

Communication from Public

Name: Akhilesh Jha

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Council File No: 23-0497

Comments for Public Posting: Points and Authorities in support of the project and against the appeal.

Akhilesh K Jha
13123 Hoyt St, Pacoima, CA 91331
Phone: 310-995-4859, Email: contact.aj.jha@gmail.com

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Los Angeles City Council
c/o Office of the City Clerk
City Hall, Room 395
Los Angeles, California 90012

Re: Council File: 23-0497, 1848 South Gramercy Place; Related Case: CPC-2020-2115-DB-HCA, ENV-2020-2116-CE-1A

Dear Council Members,

I am writing in support of the affordable housing project proposed at 1848 S Gramercy Pl, Los Angeles, CA 90019 under Council File 23-0497. The project in question was duly approved by the Planning Commission on February 23, 2023. A CEQA Class-32 Exemption, determined by the City and the Planning Commission, was appealed by Laura Meyers on May 10, 2023 based on the allegation that the existing house is a historic monument. Please note that Laura Meyers lives on the same street (Gramercy Place); about four houses away from the proposed project site and she is hell-bent on not letting the housing project approved since May 5, 2018 when she wrongly convinced Council District 10 that the existing house is a **Transitional Victorian Residence**. She is relitigating the issue, which was put to rest by the city staff, historic commission, PLUM committee, and subsequently by this council on October 03, 2018. I would like to bring to your attention the following facts that clearly show that historic monument consideration should be rejected and the planning commission findings should be upheld by this council.

1. Historic Monument Consideration has been already denied by the City Council

Ms. Meyers has been trying to declare this house a historic monument since May 5, 2018 when she wrongly convinced Council District 10 that the existing house is a **Transitional Victorian Residence**. Of course, as you would see from every report that this house had nothing to do with a Victorian-Style of residence. Please see the exact motion City Council Motion 18-0330 below (**Exhibit¹**) initiating historic monument determination by the city:

“The property located at 1848 S. Gramercy Place, Los Angeles, CA 90019, is an excellent example of a 1905 **Transitional Victorian residence** in the city with an accessory Colonial Revival dwelling in the rear of the lot, and therefore, this multi-family residence is one of the few remaining early (1904-05) **Transitional Victorian residences** in the Angelus Vista Tract

¹ https://clkrep.lacity.org/online/docs/2018/18-0330_mot_04-13-2018.pdf

representing one of the early suburban residential tracts as the city developed farther west.” (emphasis added)

Under CHC-2018-3217-HCM, the city Cultural Heritage Commission held a meeting on July 5, 2018. The Commission determined that this house does not conform with the definition of a Monument pursuant to LAMC Section 22.171.7 by a vote of 5-0 (**Exhibit**²). In particular, the city staff from the Office of Historic Resources found that (**Exhibit**³):

(a) The Stokes’ Angelus Vista Tract Residence does not meet the criteria for designation under the Cultural Heritage Ordinance.

The preparer argues that the property is eligible under two criteria of the Ordinance: that it “is identified with important events of national, state, or local history or exemplifies significant contributions to the broad cultural, economic or social history of the nation, state, city or community” for its association with the early development of the Angelus Vista Tract and a California Supreme Court case involving restrictive use covenants, *Werner v. Graham*, and that it “embodies the distinctive characteristics of a style, type, period, or method of construction; or represents a notable work of a master designer, builder, or architect whose individual genius influenced his or her age” as an unique example of Craftsman-style architecture and an exemplary work of noted builder Naldo F. Stokes.

(b) The subject property is not associated with any significant historical events and does not exemplify any contributions to history.

Even though the subject property does date from the early period of the neighborhood’s development, it no longer retains sufficient integrity to individually convey its significance. The cumulative alterations, particularly on the primary, east-facing elevation, have substantially impacted the original design intent, materials, feeling, and association with the development of the Angelus Vista Tract. Further, the court case cited by the preparer may have had some impact on the development of Washington Boulevard as a commercial corridor; however, while the owner of the house was one of the named defendants, the case does not appear to have any direct association with the subject property.

