

LA PLANNING OUT OF CONTROL

LA: Houston on the Pacific

Cary Brazeman



If you've seen our newspaper advertisements over the past few days, you know that the City of Los Angeles is preparing to gut the zoning code, defining planning standards down across the City to the point where even projects that have negative impacts will be approved anyway. More specifically, future projects in all 46 of the City's Specific Plan areas no longer will have to conform with plan requirements.

What does a city without zoning integrity look like? Hop a plane to Houston and you'll find out.

Houston is the biggest city in the U.S. that has no meaningful zoning code, including no transitional zoning requirements. In Houston, a 25-story office building and a single-family home can share a curb ... buildings on the same street can have wildly different heights and setbacks, which negatively affects both the aesthetics and the experience of the neighborhood. And, uses, well, uses can run amok. This is one of the reasons why Houston isn't mentioned in the same breath as "New York, LA and Chicago."

Los Angeles, on the other hand, has the potential to be the greatest American city of the twenty-first century: Uniquely American yet international, multiethnic, multilingual and multicultural ... a quality place to live ... thriving with commerce ... with a glorious natural environment including the mountains, the sea and the Los Angeles River watershed.

Gutting the zoning code in LA is a surefire way to set back our aspirations. To gut the zoning code is to deface and degrade the city; once the genie is out of the bottle, there will be no going back.

Mayor Villaraigosa may be content to watch Los Angeles decline into a second-rate city, but I, on the other hand, am not.

(Cary Brazeman is the founder of LA Neighbors United. Read more about the zoning code and contact him through www.LAneighbors.org.) -cw

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