

Political compromise at City Council's PLUM Committee jeopardizes special protections for the Skid Row community

This past Monday, the Planning and Land Use Management (PLUM) committee of the City Council moved forward a Community Plan that would determine the fate of Skid Row. As the Plan rightfully acknowledges, Skid Row is a community, and one that has organized itself to win changes that have benefitted residents citywide: the establishment of LAUSD's Homeless Education Office Support Program, the 6th Street bike lane, and the Hotel Conversion moratorium, to name a few.

Skid Row's General Jeff convinced the city to create a procedure to make it possible to subdivide a neighborhood council, something many other neighborhoods have benefitted from since then. But three days before the election to approve a Skid Row Neighborhood Council in 2017, their Council Member for District 14, Jose Huizar, changed the rules to favor DTLA development interests and the Skid Row Neighborhood Council was defeated by 67 votes.

For the last six years, Skid Row residents and community organizations have worked alongside and been in dialogue with the Department of City Planning and the Planning Commissioners to preserve their community. These city entities took significant time to meet with any who believed they had a stake in the future rezoning of Downtown L.A. and painstakingly crafted a new community Plan that tried to weave the varied interests of these people together. One consistent part of that plan was a low income housing only IX1 Zone to ensure that the generative voice of this low income community will continue both to be heard and to benefit all Angelenos into the future. **The IX1 zone provides special protections and considerations for an impacted community in need of unique, equitable, responsive land use practices.**

But this week, the larger DTLA community in general, and Skid Row specifically, was reminded how uncommitted some of the City Council is to honor all voices. PLUM scheduled decision-making meetings for two Community Plans - processes that have each taken half a decade to construct - on one day, on a Monday, in fact, which, as the LAPD officers outside the meeting room told us, "We are not staffed on Mondays for Public Comment." Many residents and community organizations came to the 1PM meeting only to find others had been lined up since 10AM, so when the Council limited public comment for each Plan to one hour, many knew their voices would not be heard.

But that didn't really matter - the Councilmembers seemed to have made up their minds before the meeting even began. They ignored the recommendations of the Council people for Districts 1 and 14, the two individuals who actually represent Skid Row. They introduced ideas that had never been mentioned in the 6-year long process: the only portion of Skid Row that would be preserved would be 80% affordable instead of 100%. The original allowance of 100% affordable-only was specifically designed to prevent displacement of vulnerable community members. And the numbers and policies introduced also made little sense from a development standpoint.

Why does it so often feel like residents and grassroots community organizations get little chance to shape their futures? **What happened to all the rhetoric about equity?** Why do backroom deals seem to craft policy shifts before the community gets to offer public input? For Skid Row, this is a reminder - once again - that DTLA development interests will always take precedence over the community they have painstakingly worked to build and protect. And for those who welcome the decimation of Skid Row, let us remember that developers first came for Skid Row, and many did not speak out, but soon they could come for your neighborhood too.