% raise would enable that family to rent the median-priced apartment. With housing costs rising faster than incomes, we are likely to retain our title as the least affordable city in the United States for years to come.

Why is our housing stock unaffordable? Supply-and-demand imbalances. Although the local economy has made progress since the Great Recession, real wage growth has been tepid. Moreover, we are not a hotbed of high-paying industries.

Affordable housing is not just a concern for those living in substandard accommodations. It threatens the economic vitality of the entire state. As shelter becomes more unaffordable, working families depart the city and fewer jobs come to California — a vicious negative feedback loop.

According to the California Housing Partnership Corp., Los Angeles County needs almost 500,000 more units that are affordable to households earning less than 50% of the area median income. Developers build less than 3% of this number annually.

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In June, the California Supreme Court ruled that cities can require the inclusion of affordable units in for-sale projects. Although this decision gives local government more tools to create affordable housing, it may well push developers to build elsewhere, if at all.

Rather than using economic “sticks,” we need more “carrots” to incentivize the private sector. Here are three solutions:

Expand density bonuses. Los Angeles is infamous for its sprawl, a result of low-density zoning codes that separate residential from commercial development. This paradigm, reflective of the victories of homeowner groups after World War II, no longer addresses the challenges facing the city. Rather, it creates congestion, long commutes and “bedroom suburbs” distant from employment centers. The antidote to sprawl is to build higher-density housing near transportation and employment hubs.

A state “bonus” law grants additional density beyond the underlying zoning to developers who include affordable housing in their projects. Yet these bonuses have been insufficient. Developers are constrained by the high costs of land and construction so they cannot recover their investment in affordable units even with the offered incentives.

Between 2008 and 2013 only 187 market-rate projects employed density bonuses, providing 1,406 residential units affordable to households earning 80% of the area median income or less, and just 81 units for those earning between 80% and 120%. The city should loosen qualifying thresholds and expand the size of the bonuses.

Amend site plan review. On the heels of lawsuits filed by neighborhood groups, in 1990 the city enacted an ordinance that mandates a site plan review process for any project that results in an increase of 50 residential units or 50,000 non-residential square feet. Accordingly, the Planning Department must review a proposed development's compatibility with its surrounding neighborhood and consistency with relevant planning and zoning codes.

That may sound reasonable, but neighborhood groups routinely abuse site plan review as a tool to stall or block development. The additional time and uncertainty resulting from this process effectively impose a tax on even the best proposals.

Projects that comply with underlying zoning, meet design guidelines and reach local affordability goals should bypass site plan review and enter directly into the building permit process.

Use the EIFD. The dissolution of California's Redevelopment Agencies in 2012 wiped out tax-increment financing, which was the largest form of housing subsidy. Under tax-increment financing, future property tax revenues from a new project could be advanced to the developer to provide gap financing. This was a particularly effective tool for the construction of affordable housing projects, which otherwise would not meet developers' required returns. The loss of this tool, combined with cuts to state and federal subsidies, has dramatically reduced the funds available to affordable housing developers.

Even if the city acts on these recommendations, the affordability crisis is likely to get worse before it gets better; building housing takes time. That's all the more reason to stop pretending that the unsupportable status quo will somehow improve on its own, and start making progressive changes to our building and zoning codes.

Paul Habibi is principal of Grayslake Advisors, a real estate expert services firm, and a lecturer at the UCLA Anderson School of Management and the UCLA Law School.

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Housing & Homeless Dilemma

Opinion Op-Ed Column

Alice Callaghan: Pushing out the homeless isn't a solution

Patt Morrison

LOS ANGELES TIMES

patt.morrison@latimes.com



Portrait of Father Alice Callaghan, at Las Familias Del Pueblo, in Los Angeles on July 8. Dubbed "Father Alice" because she is both an Episcopal priest and a former nun, Callaghan is best known in City Hall circles for her politically savvy lobbying on behalf of the poorest of the poor. (Francine Orr / Los Angeles Times)

JULY 15, 2015, 5:00AM

The mantra in the real estate biz is location, location, location. It's pretty much the same thing in Alice Callaghan's line of work — housing, housing, housing ... on skid row. The former Roman Catholic nun turned Episcopal priest has spent nearly 35 years single-mindedly working to bring to the homeless some of the same advantages — starting with a roof over their heads — that other Angelenos enjoy. Callaghan, who also runs skid row's Las Familias del Pueblo, a service center for immigrant families and children, was, in her teen years, a Newport Beach surfer girl; now she navigates the tricky waters of public policy and the politics of homelessness.

