



LA Tenants Union Backs the Neighborhood Integrity Initiative

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The LA Tenants Union, a unique movement of citywide renters rights volunteers whose members refuse money from developers or from City Hall, has endorsed the Neighborhood Integrity Initiative and its effort to end the backroom City Hall deals that are let developers pave over L.A. with unwanted luxury housing.

LATU voted to back the March 8, 2016 ballot measure, which gathered 104,000 signatures to be placed before Los Angeles voters next spring.

Uver Santa Cruz, a member of LA Tenants Union and 29-year resident of Echo Park, said his neighborhood directly along the 101 Freeway is “being overtaken by development that is extreme, and nobody is as involved in challenging this as the Neighborhood Integrity Initiative is. We've been overrun, and nobody has had the strength or the ability to get political control over this bad land-use and extreme overdevelopment.”

The LA Tenants Union is a fast-growing and increasingly influential group that rose up in response to mass evictions and landlord trickery — abuses fed by the City Council's craze of approving luxury housing complex that ignore local zoning and community desires for parks, grocery stores and less-expensive housing.

On his corner in Echo Park, where Cruz lives in a rent-stabilized eight-unit building, he says, “We have a new 80-unit, and a new 28-unit, two big luxury buildings, going in. And now they want us out of our own building, for a third project — they want us out badly.”

LA Tenants Union in July came out against the phony and destructive JJJ measure appearing on the November 8 ballot. JJJ purports to create “affordable housing” but will actually promote massive towers and luxury complexes — and their accompanying surface street gridlock — in neighborhoods where they are now flatly prohibited.

The Coalition to Preserve LA stands solidly with the LA Tenants Union in opposing JJJ. JJJ is a recipe for demolition of solid, older housing that still offers inexpensive rentals — and that Los Angeles cannot afford to lose.

Jill Stewart, director of the Coalition to Preserve LA, which is sponsoring the Neighborhood Integrity Initiative, said, “We are filled with pride to have gained the support of the Los Angeles Tenants Unions, a group that, in contrast to some 'housing rights' groups in Los Angeles, takes no money from City Hall or from developers and is completely independent of City Hall's rigged system of insider deals and land-use abuses.”

According to the city's own housing data, 22,000 rent-stabilized units have been demolished or converted to condos since the Los Angeles City Council embraced the luxury housing craze in 2000, thus fueling the destruction of solid older housing stock and displacing as many as 60,000 to 70,000 people.

The City Council's improper role in granting exemptions from the rules for these luxury housing developers has left Los Angeles with a luxury housing glut of empty, \$3,000+ units. But everyday people can't find a place to rent.

Sean Chandra, a young tenants rights attorney based Downtown, said he and others in LATU got behind the Coalition to Preserve LA because “The Neighborhood Integrity Initiative is a crucial measure that will help stem the tide of evictions and displacement in Los Angeles. Los Angeles County processes over 70,000 evictions each year, and three times as many tenants leave without a fight.”

Chandra blamed much of L.A.'s worsening evictions crisis on “developers who tear down rent-controlled housing to build luxury condos. The trend of luxury development threatens the character of the city we live in. It's not just that luxury housing doesn't 'fit' into existing neighborhoods—it's because the character of a neighborhood is contained in the people who live and work there, people who have families and friends among their neighbors, people who depend on their neighbors, people whose neighbors depend on them.”

Chandra urged residents next March to “vote for the Neighborhood Integrity Initiative and stop luxury development in its tracks!”

Stewart added, “LATU is made up of everyday people from across Los Angeles whose lives are placed in turmoil by greed-driven landlords and developers as an ugly new level of greed grips Los Angeles. People's dreams are dashed to make way for City Hall's horribly conceived urban cleansing.”

The Neighborhood Integrity Initiative would put a stop to “spot zoning” deals cut by the City Council that enrich some of the world's richest developers — deals hammered out behind closed doors by City Council members who first take money, gifts and wining and dining from those same developers.

The reforms force the City Council to return to its real job: writing a long-abandoned General Plan that addresses our unmet need for parks, the ancient water mains, sewers and roads, water availability and other key elements including housing.

The March ballot measure outright bans developers from writing the “Environmental Impact Reports” that today consistently lie about the gridlock and destruction of neighborhood character that their megaprojects will create.

Both groups oppose JJJ in November because it embraces the lying and the backroom dealing, Stewart says. “JJJ was actually written to stop the Neighborhood Integrity Initiative, but they failed. It would place the greased backroom deals cooked up between developers and individual council members on steroids.”

Some of the key concerns voiced to the Coalition by members of the LA Tenants Union, are:

- The L.A. City Council has allowed the destruction of 22,000 rent-stabilized units in L.A. since 2000. (Los Angeles Times)
- The City Council has allowed the demolition and conversion of 3,115 rooms for homeless people living on Skid Row, as part of City Hall's reckless frenzy to gentrify Skid Row. (City Planning Data and Rev. Alice Callaghan's Survey of Lost Single Room Occupancy housing)
- Rents for the bottom third of renters in Los Angeles skyrocketed 27% last year, and even the average rent on Skid Row is now about \$1,650 a month. (Zillow)
- In the most recent year available, the City Council approved 150% of the actual demand for luxury housing, further worsening a luxury housing glut in which the City Council consistently approves developments aimed at households making \$104,500 a year. (LA Housing Department).

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