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Via Email

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Re: Comment on Final Environmental Impact Report, 1111-1115 West Sunset Boulevard Project; Case Nos. ENV-2018-177-EIR, VTT-80315; CPC-2018-176-DB-BL-VCU-CU-MCUP-DD-SPR; ZA-2021-9399-ZAI

Dear Hearing Office, Advisory Agency, and Ms. King:

I am writing on behalf of **Supporters Alliance for Environmental Responsibility ("SAFER")** regarding the Draft Environmental Impact Report ("FEIR") prepared for the Project known as 1111-1115 West Sunset Boulevard, including all actions related or referring to the proposed 994,982 square foot mixed-use development proposed on a 6.72 acre site located at 1111 and 1115 West Sunset Boulevard in the City of Los Angeles ("Project").

After reviewing the FEIR, we conclude that the FEIR fails as an informational document, fails to adequately analyze the Project's environmental impacts, and fails to impose all feasible mitigation measures to reduce the Project's impacts. SAFER requests that the City address these shortcomings in a revised environmental impact report and recirculate it prior to considering approvals for the Project.

This comment has been prepared with the assistance of Certified Industrial Hygienist, Francis "Bud" Offermann, PE, CIH (Exhibit A). Mr. Offermann's comments are incorporated herein by reference.

I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This Project involves the removal of four existing buildings at 1111-1115 West Sunset Boulevard and the development of up to 994,982 square feet of new buildings on the 6.27 net acre site. Two development scenarios are proposed for the site: a mixed-use development scenario and a no-hotel development scenario. The mixed-use development scenario would include up to 737 residential units, 180 hotel guest rooms, 48,000 square feet of office space, and 95,000 square feet of general commercial. The no-hotel scenario would include up to 827 residential units, 48,000 square feet of office space, and 95,000 square feet of general commercial. Under both scenarios, all uses would be built within four primary structures above a screened six-level parking lot. Separate from the four primary structures, three low-rise, non-residential structures would be oriented towards Sunset Boulevard and Beaudry Avenue. In addition, a portion of the proposed residential uses would be located in low-rise residential buildings dispersed throughout the eastern and southern portions of the Project Site.

II. LEGAL BACKGROUND

CEQA requires that an agency analyze the potential environmental impacts of its proposed actions in an environmental impact report (“EIR”) (except in certain limited circumstances). *See, e.g.* Pub. Res. Code § 21100. The EIR is the very heart of CEQA. *Dunn-Edwards v. BAAQMD* (1992) 9 Cal.App.4th 644, 652. “The ‘foremost principle’ in interpreting CEQA is that the Legislature intended the act to be read so as to afford the fullest possible protection to the environment within the reasonable scope of the statutory language.” *Communities for a Better Environment v. Calif. Resources Agency* (2002) 103 Cal. App. 4th 98, 109.

CEQA has two primary purposes. First, CEQA is designed to inform decision makers and the public about the potential, significant environmental effects of a project. 14 Cal. Code Regs. (“CEQA Guidelines”) § 15002(a)(1). “Its purpose is to inform the public and its responsible officials of the environmental consequences of their decisions before they are made. Thus, the EIR ‘protects not only the environment but also informed self-government.’” *Citizens of Goleta Valley v. Board of Supervisors* (1990) 52 Cal.3d 553, 564. The EIR has been described as “an environmental ‘alarm bell’ whose purpose it is to alert the public and its responsible officials to environmental changes before they have reached ecological points of no return.” *Berkeley Keep Jets Over the Bay v. Bd. of Port Comm’rs.* (2001) 91 Cal. App. 4th 1344, 1354 (“*Berkeley Jets*”); *County of Inyo v. Yorty* (1973) 32 Cal.App.3d 795, 810.

Second, CEQA requires public agencies to avoid or reduce environmental damage when “feasible” by requiring “environmentally superior” alternatives and all feasible mitigation measures. CEQA Guidelines § 15002(a)(2) and (3); *see also, Berkeley Jets*, 91 Cal.App.4th at pp. 1344, 1354; *Citizens of Goleta Valley*, 52 Cal.3d at 564. The EIR serves to

provide agencies and the public with information about the environmental impacts of a proposed project and to “identify ways that environmental damage can be avoided or significantly reduced.” CEQA Guidelines §15002(a)(2). If the project will have a significant effect on the environment, the agency may approve the project only if it finds that it has “eliminated or substantially lessened all significant effects on the environment where feasible” and that any unavoidable significant effects on the environment are “acceptable due to overriding concerns.” Pub. Res. Code § 21081; 14 Cal.Code Regs. § 15092(b)(2)(A) & (B). The lead agency may deem a particular impact to be insignificant only if it produces rigorous analysis and concrete substantial evidence justifying the finding. *Kings County Farm Bureau v. City of Hanford* (1990) 221 Cal.App.3d 692, 732.

