



## **- JUST THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG - A 7-STORY APARTMENT BUILDING ON ETHEL AVENUE**

*by Maria Pavlou Kalban, Legislative Committee Chair*

Building a 7-story, 200-unit apartment building at 5511 Ethel Avenue in a single-family-zoned area is unacceptable! For the people who live in this quiet neighborhood, the shock of this immense apartment building on a large lot one block south of Burbank Boulevard and next to their two-story homes couldn't have been greater. The site is adjacent to a tight-knit community of family friendly neighbors and The HELP Group, a school for special needs children and young adults.

Without prior warning to anyone, the city approved this apartment building. Why? How?

Here are the facts. Mayor Bass issued Executive Directive 1 that streamlined approvals for 100 percent affordable housing and removed the need to go through the public review process, provide parking, or conduct an environmental review. The directive allows 100 percent affordable projects to be built in low-density multi-family neighborhoods. But because the mayor failed to exempt R1 zones (single-family residential neighborhoods) from the zoning description, the Ethel Ave project and several others in the Valley got through the gate before the Mayor's Office amended the directive to exclude R1 zones. The city tried to deny the project but then decided to back away, realizing they could face a lawsuit. Despite a tremendous amount of community opposition, especially from the large family-oriented local neighborhood and The HELP Group, the City Council passed the project on an 8-to-5 vote with a major push of support from our own Councilmember Nithya Raman. This situation is nuanced. The initial Executive Directive 1 and state laws combined made this project "by right" (essentially pre-approved) even if it was not the intent of the directive. But there are sensitivity issues for the residents and the school that should have been part of the discussion prior to approving the project – but weren't. Decision makers should have taken the time to understand the community's concerns – and helped them. Instead, blinded by a desire to build affordable housing at any cost, the city failed to weigh the needs of other vulnerable communities around that site.

The city left the neighborhood to fend for itself. The residents would welcome the project if built on the boulevard and not in among their homes. The developer of the project has voluntarily agreed to come before Sherman Oaks Neighborhood Council Planning and Land Use Committee on November 16, 6:30 p.m. at the Sherman Oaks Library to hear community concerns. We need to work together to make sure problems get resolved before we move forward with projects. Come to the meeting and voice your opinions.

## **STANDING UP FOR OUR COMMUNITY**

*by Maria Pavlou Kalban, Legislative Committee Chair*

This past year, our United Neighbors group has educated communities all over the city about the LA Planning Department's proposal to rezone our single-family neighborhoods to allow large apartment buildings. We are troubled by the city's lack of transparency in explaining impact and location of this rezoning to neighborhoods.

The city's supposed outreach about their rezoning plans included online webinars that never showed any actual maps or details about which neighborhoods would be rezoned. Community members sat through presentations that were general and not specific about the impact. Even our LA councilmembers, who have access to the maps, didn't reach out to their constituents through weekly newsletters or any other way to tell them what was being proposed in their communities.

When we spoke with Councilmember Raman, she assured us that she'd protect our neighborhoods if we found housing solutions on commercial corridors. We did this. We showed her maps of our community and which areas could be rezoned for more housing that left single-family and sensitive multi-family neighborhoods alone. But last week Councilmember Raman stated in a public meeting that she had no problem with apartments in our single-family neighborhoods.

Hopefully, all of you have seen our email blast instructing you on how to contact the councilmember and the mayor to let them know you strongly oppose rezoning our residential neighborhoods for apartments. We need to stand together and show our opposition before the end of Fall when it will be too late to change the maps. We know there are ways to solve the housing needs of our community without rezoning our neighborhoods. It's time the city listened to us first before acting so outrageously.

# METRO STILL WITHHOLDING CRITICAL INFORMATION ON SEPULVEDA PASS TRANSIT PROJECT

*by Bob Anderson, Transportation Committee Chair*

If you've wondered when you'll hear new information about the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's rapid transit project over (or under) the Sepulveda Pass, the answer is Saturday, October 28 from 10:00 am to 12:30 pm at the Marvin Braude Center, 6262 Van Nuys Boulevard in Van Nuys. Metro hasn't provided any new information or held any public meetings since January, even though they have spent around \$100 million analyzing and studying every aspect of the project. So, this is a rare event, and you should attend – because this project will truly impact Sherman Oaks forever.

There is plenty Metro should tell us – especially critical information about costs, affordability, schedules, and construction impacts for the six project alternatives. But Metro's announcement says the meeting will “focus on travel times and boardings”. That's interesting but it misses the big picture of how badly they have managed this project and driven it off a fiscal cliff. All three subway alternatives are totally unaffordable within Metro's available \$8 billion budget. Some of them will cost three times the budget. Not a good place to be when the final decision may be only months away.