What do you think of the new L.A. ordinances giving the homeless less time to move their possessions or have them seized?

I'm not even sure the City Council has any idea what they mean. The city's overriding concern is not solving the homeless problem but the visibility of the homeless.

Why are they so visible now?

On skid row in the 1960s, we had almost 10,000 affordable housing units, SROs [single-room occupancy hotels]. A general relief check used to cover the rent. They were occupied by the same kind of people who are now on the street. By the 1980s we were down to about 6,700 [units].

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Now, in the 50-block [skid row] area, we are down to just 3,600 SRO units. When people say, "Why are all these people on the sidewalk?," there's a simple mathematical equation: They're on the sidewalks because we have eliminated their housing.

What happened to it?

The change began at Fourth and Main. More than a third of all the housing on skid row had been on Main. [Developer] Tom Gilmore bought a building that was not at that point housing, but by buying that building and converting it into upper-scale housing, it changed the real estate dynamic all the way down Main. Then it became almost impossible for nonprofits to secure housing because now landlords have dollar signs on the horizon. It resulted in the conversion of SROs. It was a domino effect. And the city did nothing.

In the past, the city redevelopment agency had a plan to save skid row housing, to fix it up, to maintain it, because the city understood then that if you didn't house people on the row, you couldn't solve any other problems in downtown. That plan lost support in the late '80s. With term limits, there were no champions left, the redevelopment agency began to lose its power and downtown became laissez-faire economics, which it is to this day.

The homeless ... have nowhere to go. And their numbers will increase as we continue to eliminate housing.-

New York announced a \$41-billion, 10-year plan to save housing, with an emphasis on the lowest[-income] 25%. We have no plan out of City Hall. I don't think our city has the slightest interest in the homeless except for visibility. [And yet] if you eliminate the housing, you are now saying the de facto housing for the homeless of this city for decades will be on the sidewalks.

The homeless on skid row are not going to go anywhere — they have nowhere to go. And their numbers will increase as we continue to eliminate housing.

A county program provides housing at the same time it treats people for drugs, drinking or mental health problems.

That service-enriched housing becomes very expensive. You could do four or five times as much housing if you weren't doing service-enriched housing. The other issues are secondary to housing people. Nobody wants to talk about affordable housing because it moves the burden from the homeless person to the city. So the city prefers to talk about the homeless as people with problems, as though that's what keeps them from being housed.

Shouldn't the public be able to specify the terms on which people are housed on the public dollar, like getting treatment?

Yes, there are plenty of addicted and mentally ill on the sidewalk, but plenty [are] just poor people: 600 used to live at the Cecil; the King Edward and Baltimore [hotels]. All those units are gone. Shelter is a fundamental right, like food. Every citizen has a right to affordable shelter, and if you don't provide that, don't get upset that they are occupying the public domain.

Don't the shelters fill the gap left by disappearing SRO units?

If a shelter has an empty bed, it tells you more about the [shelter] than about the homeless person who won't go in. If I were homeless, I'd find a couple of friends and get as far out of view as we could. We would not go to one of the missions with 300 in a room; people who are mentally ill, who are sick, who are yelling all night. [The shelters] are not safe. A couple of years ago, some Buddhist monks slept one night in a mission and they wouldn't go back.

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How has policing on skid row changed over the years?

The last time we had really good policing was in the early '80s. If something happened on the row, they would go out with us right away and sort it out.

Mayor Garcetti says he wants changes in the new laws to protect documents and medications. He's said the homeless are "my people" too.

To him the misery of the poor is not going to hold captive the gentrifying desires of the rich downtown.

The solutions are decades away, but in the meantime, people are going to be on the sidewalks. So we need more public restrooms. We need to allow [charities] to feed people on the sidewalks.

Los Angeles probably won't be dedicating \$41 billion to housing, as New York is. What could the city do without more money?

We should use every single zoning variance, every public dollar we have to make sure every existing unit is not converted to upscale activity. The city has to announce its commitment so developers know it's hard to develop in this area, it's hard to buy an SRO and upgrade it — go somewhere else.

The city attorney could say, Mr. Mayor, I am not going to prosecute a single person you arrest or give a ticket to under these ordinances or any others that are cruel to the homeless.

