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May 25, 2021

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

Attention: PLUM Committee

Dear Honorable Members:

SUPPLEMENTAL REPORT REGARDING APPEAL OF CLASS 32 CATEGORICAL EXEMPTION ENV-2019-7743-CE FOR PROPERTY LOCATED AT 1517-1523 WEST 8TH STREET WITHIN THE WESTLAKE COMMUNITY PLAN AREA (CF-21-0021)

On November 16, 2020, the Director of Planning issued a Class 32 Categorical Exemption for a Transit Oriented Communities (TOC) project (Case No. DIR-2019-7742-TOC) involving the demolition of two (2) existing single-family dwellings, and the construction, use, and maintenance of a new seven-story, 82 feet in height, mixed-use building with 60 dwelling units over approximately 1,150 square feet of ground floor commercial space, with two (2) levels of parking containing 32 automobile parking stalls and 56 bicycle stalls. Of the total 60 dwelling units proposed, six (6) units are reserved for Extremely Low Income Households. The proposed building will encompass approximately 45,960 square feet total building area, with an FAR of approximately 3.76:1. The proposed unit mix consists of 34 studio units, 22 one-bedroom units, and four (4) three-bedroom units. The project will include approximately 5,077 square feet of open space, provided by a combination of balconies, a roof deck, a courtyard, and a recreation room/fitness center. On December 15, 2020, a California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) appeal was filed for the Categorical Exemption (Case No. ENV-2019-7743-CE), for consideration by the Planning and Land Use Management (PLUM) Committee.

The appeal challenges the Director of Planning's determination that the project is exempt from CEQA pursuant to CEQA Guideline, Section 15332 (Class 32, Infill Development) and that none of the exceptions to a categorical exemption apply to the project. The CEQA Guidelines provide that a Class 32 CE may not be used if any of five (5) exceptions apply: (a) cumulative impacts; (b) significant effect; (c) scenic highways; (d) hazardous waste sites; and (e) historical resources. Specifically, the Appellant states that the Project does not qualify for an exemption due to the cumulative effects of surrounding past, current and future projects.

The Appellant contends that the cumulative impact exception does not apply to the proposed project due to the number of “past projects, current projects and future projects spanning back to January 1, 2017 that contribute towards the cumulative impacts of the Project that must be considered.” The appellant lists 58 projects alleged to be within a 2-mile radius of the Project site. CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2(b) states that a categorical exemption is inapplicable “when the cumulative impact of successive projects of the same type in the same place, over time is significant.” An agency’s determination that a project falls within a categorical exemption includes an implied finding that none of the exceptions identified in the CEQA Guidelines apply. Instead, the burden of proof shifts to the challenging party to produce evidence showing that one of the exceptions applies to take the project out of the exempt category. (*San Francisco Beautiful v. City and County of San Francisco* (2014) 226 Cal.App.4th 1012, 1022-23.)

Here, the Appellant has not met its burden, as there is no evidence in the record to conclude that there will be a cumulative adverse impact caused by the proposed project and other projects in this area. A list of past, current, or future projects, even if found to be accurate, by itself does not represent substantial evidence of any type of cumulative impact. Speculation that significant cumulative impacts will occur simply because other projects may be approved in the same area is insufficient to trigger this exception and is not evidence that the proposed project will have adverse impacts or that the impacts are cumulatively considerable (*Hines v. California Coastal Comm’n* (2010) 186 Cal.App.4th 830, 857). The Appellant also fails to provide any evidence as to why a 2-mile radius constitutes the “same place”. The Appellant has not submitted any substantial evidence that validates its assertions that the cumulative impact exception applies. Other than a vague claim that the area is in a “high pedestrian and car traffic area”, the Appellant does not state which cumulative effects are actually at issue. For example, automobile delay, as described solely by level of service or similar measures of vehicular capacity or traffic congestion, cannot constitute a significant environmental impact for purposes of CEQA. (Public Resources Code § 21099.)

As demonstrated in the Justification for the Class 32 Categorical Exemption dated April 28, 2020, (Attachment) the proposed project and other projects in the vicinity are subject to Regulatory Compliance Measures (RCMs) related to air quality, noise, hazardous materials, geology, and transportation. Numerous RCMs in the City’s Municipal Code and State law provide requirements for construction activities and ensure impacts from construction related air quality, noise, traffic, and parking are less than significant. For example, the South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD) has District Rules related to dust control during construction, type and emission of construction vehicles, architectural coating, and air pollution. All projects are subject to the City’s Noise Ordinance No. 144,331, which regulates construction equipment and maximum noise levels during construction and operation.

The Class 32 Categorical Exemption (CE) and associated justification analysis address all environmental impacts related to traffic, noise, air quality or water quality and cumulative impacts. Additionally, the project will be required to comply with all state, regional, and local laws as part of regulatory compliance. No other changes are being made. Therefore, the CE adequately addresses all impacts relative to the proposed project at 1517-1523 West 8th Street.

Sincerely,

VINCENT P. BERTONI, AICP
Director of Planning

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Heather Bleemers", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

HEATHER BLEEMERS
Senior City Planner

VPB:HB:EA:TM