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Bel Air-Beverly Crest Neighborhood Council
Brentwood Community Council
Del Rey Neighborhood Council
Mar Vista Community Council
Neighborhood Council of Westchester-Playa
North Westwood Neighborhood Council
Pacific Palisades Community Council

Palms Neighborhood Council
South Robertson Neighborhoods Council
Venice Neighborhood Council
West LA-Sawtelle Neighborhood Council
Westside Neighborhood Council
Westwood Community Council
Westwood Neighborhood Council

October 31, 2023

Honorable Karen Bass, Mayor, City of Los Angeles

Via email

Re: Dismissal of Transportation Commission President

Dear Mayor Bass:

The Westside Regional Alliance of Councils (WRAC) is a coalition of all fourteen neighborhood and community councils on the Westside of Los Angeles, located in CDs 5 and 11 and portions of CDs 4 and 10.

We are writing to express our deep concern over the dismissal of Board of Transportation Commissioners President Eric Eisenberg from the Commission on October 16, 2023 and the manner in which it was done -- while the Commission was in the midst of considering a specific agenda item involving review of a CEQA exemption.

We note that WRAC's Statement of Principles (Bylaws, Standing Rule 4) provides: "*WRAC generally supports strict scrutiny and adherence to all planning and zoning regulations, building codes, rules, restrictions and ordinances, which we maintain have been established for the good of our communities as a whole. They should be applied, upheld and enforced by the Planning Department, Zoning Administrator, Building and Safety, and all other governing bodies and persons with jurisdiction over the approval, execution and enforcement processes.*"

We are concerned that the dismissal not only contravened WRAC's Statement of Principles but has further eroded the public's already low confidence in government.

At the Commission President's last meeting before the dismissal, on October 12 your Transportation Deputy spoke of your strong support of the proposed project to vacate a City parking lot for use as an interim homeless housing project that was then being considered by the Commission. The Commission members, some new to the body, were not familiar with and had not been asked to do a CEQA exemption review in the past. They were being asked to ratify a CEQA waiver prepared by the Board of Engineering (BOE). Given their desire to conduct due diligence, the Commissioners had a number of questions related to the document and their role in the process. There were no staff present from the BOE and no one present and staffing the Commission was able to answer their questions.

After each Commissioner made it quite clear that they understood the seriousness of the homeless challenges faced by the City and after acknowledging the need for interim homeless housing, they voted unanimously to delay taking action, with the Commission President indicating that he would work with Commissioners to identify a date in the following week for the BOE to come before the Board in a special meeting so that a timely vote could be taken.

In fact, we learned that before being relieved of his appointment, President Eisenberg scheduled a special meeting for this specific item to take place on the following Wednesday, October 18 -- in advance of the planned consideration by the City Council on October 20.

Although the Commission's vote to delay was unanimous, it was the President who was removed mid-course. That act sent a very clear message to the remaining members: Vote to support the Mayor's position, vote without questioning or seeking additional information, or risk being removed.

To the public, the message is even more chilling. It tells us that City Commissioners are not intended to act as independent voices in City Hall. Rather, they are meant to rubber stamp the wishes of the Mayor -- under threat of removal. While Commissioners may serve at the pleasure of the Mayor, the removal of Mr. Eisenberg in the midst

of consideration of the agenda item involving CEQA review severely compromises the very purpose of having citizen Commissioners.

Citizen Commissions were established to address past governmental overreach and abuse. Yet, if their independence is but a façade, they only serve to perpetuate a government that fails to value a commitment to transparency and open civic discourse. Having truly independent Commissioners provides for checks and balances badly needed in City Hall where special interests often have an outsized impact on policy development and implementation.

It has long been the practice that when City Commissioners are appointed, in addition to the required forms that they must complete, each Commissioner is required to submit a signed and undated letter of resignation to be held by the Mayor's office – until such time as needed.

At a time when public confidence in government is at an historic low, and when L.A.'s City Hall has been rocked by a number of corruption scandals, there is a heightened need for government transparency and the display of honest respect for the volunteers who serve on all citizen Commissions and Neighborhood and Community Councils, whose members dedicate significant time and effort to making this City a better place.

Without independent voices and under the threat of removal, our City will lose the opportunity to benefit from the valuable input of its concerned citizens. Too often, our participation is barely tolerated as taking up time on busy agendas. If Commissions are meant to operate in this administration merely as a rubber stamp, then there truly is no need to have commissions or commissioners. Rather, we should dedicate our time to City Charter Reform to do what is needed to nurture a more transparent government.

While citizen apathy is great and many feel it is impossible to be heard at City Hall, you, Mayor Bass, have the power to right this perception and to demonstrate an even hand and a willingness to govern for and with all –including those who ask questions and those who may come to disagree with you. Our City will be the richer for the adoption of such a philosophy.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Robin Greenberg & Christina Spitz

Robin Greenberg, Chair

Christina Spitz, Vice Chair

Westside Regional Alliance of Councils:

cc (via email):

All Los Angeles City Councilmembers:

Hon. Paul Krekorian, Council President & CD 2; Hon. Eunisses Hernandez, CD 1; Hon. Bob Blumenfield, CD 3; Hon. Nithya Raman, CD 4; Hon. Katy Yaroslavsky, CD 5; Hon. Imelda Padilla, CD 6; Hon. Monica Rodriguez, CD 7; Hon. Marqueece Harris-Dawson, CD 8; Hon. Curren D. Price, Jr., CD 9; Hon. Heather Hutt, CD 10; Hon. Traci Park, CD 11; Hon. John S. Lee, CD 12; Hon. Hugo Soto-Martinez, CD 13; Hon. Kevin de León, CD 14; Hon. Tim McOsker, CD 15

Hon. Hydee Feldstein Soto, Los Angeles City Attorney

Los Angeles City Ethics Commission