But the city has no interest in doing that. Gentrification is on a roll. Pico Union, with one of the highest densities in L.A., is being gentrified. Where are poor families there going to go?

Isn't mixed-use housing one answer?

If you're taking a Housing 101 course at UCLA, it looks good on paper, but the fact is nobody's going to feel great living in proximity to someone who's maybe a mentally ill transvestite drug addict. People don't even want them on the same block, so why would they want them in the same building? When they do mixed housing, it's almost all elderly. The elderly look better.

I read somewhere that you like the idea of skid row as a community for the homeless. What should it look like?

The SROs — fix them up. Provide an improved social service network. Skid row is the place you go when you have no money and no family. It's where you find free or cheap housing, free food, free clothes.

The plan [from the 1970s] was very enlightened. It was not to create a ghetto. You would protect the housing, you wouldn't put in retail, you'd put in other activity — like light manufacturing. That plan got abandoned.

Homeless people are no different from the rest of us: "I don't care if I have a bathroom down the hallway, if I just had a private space to live my own private life, that's all I want." That's all most people want.

This interview has been edited and condensed. patt.morrison@latimes.com

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Dialogue on Diversity with Venice Stakeholders

Housing & Homeless Dilemma



BUSINESS

The Resurrection of America's Slums

After falling in the 1990s, the number of poor people living in high-poverty areas has been growing fast.

[ALANA SEMUELS](#)

AUG 9, 2015

Half a century after President Lyndon B. Johnson declared a war on poverty, the number of Americans living in slums is rising at an extraordinary pace.

The number of people living in high-poverty areas—defined as census tracts where 40 percent or more of families have income levels below the federal poverty threshold—nearly doubled between 2000 and 2013, to 13.8 million from 7.2 million, [according to a new analysis of census data by Paul Jargowsky](#), a public-policy professor at Rutgers University-Camden and a fellow at The Century Foundation. That's the highest number of Americans living in high-poverty neighborhoods ever recorded.

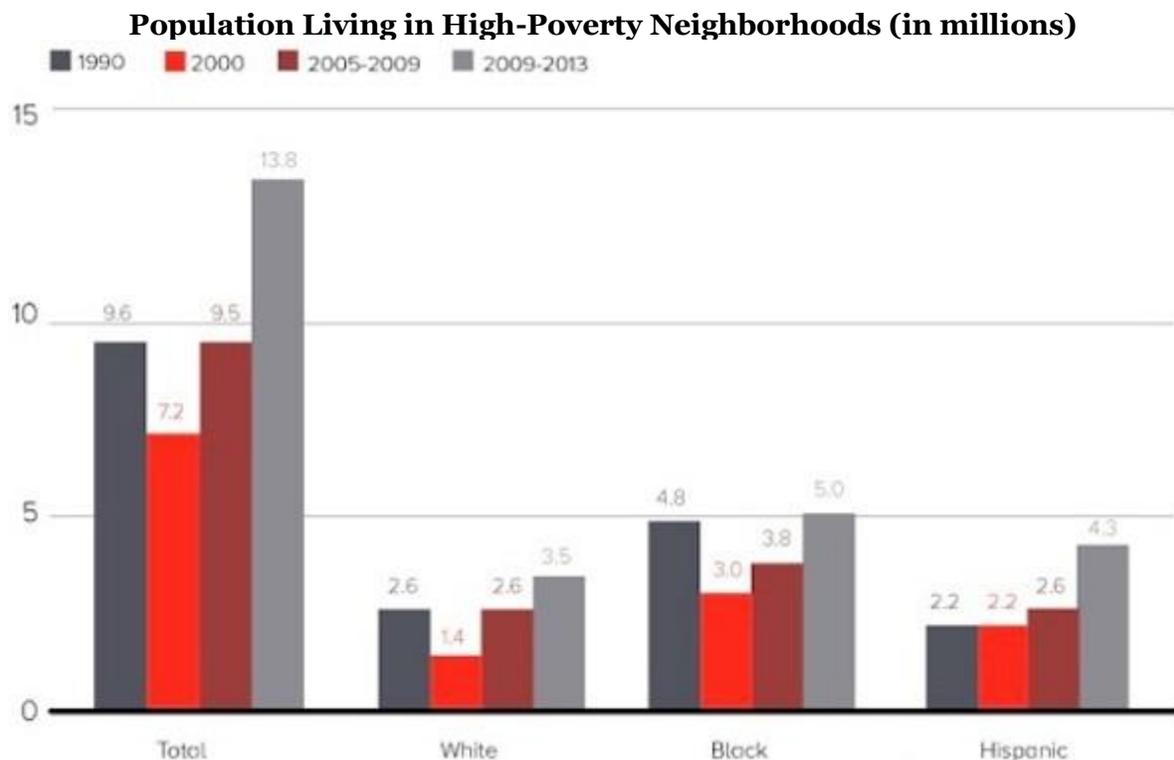
The development is worrying, especially since the number of people living in high-poverty areas [fell 25 percent](#), to 7.2 million from 9.6 million, between 1990 and 2000.

