

**Containment *and* Community SUMMARY:
A White Paper on the History of Skid Row and its Role in the Downtown Community Plan**

CURRENT CONTEXT: Los Angeles politicians are rezoning Los Angeles which will determine, among many things, the fate of affordable housing in downtown LA (Skid Row) and elsewhere throughout the city. Will they continue the violence of urban renewal (gentrification and displacement) or will the Downtown Los Angeles Community Plan (DTLA 2040) commit to preserving the housing and services of Skid Row and to delivering more low-income housing (and equitable access to it)? The ability to escape poverty and transition from addiction to sustained recovery (among many other challenges) is almost contingent on finding stable housing. The history of Skid Row, which could serve as a guide in this rezoning process, continues to be deployed erroneously. The risk of this misinformation could be the dismantling of both the existing social infrastructure and the resilient, multiracial neighborhood there.

HISTORY: Following the displacement of Bunker Hill and the failure of that to meet the needs of poor Angelenos, Mayor Bradley appointed a Citizens Advisory Committee to ensure community voices were part of the decision-making process for Skid Row. Using the best empirical and anecdotal evidence available at the time, community leaders pushed a plan that created a zone where only low-income housing (and services) was permitted and that articulated the need for similar satellite centers to be created around the city. The aim was to mitigate the effects of poverty. Despite all of the problematic implications of “containment,” there is no disputing that this plan created what today remains the greatest density of low-income housing and networks of social services in the City, as well as fifty years of community expertise, resiliency, support, and advocacy regarding human issues associated with poverty.

Unfortunately, since 1975, the political decisions that make it easier for individuals and companies to encroach on once off-limits resources has led to the dismantling of historic protections for the people and community of Skid Row. National and local housing policy and funding mechanisms have made it harder to finance low-income housing projects. At a time where there is an even greater need for protected and expanded housing and services, given the rise of new homelessness, criminalization and shelters became the only “solutions” invested in to address houselessness and the myriad of issues surrounding it. Some of the very nonprofits established to prioritize the interest of long-time Skid Row residents lost their focus on community voices and needs. As national and global shifts in the securitization of financing fostered huge growth in real estate values, developers, investors, and local businesses pushed to break apart the protections of Skid Row so as to develop market-rate and luxury housing. At a time when long-time community members have most needed their voices heard and included in decision making, the obstacles to self-representation have only increased.

On the whole, the philosophy embedded in the visions for the “new” downtown, a “24-hour city” of nightlife and luxury lofts, prioritizes middle- and upper-class consumption and residences, and falsely promises solutions to concentrated poverty. The call from the wealthy for a “mixed use, inclusive” Skid Row is just a deceptive call to try and erase the current community, protected housing, and services of Skid Row (as none of them are proposing turning wealthy communities into mixed use, inclusive neighborhoods for the folks displaced from Skid Row).

But the community of Skid Row and those truly committed to partnership with them remain active in finding solutions and demanding changes that will serve all of Los Angeles. They are

leading the efforts for greater affordable housing at all levels of need. They are fighting for social services and community investments that will make neighborhoods more liveable and healthy. They are fighting back against private and public efforts that prey on the most vulnerable. They are building networks of care that meet community needs outside bureaucratic structures that refuse basic necessities. They are providing spaces for the full development of the human spirit and imagination. As a community truly representing the diversity of Skid Row, they are working to ensure no one is left behind and that every need is met.

TODAY: Just like the Citizens Advisory Committee of 1975, the Skid Row Now and 2040 coalition came together in 2014 out of larger efforts by residents and advocacy groups for self-representation and self-determination to ensure the voices and needs of the local community were not ignored as Los Angeles rezones Downtown L.A. The current vision plans articulated by the Skid Row Now and 2040 coalition marks a continuum with the Community Plan of 1976 insofar as it advocates for an IX1 Zone that follows the boundaries of Skid Row demarcated in the Blue Book, advances strategies for adding affordable housing and retaining and improving the existing low-income housing, among other demands, as determined by long-term community members.

BASIC DEMANDS:

- **Expand the IX1 Zone to represent the historical boundaries of Skid Row, from 3rd to 7th Streets and from Main Street to Alameda Avenue.**
- **Limit incursion of market-rate development at the borders of the historical boundaries of Skid Row, to create a buffer zone to limit the impacts of gentrification and displacement.**
- **Establish a Skid Row District Council for self-representation by residents—housed and unhoused—within the historical Skid Row boundaries.**
- **Create social housing.**
- **Employ the Adaptive Reuse Ordinance (ARO) specifically for affordable and low-income housing; suggested revisions expand ARO possibilities, but affordability is set at 1 out of 10 units at best in the current plan.**
- **Establish clear means of accountability to ensure 1:1 replacement of affordable housing with covenanted low-income units *within the same Skid Row neighborhood* if housing units are lost as a result of adaptive reuse or other development.**
- **Establish more limited square footage for live/work housing units in IX2 and IX4 and require affordable housing.**
- **Tax property owners for vacant housing units that stand empty for prolonged periods, to put into a housing trust for Skid Row.**
- **Utilize city-owned properties for the construction of supportive and permanent low-income housing.**
- **Ensure compatible use in Skid Row and along a buffer zone on its perimeter that restricts bars, liquor stores, marijuana dispensaries, and shops selling drug paraphernalia.**
- **Ensure that ground level green and communal spaces are established, and park space increased and improved.**