(c) It is not a distinctive or outstanding example of Craftsman-style architecture

Although the subject property retains original elements such as wood windows, decorative half-timbering, wide over-hanging eaves, exposed rafter tails, and built-in furniture typical of the style, **staff does not find it to be a distinctive or outstanding example of Craftsman-style architecture**. As noted above, the house has experienced a number of alterations, particularly to the primary façade, that compromise the integrity and original design of the house; **therefore, it is not a distinguished example of the style**. More intact and exemplary Craftsman-style single-family residences that are already designated include the Kissam House, 2160 West 20th Street

² https://clkrep.lacity.org/onlinedocs/2018/18-0330_rpt_CHC_07-12-2018.pdf

³ https://clkrep.lacity.org/onlinedocs/2018/18-0330_misc_07-12-2018.pdf

(1907, HCM #761), Perrine House, 2229 South Gramercy Place (1908, HCM #6662), and the Edward Alexander Kelley Hackett House, 1317 South Westlake Avenue (1910, HCM #719).

(d) The property is also not a notable example of a master designer, builder, or architect.

While Naldo Stokes built at least 50 single-family residences across Los Angeles, some of which were collaborations with master architect Frank M. Tyler, he is not recognized as a master builder or architect. The majority of Stokes' body of work consists of speculative ventures for himself and his wife.

(e) The subject property was not identified by the citywide historic resources survey, SurveyLA, as eligible for designation under the national, state, or local designation programs.

(f) The City staff finds that it does not appear to rise to the level of historic significance to be individually eligible for designation as a Los Angeles City Historic-Cultural Monument.

2. United Neighborhoods Neighborhood Council Rejected HCM Designation

Despite the best effort of Laura Meyers, United Neighborhoods Neighborhood Council rejected the HCM nomination of the house on June 7, 2018 Resolution as explained in **Exhibit**⁴.

3. City Approved Historic Preservation Consultant Found the Property Ineligible for NR, CR or Local Designation

ESA Services Associates/PCR Services Corporation, which is in the HISTORICAL RESOURCE CONSULTANTS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW (**Exhibit**⁵) provided by the city, recommended that the subject property not be considered a historical resource pursuant to CEQA and that it be assigned a California Historic Resource (CHR) Status Code of 6Z, noting it as ineligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (National Register or NR) as California Register of Historical Resources (California Register or CR), as well as local designation, through survey evaluation. In particular, it made the following findings (**Exhibit**⁶):

(a) In 1987, the subject property was reviewed as part of a Section 106 Review for HUD. The resulting DPR (19-173454) indicates that it was assigned a 6Y CHR status, denoting "determined ineligible for NR by consensus through Section 106 process- Not evaluated for CR or Local Listing."

⁴ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1jcaR7O1xtsNSP7OXaKT40K6e3mvoFF93/view?usp=sharing>

⁵ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/18WB0r0wnelZCEg9vhlpnqQMdvBt9HGRO/view?usp=sharing>

⁶ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1vcReK4d6MgYG5_OZL6AnD2gjZApK-326/view?usp=sharing

- (b) *In 2012, SurveyLA conducted a survey of the South Los Angeles Community Plan Area, and did not identify 1848 Gramercy Place as an individually significant historic resources or as a contributor to a potential historic district, including the Angelus Vista Historic District. As a result of ESA’s investigation, the current technical analysis agrees with the 1987 findings that the property is not eligible for listing on the National Register.*
- (c) *Since the date of the most recent evaluation was more than five years ago, ESA re-evaluated the subject property at the federal, state, and local levels. As a result, ESA found the subject property ineligible for listing under all applicable criteria at the federal, state, and local levels.*
- (d) *There is no evidence that suggests the subject property was significant to the development of the Angelus Vista Tract, as the subject property was built five years after the plot was subdivided and there are intact early examples of single-family residences within the tract and within in the Angelus Vista Historic District. Furthermore, the subject property lacks architectural merit as an excellent example of the Tudor Revival style and a notable work of builder Naldo Stokes.*
- (e) *The subject property also has not yielded, and is not likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.*
- (f) *In addition, the subject property lacks integrity of design, materials, workmanship and feeling due to alterations. Therefore, ESA recommends that the subject property not be considered a historical resource pursuant to CEQA and that it be assigned a CHR Status Code of 6Z, “Found ineligible for NR, CR or Local designation through survey evaluation.”*

4. City Council Concurred with Historic Monument Consideration Findings

On October 5, 2018, the city council voted 13-0 in the favor of adapting The Cultural Heritage Commission finding relative to the declination of designation for the Stokes' Angelus Vista Tract Residence located at 1848 South Gramercy Place in the list of Historic- Cultural Monuments (**Exhibit**⁷). It is also interesting to note the Council District 10, which had initiated this motion on the behest of Laura Meyers also voted in the favor of adapting The Cultural Heritage Commission finding and thereby concluding that the project site is not a historic monument.