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Back then, concentrated poverty was declining in part because the economy was booming. The Earned Income Tax Credit boosted the take-home pay for many poor families. (Studies have shown the EITC also [creates a feeling](#) of social inclusion and citizenship among low-income earners.) The unemployment rate fell as low as 3.8 percent, and the first minimum wage [increases](#) in a decade made it easier for families to get by. Programs to disassemble housing projects in big cities such as Chicago and Detroit eradicated some of the most concentrated poverty in the country, Jargowsky told me.

As newly middle-class minorities moved to inner suburbs, though, the mostly white residents of those suburbs moved further away, buying up the McMansions that were being built at a rapid pace. This acceleration of white flight was especially problematic in Rust Belt towns that didn't experience the economic boom of the mid-2000s. They were watching manufacturing and jobs move overseas.



Source: 1990 and 2000 Census, 2005-2009 and 2009-2013 ACS/The Century Foundation

Cities such as Detroit saw continued white flight as wealthier residents moved to Oakland County and beyond, further and further away from the city's core. They brought their tax dollars with them, leaving the city with little tax base, a struggling economy, and no resources to spend on services.

Low-income residents who wanted to follow the wealthy to the suburbs would have had a difficult time. Many wealthy suburbs [passed zoning ordinances](#) that prohibited the construction of affordable-housing units or the construction of apartment buildings in general. Some mandated that houses all be detached, or are a minimum size, which essentially makes them too expensive for low-income families.

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“It’s no longer legal to say, ‘We don’t want African-Americans to live here,’ but you can say, ‘I’m going to make sure no one who makes less than two times the median income lives here,’” Jargowsky told me.

(Though some affordable-housing developers try to build in the suburbs, many more, especially those in the “poverty-housing industry,” [advocate for](#) building more developments in high-poverty areas to stimulate economic growth. The Local Initiatives Support Corporation, which has a goal of investing in distressed neighborhoods, for example, has spent \$14.7 billion building affordable housing units since 1980.)

Some of the cities where poverty is the most concentrated are in the Midwest and Northeast, where tens of thousands of people have headed to suburbs, and the region itself is shrinking in population. In Syracuse, New York, for example, 65 percent of the black population lived in high-poverty areas in 2013, up from 43 percent of the black population in 2000, Jargowsky found. In Detroit, 58 percent of the black population lived in areas of concentrated poverty in 2013, up from 17 percent in 2000. And in Milwaukee, 43 percent of the Latino population lived in areas of concentrated poverty in 2013, up from 5 percent in 2000.

The number of high-poverty census tracts is also growing in many of these cities. In Detroit, the number of such tracts tripled to 184, from 51 between 2000 and 2013, as concentrated poverty spread to inner suburbs. In Syracuse, the number of high-poverty census tracts grew to 30 from 12.

Federal dollars have sometimes been used in ways that increase the concentration of poverty. Most affordable housing is built with low-income housing tax credits, which are distributed by the states. States assign the tax credits through a process in which they weigh a number of different factors including the location of proposed developments. Many states have favored projects in low-income areas, a practice that was the recent subject of a Supreme Court case known as Inclusive Communities. The Inclusive Communities Project argued, in the case, that the way Texas allocated tax credits was discriminatory, since 93 percent of tax credit units in Dallas are located in census tracts that are more than 50 percent minority, and are predominantly poor. The Supreme Court agreed in June, allowing groups to bring lawsuits about such segregation.

Finally, Housing Choice Vouchers, also known as Section 8, are meant to give poor families better options about where they live, but are instead [confining the poor](#) to the few neighborhoods where landlords will accept the voucher.

