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Finally, a Bill to Stop Mansionization: Saving a Cherished Mid-City Neighborhood

12 Jul 2013 Written by Shelley Wagers



LA'S NEIGHBORHOODS - Encircled by West Hollywood, Beverly Hills, Carthay Circle, and Park La Brea, the area of Beverly Grove has been under siege for nearly a decade.

Hulking McMansions built on spec defy the scale and character of the neighborhood and deprive their nearest neighbors of light, air, and privacy.

Relief finally may be in sight for this charming residential enclave. An ordinance that comes up before the City Planning Commission next month could snatch Beverly Grove from the jaws of the speculators.

The prime location of this cherished Mid-City neighborhood has cost homeowners and residents dearly. Surrounded by protected neighborhoods -- two Design Review districts to the west and three Historic Preservation Overlay Zones to the east and south -- Beverly Grove became ground zero for reckless development.

Most of its roughly 700 homes were built in the 1920s and 1930s on lots of about 6,100 sq ft. Styles include Spanish, Mediterranean, Tudor, Norman, English Cottage, and Heinz 57, and the houses average about 2,000 square feet plus detached garage. But on these modest city lots, cowboy contractors have crammed dozens of tall, boxy houses that measure about 4,400 square feet including their attached garages.

In 2006 the City granted Beverly Grove a temporary ordinance. In 2008 it passed the Baseline Mansionization Ordinance. Even at a glance, it's clear that neither measure put a stop to mansionization. In 2011, the City Council adopted Paul Koretz's Motion for a Beverly Grove RFA Overlay District. To the immense relief of beleaguered Beverly Grove, the Planning Department will finally bring an ordinance based on that Motion to the City Planning Commission in early August.

Notwithstanding opposition from a small cadre heavily skewed to builders and realtors, the RFA ordinance enjoys wide support. Two different Councilmembers conducted two different surveys about six years apart. Both times, Beverly Grove homeowners and residents showed strong, consistent support for meaningful limits on home size. What drives them isn't NIMBYism. It's the conviction that mansionization undermines community integrity and sound public policy.

Houses twice the size of the average older home violate the scale of the neighborhood.

McMansions fronted by suburban-style attached garages violate the character of the neighborhood. Oversize houses drive up consumption of building materials, make storm run-off worse, and guzzle energy.

Mansionizers routinely rip out mature trees and flout regulations regarding the treatment of asbestos and other building materials, as well as working hours and conditions.

Bottom line: The mansionization of Beverly Grove violates City policy on every level.

The city's General Plan calls for development that maintains the scale and character of stable residential neighborhoods.

Los Angeles Planning Policy describes mansionization as "residences with bulk and mass significantly larger than the street's current character."

The key policy document of city planning ("Do Real Planning") calls Mansionization "the most pervasive threat faced by single-family homes."

The "Green LA" action plan vows to set "smart new standards for 'green building' and land use planning."

The City of Los Angeles Housing Element for the rest of this decade calls for "sustainable development policies and programs that support conservation and reduce demand."

The remedy is at hand. The proposed ordinance based on Councilmember Koretz is a model of simplicity and sensible compromise.

The ordinance will set the limit on home size at just over 3,000 square feet. That's about 50 percent bigger than the average older home in the neighborhood.

By including attached garages in square footage and offering incentives for detached garages, it will take 400 square feet of bloat out of houses and restore the buffer that a driveway provides.

The proposed RFA ordinance allows for change and renewal but keeps the scale and character of the neighborhood. It honors community values and City policy. Now the City just needs to pass it.

To follow the preparation and adoption of the Beverly Grove RFA, log on to this website:

beverlygrove.org/

RFA supporters have a Facebook page.

You can also reach them by e-mail at mcmansionsurvey@yahoo.com or by phone at 310-849-3649.

(Shelley Wagers is a long-time community activist. She lives in Beverly Grove.)

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Dick Platkin · Top Commenter · Fargo Central High School

As another Beverly Grove resident, we know how the spec builders and contractors quickly get their permits. They build according to the provisions of the Baseline Mansionization Ordinance, which legally permits McMansions, even though its supporters claimed, and some still believe, that its purpose is to stop mansionization. But, it was a weak ordinance when presented to the City Planning Commission in 2008, and then it was further weakened through amendments adding sham exemptions and bonuses. The worst is the Green Bonus, the real legacy of Jack Weiss, since McMansions are not green, and Building and Safety gives this bonus to every applicant -- no questions asked and apparently w/o credible inspections. The real fix should be to amend this phony citywide ordinance, not force neighborhoods like Beverly Grove to go through a decade of hell to get a bandaid, while most of Los Angeles's neighborhoods are still being mansionized.

Reply · Like · 4 · July 12, 2013 at 10:53am



Ron Senger · Top Commenter · Los Angeles, California

Is this green "bonus" an increase to allowable square footage? Does it affect setbacks? I am also disturbed by the concept of "selective" enforcement.... parking, food trucks, street use, signage.... a law is a law is a law.....why have we let these issues slide into the hands of the politicians. Hands that too often seem to be open, waiting for their next campaign donation.

Reply · Like · 2 · July 12, 2013 at 1:10pm



Dick Platkin · Top Commenter · Fargo Central High School

Yes, the Green Bonus allow a house to be 20 percent larger. Furthermore, there is no requirement to actually demonstrate energy savings. This is because large houses have a large carbon footprint. They all have pools, spas, air conditioning, fancy appliances, and big cars sitting in their driveways. As I have written previously on City Watch, the green bonus is a scam, just a give-away to the speculators building and selling McMansions.

Reply · Like · 1 · July 26, 2013 at 10:29am



Catherine Bosler · Works at Self-Employed

I have no doubt that Shelly's intentions are good, trying to preserve the neighborhood but at the same time, this ordinance is not about preservation it is just about size limitation, it will not affect the people who already own large houses in the neighborhood but only the people who own small houses, limiting them in their rights to build up. It will have a negative effect on the "family" type of neighborhood, limiting the amount of people living in a house, it will have a negative effect on the demographics (for couple only unless you already own a large house), it will affect the local public school who receive findings on new constructions and finally it will have a terrible effect on home owners who own small houses. This is not going to stay a family neighborhood, the only good thing about it is that it will be temporary and hopefully when everyone will see the terrible effect that this pseudo preservation will have, we will be able to reverse it. I am so surprised that councilman Koretz is so unwilling to listen to the

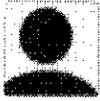
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