5. City Planning Commission Concurred with Historic Monument Consideration Findings:

On February 23, 2023, City Planning Commission found that (**Exhibit**⁸)

Neither the project site itself nor any of the existing structures on the project site have been identified as a historic resource by local or state agencies. On May 5, 2018, an application was

⁷ https://clkrep.lacity.org/onlinedocs/2018/18-0330_CAF_10-05-2018.pdf

⁸ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1y6_fky9NJYB7IaYy_uUc5SdK2dLLkJZ2/view?usp=sharing

filed (per case CHC-2018-3217-HCM) to declare the property an Historic- Cultural Monument. City Planning Staff recommended that the Cultural Heritage Commission not declare the property an Historic-Cultural Monument per Los Angeles Administrative Code, Chapter 9, Division 22, Article 1, Section 22.171.7. At a hearing on July 15, 2018, the Commission determined the project site is not eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, California Register of Historical Resources, the Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monuments Register, and/or any local register. Further, the project site was not found to be a potential historic resource based on the City's HistoricPlacesLA website or SurveyLA, the citywide survey of Los Angeles. Neither the State nor the City consider the site a historic resource, therefore, the proposed project cannot cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource and this exception does not apply.

Additionally, the Project Site is located within a developed and urban area, as such, will not cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of an historical resource.

Therefore, the Project is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to State CEQA Guidelines, Article 19, Section 15332 (Class 32) and there is no substantial evidence demonstrating that an exception to a categorical exemption pursuant to CEQA Guidelines, Section 15300.2 applies.

There is no substantial evidence in the record that the proposed incentive(s) will have a specific adverse impact. A "specific adverse impact" is defined as, "a significant, quantifiable, direct and unavoidable impact, based on objective, identified written public health or safety standards, policies, or conditions as they existed on the date the application was deemed complete" (LAMC Section 12.22 A.25(b)). As required by Section 12.22 A.25 (e)(2), the project meets the eligibility criterion that is required for density bonus projects. The project also does not involve a contributing structure in a designated Historic Preservation Overlay Zone or on the City of Los Angeles list of Historical-Cultural Monuments. Therefore, there is no substantial evidence that the proposed incentive(s) will have a specific adverse impact on public health and safety. Analysis of the proposed Project determined that it is Categorically Exempt from environmental review pursuant to Article 19, Class 32 (Infill) of the CEQA Guidelines. The Categorical Exemption (CE) could be adopted, including, on the basis that none of the potential environmental effects of the proposed Project would cause substantial adverse effects on human beings, on public health and safety, or on property listed in the California Register of Historic Resources. Based on all of the above, there is no basis to deny the requested incentive.

The project also does not involve a contributing structure in a designated Historic Preservation Overlay Zone or on the City of Los Angeles list of Historical-Cultural Monuments. The project does not involve the demolition of a historic structure that was placed on a national, state, or local historic register prior to the submission of the application.

6. City Approved Historic Preservation Consultant Updated Its Report and Found the Property Ineligible for NR, CR or Local Designation

At the request of the Planning and Land Use Management Committee, the City Approved Historic Preservation Consultant updated its report and found that the property is still ineligible for NR, CR or Local Designation. To quote the report (**Exhibit⁹**):

As a result of ESA’s research, it appears that the subject property at 1848 S. Gramercy Place appears to still be ineligible as a historical resource, as indicated in the 2018 report. The other examples of buildings of the same style, type, those associated with notable persons, and those built by Stokes that were referenced in the report, including 1625 Cimarron Street, 5757 Tuxedo Terrace, 1826 S. Wilton Place, 1651 S. Gramercy Place and 2756 S. Raymond Avenue, all remain extant. The research conducted to verify the validity of the 2018 HRA report confirms that the results and findings remain valid.

7. City Rejected Appellant’s Argument Against Class-32 Exemption

On August 15, 2023, the City Planning Department staff concluded that (**Exhibit¹⁰**):

The Appellants have not demonstrated that the project is not exempt from CEQA pursuant to a Class 32 Categorical Exemption. A review of the project to determine the applicability of the Class 32 CEQA Exemption resulted in a determination that the project would not result in any significant effects relating to traffic, noise, air quality or water quality. The project is beneath the threshold criteria established by the Los Angeles Department of Transportation (LADOT) for preparing a traffic study, as verified by a referral form signed by LADOT staff on March 14, 2022. Therefore, the project will not have any significant impacts to traffic. The project will not result in significant impacts related to air quality because it falls below interim air threshold established by Department of City Planning (DCP) staff. Interim thresholds were developed by DCP staff based on CalEEMod model runs relying on reasonable assumptions, consulting with Air Quality Management District (AQMD) staff, and surveying published air quality studies for which criteria air pollutants did not exceed the established Southern California Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD) construction and operational thresholds. The Appellant has not provided any substantial evidence as to how the how the venting at the first and second floor along the project’s northern elevation will create hazardous conditions.