All of these developments have increased the racial concentration of poverty, especially in mid-sized American cities.

“These policies build a durable architecture of segregation that ensures that racial segregation and the concentration of poverty is entrenched for years to come,” Jargowsky writes.

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Highest Black Concentration of Poverty

RANK	METROPOLITAN AREA	BLACK		
		2000	2005-2009	2005-2009
1	Syracuse, NY	43.4	48.3	65.2
2	Detroit-Livonia-Dearborn, MI	17.3	41.4	57.6
3	Toledo, OH	18.7	43.4	54.5
4	Rochester, NY	34.2	43.5	51.5
5	Fresno, CA	42.8	28.1	51.4
6	Buffalo-Niagara Falls, NY	30.8	31.8	46.4
7	Cleveland-Elyria-Mentor, OH	26.7	36.7	45.5
8	Gary, IN	22.2	30.1	45.2
9	Milwaukee-Waukesha-West Allis, WI	38.7	41.0	44.8
10	Louisville/Jefferson County, KY-IN	38.6	41.9	42.6

Sources: 2000 Census, 2005-2009 and 2009-2013 ACS/The Century Foundation

Some recent developments, including the Supreme Court decision and a new HUD rule that requires regions to think more carefully about segregation, are positive signs. But Jargowsky says deeper policy prescriptions are needed to reduce these depressing trends in concentrated poverty. First, he says, federal and state governments must ensure that new suburban developments aren't built more quickly than the metropolitan region is growing, so that such developments don't create a population vacuum in cities and inner suburbs. Second, every city and town must ensure that new housing construction reflects the income distribution of the metropolitan area, he said, so that more housing is available to people of all incomes in different parts of town.

"If we are serious about breaking down spatial inequality," Jargowsky writes, "We have to overcome our political gridlock and chart a new course toward a more geographically inclusive society."

That's important for the future of our cities, but also for our nation, Jargowsky said. His research shows that poor children are more likely to live in high-poverty areas than are poor adults—28 percent of poor black children live in high-poverty areas, for example, compared to 24 percent of poor black adults. Overall, 16.5 percent of poor children live in high-poverty areas, compared to 13.8 percent of poor adults.

A child who grows up in a high-poverty area is likely to be poor when he grows up. [Research](#) out this year from Harvard shows that children who moved from poor areas to more affluent areas had higher incomes and better educational achievements than those who stayed in poor areas. Without dramatic changes, today's children who live in high-poverty areas are going to grow up to be poor, too.



ALANA SEMUELS is a staff writer at *The Atlantic*.

Dialogue on Diversity with Venice Stakeholders

She was previously a national correspondent for the *Los Angeles Times*.

Housing & Homeless Dilemma

Los Angeles homeless need safe havens, not sidewalks: Mike Bonin



Los Angeles must find alternatives to sidewalk encampments for the thousands of people living without permanent shelter, writes Councilman Mike Bonin. (John McCoy/LA Daily News)

By Mike Bonin

POSTED: 07/23/15, 1:00 PM PDT |

In recent years, Los Angeles has seen more progress in combating homelessness than it ever has — yet the problem is still getting worse.

Since 2011, the region has housed more than 23,000 people — a record number even by national standards. Yet homelessness is on the rise. Encampments are proliferating in our neighborhoods throughout the city. There are villages of tents on sidewalks from Venice to Van Nuys, and shantytowns in neighborhoods from Skid Row to San Pedro.

How is this possible? And how can we fix it?

The problem has roots in Los Angeles' failure to provide sufficient housing and shelter. In 2006, the city got slapped hard by federal courts, which ruled that it was cruel and unusual punishment to forbid people from sleeping on sidewalks if there was not sufficient housing or shelter. In response, the city made a long-term commitment to build more housing, agreed to allow sidewalk camping, and enshrined that policy in a legally binding agreement.

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Predictably, the stock of available housing has come nowhere close to meeting the demand. As a result, there are nearly 20,000 people in the city without shelter — and they are going where the law and the lack of resources is telling them to go: sidewalks, parks, and canyons.

While it must have been a tempting way for the city to wash its hands of the legal issue, this policy has been a disaster. The impacts have been as harmful as they should have been predictable: Encampments are increasing. The unsheltered homeless are falling deeper into chronic homelessness and mental illness. Neighborhood quality of life is being damaged. No one wins.

