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May 23, 2016

The Honorable José Huizar
Chair, Planning and Land Use Management Committee
Los Angeles City Council, c/o City Clerk, Room 395
City Hall, 200 North Spring Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012-4801

Dear Council Member Huizar:

This letter is to provide you with information on the impact of the availability of affordable housing on health and well-being, and pertains to the proposed Reef Development Project in the Southeast Los Angeles Community Plan Area in the Ninth Council District. The Reef Development Project is a proposed mixed-use development that would cover approximately 10 acres; a draft environmental impact report was submitted for public comment and for review by the City of Los Angeles Planning Department (ENV-2014-1773-EIR). This letter is not intended to address the merits of the proposed project, but rather to generally convey information on the health impacts related to the lack of quality, affordable housing that may be exacerbated by development projects such as this.

Research has shown that the social and economic factors in the environments where we work, play, live, and learn, i.e., social determinants of health, can have a profound impact on the health of individuals and communities. Promoting economic development in South Los Angeles is laudable given the well-established interrelationship between economic well-being and health outcomes. Among the social determinants of health, affordable housing stands out as particularly important since the location, quality, and affordability of housing have all been linked to health outcomes.

As you know, there is an immense shortage of quality and affordable housing in the City and County of Los Angeles. Efforts by the Los Angeles City Council, in partnership with the County, to address the lack of affordable housing particularly with respect to the homelessness crisis are to be commended. The persistent lack of affordable, safe, quality, and protected housing continues to exacerbate health disparities and social inequities. The following summarizes the evidence of the connection between health and housing:

When quality, affordable housing is not available or accessible:

- People are often unable to afford healthy food, medical and mental healthcare, and other essential goods and services, all of which can negatively impact health. Individuals are more likely to fail to fill a prescription or adhere to healthcare treatment due to cost; are more likely to describe themselves as being in fair or poor health compared to individuals living in affordable housing; and are more likely to report unhealthy days in the last month compared to those who do not have difficulties affording housing.

- Adults and children experience higher levels of stress, anxiety, hopelessness and depression, which also impacts their overall health and well-being.
- People may be involuntary forced to move to areas further from their jobs, their social network, and religious institutions, all of which can adversely impact health as well.
- Moving frequently leads to housing instability and has negative impacts on children including increased absenteeism and poor performance in school, which is linked with negative health and social outcomes.

Additional information about the links between housing and health is provided in the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (DPH) report entitled, *Social Determinants of Health: Housing and Health in Los Angeles County*, available on DPH's website.

An October 2015 Health Impact Assessment report by Human Impact Partners found that the Reef Development Project may have the following impacts:

- New developments, like the Reef, in underserved neighborhoods can lead the community residents to experience high risk financial strain due to gentrification, which can lead to indirect displacement - a type of displacement that occurs when residents and businesses are gradually priced out of the area and must involuntarily leave.
- Residents who experience financial strain and/or displacement may experience a range of chronic stress-related physical and mental illnesses, including anxiety, depression, hypertension, heart disease, and obesity, diabetes, and sleep disorders.
- Disruption of social networks can lead to additional health challenges, including exposure to fragmented social environments that have higher rates of violence and sexually transmitted diseases.

Increased access to affordable housing in housing development projects such as the Reef Project Development would help ameliorate the lack of quality, affordable housing in the City of Los Angeles and related negative health outcomes described above.

Thank you for your time and attention to the importance of affordable housing in protecting the public's health. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like additional information on this important public health issue.

Sincerely,


Cynthia A. Harding, M.P.H.
Interim Director

CAH:jb

c: Planning and Land Use Management Committee
Council Member Curren D. Price, Jr.
South Los Angeles Area Planning Commission
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