While the courts review an EIR using an “abuse of discretion” standard, “the reviewing court is not to ‘uncritically rely on every study or analysis presented by a project proponent in support of its position. A ‘clearly inadequate or unsupported study is entitled to no judicial deference.’” *Berkeley Jets*, 91 Cal. App. 4th at p. 1355 (emphasis added) (quoting *Laurel Heights Improvement Assn. v. Regents of University of California* (1988) 47 Cal. 3d 376, 391 409, fn. 12). As the court stated in *Berkeley Jets*:

A prejudicial abuse of discretion occurs “if the failure to include relevant information precludes informed decisionmaking and informed public participation, thereby thwarting the statutory goals of the EIR process.” (*San Joaquin Raptor/Wildlife Rescue Center v. County of Stanislaus* (1994) 27 Cal.App.4th 713, 722; *Galante Vineyards v. Monterey Peninsula Water Management Dist.* (1997) 60 Cal. App. 4th 1109, 1117; *County of Amador v. El Dorado County Water Agency* (1999) 76 Cal. App. 4th 931, 946.)

More recently, the California Supreme Court has emphasized that:

When reviewing whether a discussion is sufficient to satisfy CEQA, a court must be satisfied that the EIR (1) includes sufficient detail to enable those who did not participate in its preparation to understand and to consider meaningfully the issues the proposed project raises [citation omitted], and (2) makes a reasonable effort to substantively connect a project's air quality impacts to likely health consequences.

Sierra Club v. Cty. of Fresno (2018) 6 Cal.5th 502, 510 (2018), citing *Laurel Heights Improvement Assn. v. Regents of University of California* (1988) 47 Cal.3d 376, 405. “Whether or not the alleged inadequacy is the complete omission of a required discussion or a patently inadequate one-paragraph discussion devoid of analysis, the reviewing court must decide whether the EIR serves its purpose as an informational document.” *Sierra Club v. Cty. of Fresno*, 6 Cal.5th at 516. Although an agency has discretion to decide the manner of discussing potentially significant effects in an EIR, “a reviewing court must determine whether the discussion of a potentially significant effect is sufficient or insufficient, i.e., whether the EIR comports with its intended function of including ‘detail sufficient to enable those who did not participate in its preparation to understand and to consider meaningfully

the issues raised by the proposed project.” 6 Cal.5th at 516, citing *Bakersfield Citizens for Local Control v. City of Bakersfield* (2004) 124 Cal.App.4th 1184, 1197. “The determination whether a discussion is sufficient is not solely a matter of discerning whether there is substantial evidence to support the agency’s factual conclusions.” 6 Cal.5th at 516. Whether a discussion of a potential impact is sufficient “presents a mixed question of law and fact. As such, it is generally subject to independent review. However, underlying factual determinations—including, for example, an agency’s decision as to which methodologies to employ for analyzing an environmental effect—may warrant deference.” *Sierra Club v. Cty. of Fresno*, 6 Cal.5th at 516. As the Court emphasized:

[W]hether a description of an environmental impact is insufficient because it lacks analysis or omits the magnitude of the impact is not a substantial evidence question. A conclusory discussion of an environmental impact that an EIR deems significant can be determined by a court to be inadequate as an informational document without reference to substantial evidence.

Sierra Club v. Cty. of Fresno, 6 Cal.5th at 514. We find that the FEIR prepared by the City here is inadequate for the reasons set forth below.

III. DISCUSSION

A. There is Substantial Evidence that the Project Will Have a Significant Health Risk Impact from its Indoor Air Quality Impacts.

Certified Industrial Hygienist, Francis “Bud” Offermann, PE, CIH, has conducted a review of the proposed Project and relevant documents regarding the Project’s indoor air emissions. Indoor Environmental Engineering Comments (Exhibit A). Mr. Offermann concludes that it is likely that the Project will expose residents and employees of the office, hotel, and commercial spaces of the Project to significant impacts related to indoor air quality, and in particular, emissions of the cancer-causing chemical formaldehyde. Mr. Offermann is a leading expert on indoor air quality and has published extensively on the topic. Mr. Offermann’s expert comments and curriculum vitae are attached as Exhibit A.

Mr. Offermann explains that many composite wood products used in building materials and furnishings commonly found in offices, warehouses, residences, and hotels contain formaldehyde-based glues which off-gas formaldehyde over a very long time period. He states, “[t]he primary source of formaldehyde indoors is composite wood products manufactured with urea-formaldehyde resins, such as plywood, medium density fiberboard, and particleboard. These materials are commonly used in building construction for flooring, cabinetry, baseboards, window shades, interior doors, and window and door trims.” Ex. A, p. 2-3.