The ultimate solution to homelessness is providing housing first, with supportive services as needed. But even if we build exponentially more housing faster than we ever have, we will have tens of thousands of people without shelter for years. That's not acceptable.

While we wait to build enough housing, we spend a tremendous amount of time and money dealing with the issue of encampments, but we focus very little on giving people an alternative to sidewalks. We can't ignore the problem or wish it away. Housing first cannot mean housing only.

We need real alternatives to living in shanties — a menu of options between our sidewalks and our far too scarce permanent housing. That includes shared housing, bridge housing, sobering centers, transitional shelters, and even emergency shelters. We need options that keep people off the streets, out of risk, and engaged in case management and services unavailable on the street. We need to create and invest in a continuum of care rather than in our current policy of malignant neglect.

We must do better than a system of bare-bones, one-size-fits-all shelters that feel like prisons, and become permanent warehouses for people. We need specialized, welcoming centers or shared housing for couples, for families with children, for teenage runaways, for veterans and others. New York has begun to move toward this model. Agencies there have begun to implement a new “safe haven” system of shelters to lure the chronically unsheltered and service resistant from the streets. Officials are creating a series of round-the-clock “drop-in” centers. Churches and synagogues are opening small overnight “respite programs.”

We should do that here.

The issue of the unsheltered homeless population in Los Angeles is daunting. Citywide, 73 percent of our homeless go without shelter. Addressing this problem will require significant investment from and partnership with other levels of government. We will need money from the state, and from the county, and its health, mental health and social service agencies. We will need partners in the private sector and in the faith communities. We will likely need to change or suspend some land-use regulations to make it easier to create more housing and shelter options.

This will be challenging. It will cost money and political capital — neither of which is unlimited, and both of which are needed to build permanent supportive housing. We need more of both. We cannot ignore the enormous gap between our small supply of permanent housing and our tremendous demand. And we cannot ignore the costs and consequences — to our unhoused and unsheltered neighbors and to our neighborhoods — of the City of Angels being a City of Encampments.

Los Angeles City Councilman Mike Bonin is a member of the council's Committee on Homelessness.

Dialogue on Diversity with Venice Stakeholders

Social & Physical Character Dilemma

Power To Speak: The Dwellification of Venice

Posted July 22, 2015 by The Argonaut in [Columns](#)

By Oren Safdie

Once a catalyst for experimentation, Venice is letting its architecture get big, boxy and stale



Safdie argues that many of the new homes being built along Brooks Avenue in the heart of Oakwood don't continue a unique Venice style of architecture, they caricature it

Venice Beach has always had the reputation of being on the cutting edge of design and fashion. Numerous architects either live or work in the area, and the shmorgasbourg of styles one encounters from street to street, or even from house to house, turns Venice into a walk-through architectural museum showcasing an eclectic mix of styles that makes Venice — well, Venice.

The Argonaut extolled these virtues last year in a feature article in which several avant-garde houses appeared alongside commentary from their architects. Unanimously, they extolled the freedom they felt designing in a neighborhood that had no historical or stylistic norm to tie them down, a relatively lax building code and a sense that Venice inspired them to experiment.

But look a little closer, and a spat of new single-house dwellings and triplexes popping up along Brooks Avenue (and the rest of the Oakwood section of Venice, for that matter) suggest a much less exciting future.

The Oakwood area has the most potential for growth, as many of the dwellings are prime targets for tear downs. Rising property values and a resurgence of commercial growth along Abbot Kinney Boulevard and Rose Avenue have also made this part of Venice the hip place to live.

But signs of innovative architecture? Not anymore.

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Part of the problem has its roots in the most recent housing recession and the tightening of loan credit. Many of the 5,000-square-foot lots became attractive targets for newbie developers who had cash on hand and were able to close without risk. Other buyers included young families who wanted to stay on the Westside but couldn't afford Santa Monica. With a lot of gang activity having been pushed out, Oakwood offered a viable alternative.

For developers, the main concern was to fill up every viable square foot of the property, usually amassing three two-floor units in order to maximize profits. These were then either leased or put up for sale to families looking for three-bedroom, two-bathroom units. And for the families who were able to buy directly, there seems to have been little money left over to hire a decent architect, with owners sometimes resorting to relying on their own sketches for building contractors to execute. Landscaping was usually shoe-horned into wherever it could fit.