Additionally, Appellant has provided no substantial evidence to support their claim that the property “may” be a contributor to a historic district. Neither the project site itself nor any of the existing structures on the project site have been identified as a historic resource by local or state agencies. On May 5, 2018, an application was filed (per case CHC-2018-3217-HCM) to declare the property an Historic- Cultural Monument. City Planning Staff recommended that the Cultural Heritage Commission not declare the property an Historic-Cultural Monument per Los Angeles Administrative Code, Chapter 9, Division 22, Article 1, Section 22.171.7. At a hearing on July

⁹ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1R3DFXpvfzo51bAwP6DG1k1I63FlmVEig/view?usp=sharing>

¹⁰ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1qWyHlioiQCshKtJGSE_606UJejfFkq-w/view?usp=sharing

15, 2018, the Commission determined the project site is not eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, California Register of Historical Resources, the Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monuments Register, and/or any local register. Further, the project site was not found to be a potential historic resource based on the City's HistoricPlacesLA website or SurveyLA, the citywide survey of Los Angeles.

8. City Again Rejected Appellant's Argument Against Class-32 Exemption

On August 13, 2024, the City Planning Department staff again rejected the appeal by stating the following (**Exhibit¹¹**):

As stated in its April 4, 2023 Letter of Determination, CPC also determined that, based on the whole of the administrative record, the project is exempt from CEQA pursuant to State CEQA Guidelines, Article 19, Section 15332, Class 32 (Infill Development), and that there is no substantial evidence demonstrating that an exception to a categorical exemption pursuant to CEQA Guidelines, Section 15300.2 applies.

On April 19, 2023, a CEQA appeal was filed by Jean Frost and Laura Meyers on behalf of the West Adams Heritage Association. Documents supporting the appeals were submitted to the Council File on April 21 and May 10, 2023.

On August 15, 2023, the Planning and Land Use Management Committee convened and continued the item for a date to be determined at the request of Council District 10, in order to provide time for the Applicant to submit a supplemental Historic Report and Noise Analysis as it pertains to the project. On September 15, 2023, the Applicant submitted a Noise Impact Assessment (**Exhibit¹²**) and on November 21, 2023, the Applicant submitted the requested supplemental Historic Report (**Exhibit⁹**), which have been submitted to the Council File. The Planning Department has no additional changes to the Appeal Analysis Report dated August 15, 2023. *Exhibit references added.*

9. State Law Prohibits City to Change Historic Designation Post Deemed Complete Application

California Code, Government Code - GOV § 65913.10 (a) prohibits the city to change the designation the of site after an application has been deemed complete. In this case, the application is not only deemed complete but also approved by the city planning department staff and the city planning commission. The exact language of the law is state below:

(a) For purposes of any state or local law, ordinance, or regulation that requires the city or county to determine whether the site of a proposed housing development project is a historic site, the city or county shall make that determination at the time the application for the housing development project is deemed complete. **A determination as to whether a parcel of property**

¹¹ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1FFe-JyLqknkxIx0NG4GOOB7oBAQbtbwh/view?usp=sharing>

¹² <https://drive.google.com/file/d/10F5OVqIBmQfjQvZySH80sq03TNhjiXL/view?usp=sharing>

is a historic site shall remain valid during the pendency of the housing development project for which the application was made unless any archaeological, paleontological, or tribal cultural resources are encountered during any grading, site disturbance, or building alteration activities. (emphasis added)

(b) For purposes of this section:

(1) “Deemed complete” means that the application has met all of the requirements specified in the relevant list compiled pursuant to Section 65940 that was available at the time when the application was submitted.

(2) “Housing development project” has the same meaning as defined in paragraph (3) of subdivision (b) of Section 65905.5.

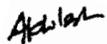
(c)(1) Nothing in this section supersedes, limits, or otherwise modifies the requirements of, or the standards of review pursuant to, Division 13 (commencing with Section 21000) of the Public Resources Code.

(2) Nothing in this section supersedes, limits, or otherwise modifies the requirements of the California Coastal Act of 1976 (Division 20 (commencing with Section 30000) of the Public Resources Code).

(d) This section shall remain in effect only until January 1, 2030, and as of that date is repealed.

In the light of the above facts, the council upholds the appeal, it will abuse its discretion and power.

Best regards,



Akhilesh Jha