

Letter:

All projects of significant impact or size deserve full vetting with sufficient time and input devoted to evaluating their impacts. The City Planning Report points out that the proposed action would have the effect of limiting public participation in the approval process. The proposed procedural change to bypass the PLUM Committee would result in delay of other City Council business. Alternative solution(s) must be developed to deal with the problem of the corruption in the planning and land use process engaged in by the City Council's Planning and Land Use Management Committee and the City Council. The Studio City Neighborhood Council opposes the City Council motion seeking to bypass the PLUM Committee for "high value projects".

Bypassing the City Council's PLUM Committee bypasses the last critical opportunity to fully vet and evaluate the most impactful projects in the City of Los Angeles and their effects on the communities in which they intend to build. Circumventing the Council's PLUM Committee could lead to increased corruption with less review. These "High Value" projects provide the public many opportunities to comment on the significant impacts to their neighborhoods, land values and traffic effects, which we doubt can be accommodated by the full City Council. This motion to expedite projects would have the effect of limiting public participation in the approval process by eliminating any hearing held by the City PLUM Committee. Pressing matters of the full City Council will curtail the amount of time for public participation now handled in meetings at the PLUM Committee stage and the Planning Department Report has presented quantifiable determination as to exactly what constitutes a "High Value" project, and questions whether the full City Council can dedicate the time, staffing or depth of understanding to acquire a full understanding of all the significant issues that could/will significantly impact a neighborhood or community.

The City has created insufficient barriers to the lawyers, private planners, lobbyists and other individuals in promoting a "High Value" project to Council Members, thus creating the opportunity for even more City decision makers to be targets for corruption. The City Council would be better off limiting the access of developers and lobbyists to Councilmembers for the purpose of influencing project determinations and should make real efforts to create a true independent review of these "High Value" projects, which cost hundreds of millions of dollars and affect the lifestyles and environment of hundreds of thousands of Los Angeles residents and businesses for multiple decades.

The SCNC strongly urges the Los Angeles City Council to consider the following points for "High Value" projects and delay passage until the following are addressed for the benefit of the public:

1. Alternative definitions of a "High Value" project be offered by City Planning, for the public and the City Council, that reflect "High Impact" since size does not always match impacts. Size should not be the only determinant.
2. The public should know in advance for transparency as to exactly which individual(s) using which requirements will have the authority to determine if a project is sent to the City PLUM Committee or sent directly to the full City Council for resolution.
3. A solution is found that creates a greater timeframe and more generous appeal process for the public—and specifically for stakeholders in the neighborhood where the project is slated to be built—before the sitting City Council members make any final decisions.
4. Requirements be developed to prohibit contact outside of public meetings between "High Value" applicants or their representative and the Members of the City Council or their staff.

5. The proposed “Policies and Procedures” undergoing review by the City Attorney must include and not limit opportunity for Neighborhood Councils to participate in project vetting.
6. For “High Value” projects, Neighborhood Councils should be provided additional time to comment on projects due to the complexity of issues.
7. Neighborhood Councils and the Public should be given additional time to comment after changes introduced within the meeting or since the last public meeting.

The Studio City Neighborhood Council (SCNC) advises the Los Angeles City Council, the Los Angeles Planning Department, and the City Department of Neighborhood Empowerment must perform greater outreach to the residents and business of the City of Los Angeles and to their elected Neighborhood Councils so that the constituents of this City can have a greater voice in the most significant projects impacting our surrounding environment and lifestyles.

Sincerely,

Scott Mandell, President
Studio City Neighborhood Council