

MEMO

Date: September 10, 2014

Re: West Hollywood Eastside Community Plan – Eastside Tour and Working Group Meeting #5 Summary (September 10, 2014)

INTRODUCTION

This memorandum summarizes the fifth meeting of the Eastside Working Group conducted by the City of West Hollywood. The City organized three topic presentations: 1) Code Compliance, 2) Rent Stabilization and Housing Annual Report, 3) Immigrants from the former Soviet Union. These presentations were designed to help the Working Group members and public better understand how the City's Code Compliance and Rent Stabilization and Housing Departments operate as well as understand the Russian-speaking community that exists on the Eastside. This summary describes the purpose and composition of Working Group Meeting #5, presents outcomes from the discussion, and outlines next steps.

OVERVIEW

The City of West Hollywood hosted and facilitated Working Group Meeting #5 on September 10, 2014, at the Plummer Park Community Center from 6:30 to 8:00 p.m. Presenters at the meeting included Senior Planner Bianca Siegl, Code Compliance Manager Jeffrey Aubel, Rent Stabilization and Housing Information Coordinator Anwar Zraikat, and Project Development Administrator Andi Lovano, and Rent Stabilization and Housing Manager Peter Noonan from the City of West Hollywood. The meeting was attended by nine Eastside Working Group members. At the meeting, City staff provided a brief overview of the results of Working Group Meeting #4 that occurred on July 9, 2014. Staff updated the Working Group regarding online outreach via neighborland.com/wehoeastside. Working Group members were encouraged to visit the site to stay updated on others' opinions. The Working Group received a presentation from Jeffrey Aubel and Anwar Zraikat on the City's code compliance operations and from Andi Lovano and Peter Noonan regarding the City's Annual Report on Rent Stabilization and Housing. The last presentation from Working Group member Marina Berkman elaborated on demographics and cultural characteristics of immigrants from the former Soviet Union. In addition, the public was invited to share comments at the beginning and end of the meeting.

MEETING #5 RESULTS

MEETING AGENDA

- Call to order, pledge of allegiance, and roll call
- Public comment
- Welcome and introductions

- Approval of minutes
- Code Compliance Presentation
- Rent Stabilization and Housing discussion
- Russian-speaking community presentation
- Appoint Working Group member reviewers for Community Plan consultant selection
- Schedule and next steps
- Comments and adjournment

CODE COMPLIANCE DISCUSSION

Because Working Group members had previously raised questions about code compliance for building exterior maintenance, Code Compliance Manager Jeffrey Aubel focused on general property maintenance procedures. He explained that per each stage of the citation process, there are guarantees of a certain number of days for the property owner to respond to the citation. A minimum number of days of neglect by the property owner must pass in order for code compliance to move on to further and more aggressive steps. This process is shorter if the issue is categorized as a “life-safety” issue. Aubel assured the audience that West Hollywood’s Code Compliance, especially compared to Los Angeles’ department, is very responsive. Code Compliance not only handles issues of property maintenance but also other issues such as signage and noise complaints. The City is segmented into zones where each zone is primarily managed by two Code Compliance staff. Aubel encouraged the use of WeHo Direct, which is a 24/7 online reporting system where the public can report concerns. Aubel admits that Code Compliance is mostly reactive – it receives complaints and then acts upon these complaints; however, when Code Compliance officers are on site to attend those complaints, they will also proactively look for other issues with the building. Not only this, sometimes complaints will bring attention to broader issues, hence causing Code Compliance to proactively address the issue city-wide. In response to a member’s question, Aubel states that all complaints are public record and can be accessed via telephone call or the planning counter.

Rent Stabilization and Housing Information Coordinator Anwar Zraikat explained that all units built before 1979 are rent stabilized. However, if the tenant of the rent stabilized unit leaves, the rent for unit can be reset to market rate. He described the requirements for rent stabilization maintenance standards and the process to file a complaint. Anwar and Jeff Aubel from Code Compliance provided clarity of the differences between Code Compliance roles and Rent Stabilization and Housing roles.

RENT STABILIZATION AND HOUSING DISCUSSION

Andi Lovano and Peter Noonan presented an update on the RSH Annual Report 2013, which summarizes policy trends and availability of affordable housing per year. Affordability has been harmed by the dissolution of the CRA, sequestration, and the Costa Hawkins Act. Working Group members and RSH staff discussed the difficulties of maintaining the number of affordable units and challenges to creating meaningful incentives.

RUSSIAN-SPEAKING COMMUNITY DISCUSSION

Marina Berkman, an Eastside Working Group member, works as a psychologist for the Jewish Family Service of Los Angeles, which aims to strengthen and preserve individual, family, and community life by providing a range of human services at every stage of the life cycle. Marina gave an overview of the diverse cultures of West Hollywood immigrants from the Former Soviet Union, as well as different hardships that were faced by immigrants of different time periods. Most of the Russian-speaking population in West Hollywood is Jewish. Some of these hardships such as Russian dictatorship and the effects of the Holocaust caused many Russians to have a strong mistrust of government. Though the Russian community is rather prominent on the Eastside, the Russian population is dwindling as the younger generation marries interracially and moves elsewhere.

APPOINTING WORKING GROUP MEMBER

Staff requested one Working Group member be appointed to participate in the selection process for the consultant team from the Eastside Community Plan. This would involve reviewing applications, sitting in on interviews, and ranking candidates. The Working Group nominated Neal Zaslansky and Michael Dolan. They will decide amongst themselves who will be the primary appointee and who will be the alternate appointee in case the primary is made unavailable.

NEXT STEPS

The originally scheduled Tuesday, October 8th, 2014 meeting was rescheduled to Tuesday, October 28th, 2014 and will feature a presentation regarding the Eastside Market Study from consultant firm RSG. An email will be sent out as a reminder of the date change. In addition, the November 12th meeting date will remain the same on the 2nd Wednesday of the month. The November meeting will feature a discussion regarding current development in the Eastside of West Hollywood and Hollywood.

EASTSIDE WORKING GROUP MEETING #5 TRANSCRIPTION NOTES

The following are notes from comments made by Working Group members.

CODE COMPLIANCE PRESENTATION

- Exterior paint jobs are often not done within the 7 year requirement
- Commercial buildings are less likely to be reported
- Push for more proactive Code Compliance approach
- People may have a perception that their one complaint won't make a difference. Hopes that it will be easier to find out what complaints have already been filed on a specific property. Optimism about WeHo Direct – to engage neighbors in reporting Code issues
- Concern over shared economy and businesses like AirBnB and wonders how code enforcement handles these home occupancies

RENT STABILIZATION AND HOUSING ANNUAL REPORT UPDATE

- Suggest scheduled inspections of all rent stabilized buildings
- City should consider incentives for landlord to maintain exteriors, especially for some landlords cannot afford it
- Maintenance standards are currently not applied to common area flooring that are not carpet – tile or linoleum
- Question of what is considered sufficient maintenance – replacing one broken tile is enough
- Suggestion that the city keep record of exterior painting
- Eastside identity is largely based on moderate housing stock
- Difficulty of incentivizing moderate housing as the state sees moderate as market rate
- What is the City doing about the aging housing stock? Difficult to address because they are privately owned; for example, difficult to assure buildings will become seismically standard while maintaining rent stabilized units
- RSH's priority is to maintain rent stabilized units

RUSSIAN-SPEAKING COMMUNITY PRESENTATION

- The Working Group members greatly appreciated Marina's presentation and became more open-minded and knowledgeable of their Russian neighbors.
- Recommendations to reach out to Russian Community
- Presentation should be a tool to help others in the community understand Russian-speaking population