



Belmont Heights Community Association

375 Redondo Ave #332 * Long Beach, California 90814

www.MyBelmontHeights.org

July 17, 2007

TO: The Housing & Neighborhoods Committee
Vice Mayor Lowenthal
Councilmembers Gabelich & Lerch

Re: Demolition of Homes 45 Years Or Older and Neighborhood Character Stabilization

The Belmont Heights Community Association ("BHCA"), through its Neighborhood Preservation Committee, has reviewed the staff report for today on the proposed Neighborhood Character Stabilization Plan and demolition of structures 45 years or older. We offer the following preliminary comments.

OVERVIEW

Our primary objective is to halt the mansionization of Belmont Heights. The staff report documents the effects of demolitions and over-remodels of homes resulting in loss of character-defining features of our neighborhood which are irreplaceable.

We support the staff approach which is to take steps immediately to "stop the bleeding" while careful evaluation of changes to zoning and other alternatives are considered.

DEMOLITION OF HOMES OVER 45 YEARS OLD

We have continuously supported Vice Mayor Lowenthal's proposed ordinance to curtail demolition of homes over 45 years old. However, as stated in our June 5, 2007 letter, a secondary level of review must protect both homes with "potential historic significance" and those whose demolition would negatively impact the character of the neighborhood. The staff report recommendation appears to incorporate our concerns by stating that "[f]or demolition of buildings over 45 years of age, review could require the preparation of a historic assessment survey as well as reviewing whether demolition of the structure would diminish the character of the neighborhood." Report at page 5. BHCA thinks it essential that the secondary level of review consider both aspects and decline to issue demolition permits without further proceedings if the home to be demolished fits either criteria.

Additionally, we would like to discuss what the secondary level of review would consider including what matrix of criteria would be applied, who would make the determination and what recourse neighbors would have if they disagree with any approvals. Upon request for a demolition permit, neighbors within a reasonable range should be notified in writing of any proposed residential demolitions, the same for proposed major remodels.

We also considered the Internal Control Ordinances ("ICO") described on page 2. These appear to be completely effective in halting, for a temporary period, demolitions and over-remodels in neighborhoods experiencing significant mansionization. If changing the permitting process from ministerial to



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discretionary and requiring a secondary level of review for homes over 45 years old does not achieve the desired outcomes, we would support an ICO as described in the staff report for Belmont Heights.

NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER STABILIZATION PLAN

BHCA is committed to a neighborhood driven process for determining changes to our residential zoning. We have proposed that the approach be multi-faceted and include not just zoning changes but an educational component, a financial component and other mechanisms designed to promote growth that is healthy for the neighborhood and consistent with the existing character-declining features. In that vein, we think that the term "neighborhood character" has several aspects which include architectural style and building equipment but also look at the flow of the neighborhood, the street scape, and a variety of other features that are important. Restoration and rehabilitation should be emphasized and incentivized as the first best option.

We would like to see the list of proposed development standards noted in Option "B" be brought back to the Housing and Neighborhood Committee within thirty (30) days. We ask that staff work closely with BHCA during this period to design this set of proposed ordinances that will directly affect the size, density, lot-ratio/FAR standards, green space, setback and step-backs, etc. for any new construction in the neighborhood of single family homes. The BHCA has devoted time and expertise to this topic and we look forward to sharing our recommendation with the staff.

In summary, we support the original proposed ordinance to require a secondary level of review for demolition of homes over 45 years old provided that the criteria for protecting those homes from demolition includes both which are "potentially historic" and those whose demolition would negatively impact the neighborhood character. Secondly, we support a process whereby BHCA can democratically review different approaches as proposed by staff to ensure that restoration and rehabilitation are the first priority and that growth and development occur in a way that enhances the neighborhood in that the City approach further residential development in affective areas through a multi-facet approach that results in preservation of neighborhood character.

Sincerely,

Marc Coleman & Maureen Neely, Co-Chairs
Neighborhood Preservation Committee BHCA