And don't forget, one of these “subways” operates noisy elevated trains above Sepulveda Boulevard for five miles in only the Valley and takes out two badly needed traffic lanes. It would be a disaster for Sherman Oaks. Fortunately, Metro is also studying three monorail alternatives that may provide the only affordable solutions for the project – if Metro treats them fairly.

Keep Bel-Air Beautiful, a nonprofit organization, is currently suing Metro to force them to provide all the public information they should have provided a year or more ago. The battle is heating up and we'll be sure to give you a front-row seat as things develop.

## CD4 TURNS BLIND EYE TO SOHA REQUEST TO FIX BROKEN PARKING METER SITUATION

*by Tom Glick, Planning Committee Chair*

Recently, SOHA reached out to Councilmember Nithya Raman's office, including her chief of staff, to make them aware that parking meters throughout Sherman Oaks are broken and effectively unavailable for use – or if used, subject the user to a parking fine. We wanted to enlist their support in getting these meters fixed, not only in our community but citywide. It is just plain crazy that we have limited commercial parking throughout our community, and especially on Ventura Boulevard, and that workable readable meters are not available for use – or subject to a fine just because our LA Municipal Code does not address broken meters.

We asked Councilmember Raman's office to enact a Code change because the city is very slow to fix broken and non-usable meters, and this puts our community and especially our business owners at a disadvantage. We asked that City Council issue either a Council Order or a Code Amendment to put the responsibility for broken meters on the City and not its citizens. If a meter is broken or not working, parking should still be available to the public and should be free to use – with no parking fine – until the city fixes the meter. But today, if the meter is broken, it is not the city's responsibility so there is no rush to fix it.



Parking meters have historically been an affordable way for people to park in the community and if not working, those who can least afford to pay for private parking spaces are most affected. We suggest that City Council either use their authority to issue a Council Order to the Parking Enforcement Bureau to suspend parking fines on broken meters as a short-term solution or initiate a long-term solution to amend the Municipal Code accordingly. SOHA offered to provide a draft fix for the Municipal Code to Councilmember Raman's office. As of the writing of this article, some three weeks after our initial email request to the Council Office, they have not responded to our request. As a result, SOHA Board members will be spending a Saturday morning in October to identify broken or under-performing meters and report on them – because we feel it is an important issue that needs to be fixed immediately for the benefit of our community. Maybe Councilmember Raman will step up once she sees the results of our report.

# CONSIDER FACTS NOT GESTURES BEFORE VOTING

*by Tom Glick, Planning Committee Chair*

While concerts in Van Nuys-Sherman Oaks Park or ribbon-cutting ceremonies for street intersections are nice, small-scale gestures for our community's benefit, Councilmember Nithya Raman needs to do much, much more for our community. She campaigned in 2019-20 on a promise that it was "Our Time To Lead". Presumably the "Our" meant that she was going to be a maverick and do better than her predecessors in City Hall, especially her direct predecessor, David Ryu. She was going to make a difference for our community. She was going to make everything better – from homelessness to land-use development to community relations to corruption. You name it, she promised it. But like most promises made by politicians, these seem to always fall short of those grand expectations we in the electorate have.

Councilmember Raman has made small-scale gestures as noted above but has fallen way short of the expectations she set during her 2020 campaign run – especially on significantly important issues facing our community, such as her commitment to the protection of our historic, stable single-family neighborhoods and the reduction of local homelessness. When Councilmember Raman came to SOHA's monthly live meeting in Spring 2023, she pledged her support for preserving single-family neighborhoods. Well, that pledge didn't last. The LA Planning Department in their current Housing Element is proposing to carve up and densify our single-family neighborhoods and those of many communities throughout the city. Councilmember Raman claims she is not to blame – instead blame the state legislature. What's more distressing, she has been quoted on this issue stating that she'll allow apartments in single-family areas per state mandates and that we need to accept change whether we like it or not.

And regarding homelessness, Councilmember Raman continually states that she is proud of her record on homelessness, in spite of the January 2023 homelessness survey in Sherman Oaks and every LA community showing that homelessness had increased by 10 percent citywide in 2022. No Covid to blame on this count. With billions of dollars in our government accounts to help solve the problem, in the end, it just amounts to plain and simple government inefficiency and ineffectiveness by our local leaders. But Councilmember Raman continues to believe that the homelessness situation in her district and specifically Sherman Oaks is better. In reality, there are many constituents and stakeholders including business owners in the Sherman Oaks Business Improvement District who disagree.

Now that Councilmember Raman is coming up for re-election in the March 2024 Primary, we all need to view her record carefully when we decide our vote. We need to separate out small gestures which benefit our community in the short-term from significantly more important large gestures which have the possibility to destroy our community forever.