If this were just one or two units per block, it might not be so disparaging. But on Brooks Avenue (between 7th Avenue and Lincoln Boulevard), almost every house is starting to look like a cheap knockoff of the one next to it.

By the best measure, the overriding influence can best be described as a cheap amalgamation of the houses you might find in Dwell. The façades consist of a play between stucco or concrete and shellacked decorative wood-paneling to give the appearance of being environmentally friendly. The iron ship railings give a shout-out to Le Corbusier, and there's sometimes a small twist in floor plan or an angled window to pay homage to the Deconstructivists.

There has been some push-back from people in the Venice community, coming in the form of opposition to "mega-mansions" or triplexes that eat up all the green space, but any sort of restrictions would also drive down property values — so let's just say there aren't that many people pushing too hard.

Given Venice's status as an innovator of housing design and a bellwether of what might be coming down the pike, there's a larger question at hand. Is this one block an isolated case, or are we on the cusp of a new style of architecture: the Dwellification of America?

Oren Safdie is a playwright who has lived in Venice for three years. He recently published "False Solution," the third in a series of plays set in the world of architecture. Safdie studied architecture at Columbia University and currently teaches playwriting at the University of Miami.

Reader Comments

Cb Barrett

July 23, 2015 at 10:16 pm

It's not only Oakwood, it's happening east of Lincoln too. The 800 block of Flower & on Rose. Realtors with investors by the lot, tear it down to one room so it's a remodel & then build the 2 story rectangle that uses most of the lot. Absolutely nothing unique or attractive

Holly Mosher

July 24, 2015 at 11:29 am

You are so right on about this.

Now every time I walk, bike or drive down the streets and see a for-sale sign, it just breaks my heart knowing that in a year it will be another one of these monsters. It seems that most of them are being done on spec too. Not by families who are choosing to make these. Because after they are built, you immediately see another for sale sign go up. It is just so sad. RIP Venice.

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Stephen E Gries

July 24, 2015 at 1:27 pm

It's all over Venice it's awful no attempt to blend in rather to stick out. Most of these places look alike ie industrial. Definitely out of character probably in major violation under The Venice Specific Plan which has been on the books for over 100 years. Every time I see one I laugh because they remind me of a dentist's office bldg, I'm now living under the shadow of a McMansion 3 stories 90% of the entire lot@518 Santa Clara.

This never should have been allowed even under The Coastal Commission's Venice Sign off.

Illegal setback no outside staircase no steel beams to support all four sides no external staircase etc. now our once quaint street looks like someone built a public library on it. No privacy no view anymore less light less breeze. And the kicker here is Bonin never did anything about it even when I told him to his face that all residents on all four sides were never notified or offered compensation (which is the law even under The VSO waivers though when I first inquired to his office I was assured that we would all receive notices from the city in the mail regarding proposed construction and we the neighbors would get our chance to object and discuss. That never happened! So I was lied to by our own elected representative!

So if you want Venice to continue to be turned into ReCondo Beach,

Then keep trusting in The VNC and Bonin and The LUPC. A bunch of sell out rats imho.

Stephen Gries

July 24, 2015 at 2:14 pm

Where are the other comments? Including mine I just posted @2pm 7/24/15?

Deborah Lashever

July 24, 2015 at 2:40 pm

It's like watching a wonderfully eccentric and treasured friend die. Every day we see more and more signs that the end is drawing closer. Breaks my heart. There will never be another Venice.

Cold minds are taking the place of warm hearts here. Lots of money pouring in but many still are forced to sleep on the streets with little to no assistance. In fact developers are calling for more and more criminalization of the poor and vulnerable to drive them out. Property values rule the day.

This slash and burn gentrification that is creating Silicon Beach in place of our beloved Venice is frankly ugly in every way.

David Busch

July 25, 2015 at 11:26 am

Leave it to L.A.s out-of-control developer-political complex:

To turn Venice trash—which for decades has been recognized world-wide as a source of creative treasure. Into developer-trash; which nobody can stand. Kudos to Bonin!

Too bad Bonin won't recognize that even his mentor, Rosendahl —has now seen much of the errors of his ways in launching all this.

Mike —it's a lot more than a matter of o-pocolyps —it's an apocolypsis of our ability to dream in Venice.

Wake up, brother! You, your developer cronies and all your cops are killing Venice!

Please empty your pockets; get yourself some love —and Stop it!