Formaldehyde is a known human carcinogen. Mr. Offermann states that future residents of the Project would be exposed to a 120 in one million risk, assuming all materials are compliant with the California Air Resources Board’s formaldehyde airborne toxics

control measure. *Id.* at 4. As for employees of the hotel, office, and commercial spaces, he estimates an exposure level of 17.7 in one million. *Id.* at 5. These potential exposure level exceeds the South Coast Air Quality Management District's ("SCAQMD") CEQA significance threshold for airborne cancer risk of 10 per million.

Mr. Offermann concludes that these significant environmental impacts should be analyzed in the EIR and mitigation measures should be imposed to reduce the risk of formaldehyde exposure. *Id.* Mr. Offermann identifies mitigation measures that are available to reduce these significant health risks, including the installation of air filters and a requirement that the applicant use only composite wood materials (e.g. hardwood plywood, medium density fiberboard, particleboard) for all interior finish systems that are made with CARB approved no-added formaldehyde (NAF) resins or ultra-low emitting formaldehyde (ULEF) resins in the buildings' interiors. *Id.* at 12.

Mr. Offermann also notes that because of the Project's close proximity to roads with moderate to high traffic such as Sunset Boulevard, the US-1010, and the 110, the project is sound impacted. It will therefore require a "mechanical supply of outdoor air ventilation to allow for a habitable interior environment with closed windows and doors," so as to allow occupants the discretion to control exterior noise. *Id.* at 11.

The City has a duty to investigate issues relating to a project's potential environmental impacts, especially those issues raised by an expert's comments. *See Cty. Sanitation Dist. No. 2 v. Cty. of Kern*, (2005) 127 Cal.App.4th 1544, 1597-98 ("under CEQA, the lead agency bears a burden to investigate potential environmental impacts"). In addition to assessing the Project's potential health impacts to residents and employees, Mr. Offermann identifies the investigatory path that the City should be following in developing an EIR to more precisely evaluate the Project's future formaldehyde emissions and establishing mitigation measures that reduce the cancer risk below the BAAQMD level. *Id.* at 5-9. Such an analysis would be similar in form to the air quality modeling and traffic modeling typically conducted as part of a CEQA review.

The failure to address the project's formaldehyde emissions is contrary to the California Supreme Court's decision in *California Building Industry Ass'n v. Bay Area Air Quality Mgmt. Dist.* (2015) 62 Cal.4th 369, 386 ("*CBIA*"). At issue in *CBIA* was whether the Air District could enact CEQA guidelines that advised lead agencies that they must analyze the impacts of adjacent environmental conditions on a project. The Supreme Court held that CEQA does not generally require lead agencies to consider the environment's effects on a project. *CBIA*, 62 Cal.4th at 800-801. However, to the extent a project may exacerbate existing adverse environmental conditions at or near a project site, those would still have to be considered pursuant to CEQA. *Id.* at 801 ("CEQA calls upon an agency to evaluate existing conditions in order to assess whether a project could exacerbate hazards that are already present"). In so holding, the Court expressly held that CEQA's statutory language required lead agencies to disclose and analyze "impacts on ***a project's users or residents*** that arise ***from the project's effects*** on the environment." *Id.* at 800 (emphasis added).

The carcinogenic formaldehyde emissions identified by Mr. Offermann are not an existing environmental condition. Those emissions to the air will be from the Project. Residents and commercial employees will be users of the Project. Rather than excusing the City from addressing the impacts of carcinogens emitted into the indoor air from the project, the Supreme Court in *CBIA* expressly finds that this type of effect by the project on the environment and a “project’s users” must be addressed in the CEQA process.

The Supreme Court’s reasoning is well-grounded in CEQA’s statutory language. CEQA expressly includes a project’s effects on human beings as an effect on the environment that must be addressed in an environmental review. “Section 21083(b)(3)’s express language, for example, requires a finding of a ‘significant effect on the environment’ (§ 21083(b)) whenever the ‘environmental effects of a project will cause substantial adverse effects *on human beings*, either directly or indirectly.’” *CBIA*, 62 Cal.4th at 800 (emphasis in original). Likewise, “the Legislature has made clear—in declarations accompanying CEQA’s enactment—that public health and safety are of great importance in the statutory scheme.” *Id.*, citing e.g., §§ 21000, subs. (b), (c), (d), (g), 21001, subs. (b), (d). It goes without saying that the future residents and employees of the Project are human beings and the health and safety of those residents and workers is as important to CEQA’s safeguards as that of other nearby residents currently living near the project site.

The City’s EIR must disclose and mitigate the potential environmental impacts to future users of the building.

IV. CONCLUSION

For the foregoing reasons, SAFER believes that the EIR is inadequate and urges the City to refrain from recommending certification of the FEIR or recommending approval of the Project in order to allow staff additional time to address the concerns raised herein. Thank you for considering our comments and please include this letter in the record of proceedings for this project.

Sincerely,



Rebecca Davis