## NEIGHBORHOOD COMINGS AND GOINGS

*by Matt Epstein, President*

Many years ago, you might fondly recall that iconic television commercial where an elderly lady exclaimed, "Where's the Beef?" Well, it seems our neighborhoods have echoed a similar sentiment lately. However, times have changed, and an abundance of red meat options is making its way to our area.

On Ventura Boulevard in Studio City, right next to Philz Coffee, "Shake Shack" is set to open its doors. Their custom 100 percent Angus beef blend burgers have sparked a sensation. They proudly offer hormone-free, antibiotic-free, humanely raised cattle grazed in the USA. Additionally, the owners of Taisho and Casita are diligently working on bringing our first steakhouse to Sherman Oaks. Though the exact opening date remains a bit uncertain, it appears to be on the horizon. And for those who savor the delectable steaks served at Mistral, exciting news awaits – a new private dining room accommodating up to 26 guests is in the works. While I personally steer clear of red meat, many friends and family members are eagerly anticipating these carnivorous dining options in our neighborhood.

A noticeable trend is emerging not only locally but possibly nationwide. The former Sy Devore location on Ventura Boulevard near Western Bagel is transforming into "PAUSE". PAUSE is akin to ARTHA, which recently opened on Ventura in the former GAP spot. Both establishments offer a sanctuary to hit the pause button and unwind. They provide contemporary holistic solutions to bolster immunity and support physical and mental rejuvenation. Among their offerings is float therapy – an experience that immerses you in a meditative float tank, guiding you through a journey of serenity, recovery, and revitalization. This trend could be a response to the collective stress society has endured, stemming from events like 9/11, political divisions, and, of course, the ongoing pandemic. These last few decades have indeed posed their share of challenges. And we could all use a little relaxation.



If you're seeking a different route to relaxation, keep an eye out for Jax's Studio City, opening soon on Ventura Boulevard just before Whitsett. This sports bar is the brainchild of two stars from the podcast "When Reality Hits" – Jax Taylor and

Brittany Cartwright. It promises to be a neighborhood sports bar with intriguing offerings like Jax's grandmother's secret beer cheese recipe. They're also planning a host of events, including drag bingo, football nights, karaoke viewing parties, and gatherings to watch various reality shows. For those unfamiliar, Jax and Brittany are a married couple with a two-year-old son. It looks like this spot will be a lively place to unwind in the neighborhood, if floating in a tank isn't your thing.



article, aptly titled "Some of LA's Best Cocktails Are Hidden Behind a Bookshelf at This Valley Speakeasy," shines a spotlight on the remarkable mixologist, Scott Warren. To explore the full story and delve into the world of this Valley gem, read the entire Eater LA article at:

<https://la.eater.com/2023/9/11/23863248/rendition-room-speakeasy-studio-city-scott-warren-bartender-feature>.

Lastly, for those whose stress relief comes in the form of something sweet, there's a new cake shop called De'licee Cakes opening near Western Bagel on Ventura Boulevard. A decade ago, this family embarked on a cake journey in Moscow, dubbing it "Elite Cakes." As their success blossomed, they harbored dreams of expanding to America. Through hard work and unwavering determination, they rebranded themselves as De'licee Cakes. Their cakes are veritable works of art, and it appears that an exceptionally special cake shop is gracing our neighborhood. Anticipation is building, and I can't wait to try it out!

## JOIN OR RENEW YOUR SOHA MEMBERSHIP NOW

*by Nancy Sogoian, Membership Committee Chair*

Please become a SOHA member to help protect your community. And please share this newsletter with neighbors. Go to SOHA914.com and click on JOIN SOHA. It's only \$45 per year and members enjoy our monthly newsletters, community meetings, and more. Select your membership level and click on Pay via PayPal to use a credit card. You can also join by mailing a check to SOHA MEMBERSHIP at PO Box 5223, Sherman Oaks, CA 91413-5223.

### SOHA HOLIDAY TOY DRIVE - SUNDAY, DECEMBER 10 -

**SAVE THE DATE!**

**SOHA's 25th Annual Holiday Toy Drive will be held in Gelson's front parking lot on:**

**Sunday, December 10  
from 11:00 am to 2:00 pm**



County Of Los Angeles  
DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

**Don't miss this opportunity to help the LA County Department of Children and Family Services by donating toys to some of the 70,000 needy children in our county.**

**More details in our November Newsletter.**

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▶ **City Pushing 7-Story Apartment Building on Ethel Avenue in Sherman Oaks Residential Community - This Is Just the Tip of the Iceberg! - HELP US STOP THIS** ◀