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## **LA NEIGHBORHOOD HEROES SEEK TO END DEVELOPERS' GRIP ON CITY HALL New Ballot Plan Also Targets a Showdown Vote at the March 2017 City Election**

**Tuesday, March 15, 2016** – The leadership of the **Neighborhood Integrity Initiative** today unveiled a fresh version of their ballot plan to reform the rigged and dysfunctional City Hall system for approving building projects. And they also unveiled a team of neighborhood advocates who share the initiative's vision.

The Neighborhood Integrity Initiative will impose a two-year moratorium on the biggest special interest-driven development projects that bust up neighborhoods and produce crushing traffic gridlock, said Neighborhood Integrity Initiative campaign director Jill Stewart.

The ballot measure will also give the public a greater say in how their communities are shaped and create permanent fixes to purge the development approval process of special interest influences.

The initiative supporters are now seeking to have their measure placed on the March 7, 2017 ballot. Also on that ballot will be races for the offices of mayor, city attorney, city controller and at least eight of the City Council's 15 seats.

Below are edited excerpts from compelling stories that some members of the Neighborhood Integrity Initiative volunteer team shared at the news conference at Los Angeles City Hall today. Their stories are heartfelt and show how the culture of virtually unbridled development, greased by developer donations to elected officials, is damaging the livability and sustainability of Los Angeles.

*-Marisa Stewart, Palms neighborhood leader and activist: "It really is sad that I lived in this area for years and now [because of favors granted to developers] ... affordable housing is being completely wiped out." She talked about a four-unit affordable apartment in Palms, an extremely dense, and long-affordable neighborhood, that's has been turned into a "small lot subdivision" of five box-like homes that tower over the land. Even in modest Palms, these homes sold for \$1.2 million each. City Hall's tolerance of development at any cost creates unstable communities where there's no sense of neighborhood or place and where crime can fester. "We should be safe in our homes, but when everyone has to move there's no safety."*

*-Rev. Alice Callaghan, respected Skid Row advocate for the homeless and immigrant families, and founder of the school and family center, Las Familias del Pueblo: A few miles from Skid Row, where housing for the homeless is being decimated with the approval of City Hall, she has found the same senseless destruction of inexpensive rental neighborhoods. "We have a handful of developers who are getting their way" from the City Council to push families out of the Latino immigrant "gateway" community of Pico-Union. There's "escalating gentrification" as the City Council encourages developers to build expensive apartment buildings with no thought to human consequences. "Sometimes there's*

nowhere for these people to live but on the city's sidewalks. Where's the planning at City Hall for the poorest of the poor?"

**-Alexandra Kondracke**, a young Los Feliz community activist: She talked about the uphill fight in her community against an offensive development project. "We had to go to ten City Hall hearings to stop a project that was illegal to begin with," she related. Alexandra and her neighbors won their fight but the experience was an eye-opener, revealing how developers often win these wars simply by attrition and grinding down local residents. Alexandra also has had to contend with developers who misuse the state Ellis Act to evict tenants by falsely claiming they no longer intend to use the building for rental units. "They may put in boutique hotels at first, but then the building is sold to another owner who turns that hotel into luxury apartments." This blatant misuse of the Ellis Act, and Los Angeles City Hall's habit of looking the other way, is a big scam, she said.

**-George Abrahams**, veteran Hollywood community activist: What we have at City Hall is "campaign contribution planning," said George, who knows his way around City Hall as well as anyone. He related how the costs incurred by the city Department of Planning in processing proposed major projects is often reimbursed by the developers. The effect of this, George said, is that the city's planners are often, in effect, the developer's employees. With their paychecks virtually coming from the developers, George asked, is it any surprise that the developers get their way at City Hall?

**-Sasha Ali**, a young activist fighting a developer's project in Hollywood: Sasha related how the investor in a 50-unit apartment building in Hollywood is seeking to evict the seniors, veterans and family tenants.. When Sasha and her fellow tenants fought to protect themselves and dared to ask the owner where they were supposed to live, his reaction was "callous – he told us we should go further down the Red Line [subway] to find a place to live." What he meant was that Sasha and company should move into a lower-rent neighborhood. But gentrification, continually fed by City Hall as it bends the rules to push out existing residents citywide, has made that impossible. "What he didn't say was that the only apartments along the Red Line are luxury units." That's a clueless developer for you.

**-Jack Humphreville**, veteran public policy blogger and Wilshire District activist: Jack expressed his happiness that supporters of the **Neighborhood Integrity Initiative** now want their measure to appear on the March 7, 2017 city ballot when 11 city elected offices – including that of the mayor – will be up for grabs. "Six council members running for reelection in March already say they oppose the Neighborhood Integrity Initiative," Jack said. "We'll see if that'll be their final answer when voters start demanding to know why they're so out-of-touch with their communities." The Wilshire District is ground zero in developers' plans to upend neighborhoods that stand in the way of luxury density and gentrification.