



April 13, 2018

Honorable Committee Members
California Senate Committee on Transportation and Housing
State Capitol, Room 2209
Sacramento, CA 95814
Via email to: Cicely Chisolm at cicely.chisolm@sen.ca.gov

RE: SB 827 (Wiener) Planning and Zoning - Transit-Rich Housing Bonus - OPPOSE

To The Honorable Committee Members:

The United Neighbors in Defense Against Displacement Coalition (UNIDAD) writes to express our opposition to SB 827. If passed, the bill will roll back the recent and significant progress we have seen in Los Angeles on community-centered planning for preservation and production of affordable housing, tenant protections, and anti-displacement measures. For South Central LA, this means nullifying the progress the community has made, most recently with the People’s Plan, a set of community-centered and community-led equitable development policies. The Peoples Plan campaign, and the resulting equitable development policies in the South and Southeast LA Community Plans, are widely regarded as a step in the right direction for the future of sustainable and equitable development.

UNIDAD rejects the false NIMBY-YIMBY binary. The People’s Plan is, in fact, an alternative and represents a third way for development -- an approach to density that centers policies to advance equity through affordability, renters’ rights, and anti-displacement strategies. Even with recent amendments, SB 827 still represents a missed opportunity to uplift community-led development processes, such as that of the People’s Plan, and, thus, actually diminishes community input and a democratic process for residents to inform equitable development practices that will result in inclusion, equity, and justice for all.

UNIDAD and The People’s Plan

For over 25 years, UNIDAD’s work on equitable development has centered low-income communities and communities of color. Our coalition is one of residents and their organizations in South Central LA dedicated to keeping families in their homes and improving the health and economic well-being of low-income communities of color through responsible development. We recognize that structural racism linked to housing, policing, land use, and employment policies have caused great harm to Black, Latino, Native, Asian, immigrant, and low-income communities. Thus, the focus of our work is to reverse these harms by promoting healthy and equitable neighborhoods through planning and land use that is rooted in community.

We have seen the benefit of a transparent and democratic process, where residents’ expertise about the factors impacting their community are valuable guides to local planning and development policies. This is evident in the community benefits agreements (CBAs) that UNIDAD has worked on with community members and, most notably, in our People’s Plan campaign of 2017, which uplifted the coalition’s policy

wins from past CBA's, for more equitable and inclusive South and Southeast LA Community Plans (the Plans).

Lauded by the LA Times Editorial Board¹, the People's Plan is a community-centered framework for equitable and inclusive development in the South and Southeast LA Community Plans. It is a result of extensive collaboration with families, residents, and business owners throughout South Central LA to build a vision for development that meets our community's needs. This community-led process, paired with considerable research, analysis, and deliberation over the course of nearly a decade, yielded a series of recommendations in four broad principles:

- i. Create a net gain of affordable housing.
- ii. Promote inclusive economic development by supporting local workers and businesses.
- iii. Promote community health and wellness.
- iv. Strengthen community leadership in the land use planning process.

To promote a net gain of affordable housing, the People's Plan recommended specific zoning overlay programs that align density increases with significant community benefits - including significant and deep affordability - that were determined by stakeholders from those communities. In addition to these enhanced density incentives, the People's Plan also provided for an area-wide no net loss program throughout South LA that incorporates various anti-displacement and affordable housing replacement policies that align with the incentive programs tied to transit corridors. These are just a few of the community-driven policy recommendations in the Peoples Plan. Recognizing the need for planning to be based on community input and a transparent process, in November 2017, the LA City Council directly incorporated a significant part of the People's Plan equitable development platform into the new South and Southeast LA Community Plans.

SB 827

Unfortunately, SB 827 threatens to undermine the progress residents have made in ensuring policies that promote equitable, inclusive, and sustainable development. Specifically, the bill would nullify the People's Plan strategies incorporated in the Plans, while also making it more difficult to build what communities need near transit.

The fact is that the housing and homelessness crisis gripping the state are based on myriad problems related to poverty. Here in Los Angeles, our context is distinct. Households with the lowest income (earning less than \$25,000 per year for a family of four) reside in our urban core and make up 75% of our Metro system's core riders. On any given night, over 34,000 people are homeless. Zip codes in South Los Angeles and Westlake are home to the worst residential overcrowding in the country. As the County struggles to meet its need for over half a million additional affordable housing units, market forces continue to drive both the development of homes near transit that are priced out of reach for the majority of LA residents (including transit riders) and the destruction of existing homes housing core transit riders. The city is on track to meet its goal of 100,000 units by 2021 – but the vast majority of those units will be unaffordable to core transit riders². Finally, since 2001, over 20,000 rent controlled units were destroyed, and many more households have been displaced due to unlawful evictions and harassment.

¹ "Can South Los Angeles Do Revitalization without Gentrification and Displacement?" *Los Angeles Times*, 21 Nov. 2017, www.latimes.com/opinion/editorials/la-ed-south-la-community-plans-20171121-story.html.

² <https://la.curbed.com/2017/11/2/16598936/la-affordable-housing-new-units>. See also City of LA 2015 Housing Element Progress Report, Table B, demonstrating City met and exceeded its above-moderate income housing

What we need are programs that center low-income communities and communities of color in the planning process, and policies that are focused on preserving and producing affordable housing, enhancing tenant protections and anti-displacement policies, and advancing other equity issues related to poverty. The City's South & Southeast LA Community Plans, as a result of the People's Plan campaign, represent a commitment to this approach. In contrast, SB 827 represents a flawed solution that offers a piecemeal approach to equity with amendments, rather than beginning from that mindset. The bill loses a valuable opportunity to meaningfully uplift community concerns and support equitable development policies that work. It continues to undermine state and local programs that are working, fails to address exclusionary communities, continues to diminish democratic process, continues to increase speculation and fails to adequately protect renters. SB 827 will still make it harder to build what we need around transit.

UNIDAD's Approach

The path to equitable development, and to racial and economic justice, through city planning starts with listening to the most impacted communities and learning from their experience as they have struggled against waves of disinvestment and displacement. In Los Angeles, many historically disadvantaged communities have advocated for a path forward that does not rely on segregationist practices nor free-market deregulation. The organizations that are signatories to this letter, and who are members of UNIDAD, are working as organizations or in coalition to deeply engage historically-disadvantaged communities and craft policy that prioritizes equitable development and input from those who have been marginalized by historical planning patterns. We understand that ensuring equity is necessary for low-income communities and communities of color.

SB 827 IS NOT the answer. That honor lies with the very communities SB 827 claims to help. UNIDAD asks you to please, therefore, listen to our region's communities and craft state housing policies which build upon the significant accomplishments we have made here in LA.

Sincerely,

Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment (ACCE) Action
Blazers
Community Development Technologies (CDTech)
Dignity and Power Now
Esperanza Community Housing Corporation
Los Angeles Black Worker Center
Los Angeles County Bicycle Coalition
Los Angeles Neighborhood Land Trust
Physicians for Social Responsibility – Los Angeles (PSR-LA)
PV Jobs
Strategic Actions for a Just Economy (SAJE)
St. Francis Center
St. John's Well Child and Family Center
St. Mark's Lutheran Church
T.R.U.S.T. South LA

RHNA allocation 3 years ago, but is still woefully behind on its affordable housing goals, available at:
https://planning.lacity.org/HousingServices/files/APRs/2015_APR.pdf

Watts Labor Community Action Committee
Women in Non-Traditional Employment Roles

CC:

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