

October 6, 2023

To: Mayor Davis and City Council members  
From: Board of Directors, Friends of Sunset Park  
RE: 10/10/23 agenda item 7-A – “Future of Santa Monica Airport”

- 1) We oppose the involvement of the Healthy Democracy organization in determining the future of Santa Monica Airport or in any other city decision making.
- 2) We oppose a “Lottery-selected panel process” in our city’s decision-making. It’s the responsibility of our elected City Council and the staff hired by the City to inform and serve the Council.
- 3) We oppose the suggested “framing question” on page 16 of the staff report: “How should the diverse needs of our community inform the future of the Airport land and the balances of land use and development that will most effectively contribute to Santa Monica’s long-term vitality?”

That question points the proposed panel’s deliberations toward development. Missing is the Measure LC language about parks, public open spaces, and public recreational facilities. Any framing question should include the constraints of LC, distinguishing between what can be done under LC and what would need further voter approval.

Keep in mind that when aviation interests put Measure D on the 2014 ballot to keep the Airport open in perpetuity, the *City Council itself* put Measure LC on the ballot to affirm the city’s authority to close the Airport.

It was then left to residents to run the LC campaign. While the National Business Aviation Association and other aviation interests donated \$1 million to the D campaign, residents managed to raise \$135,000 for 3 LC mailers. Volunteers flyer every city household and phoned 9,000 registered voters. Measure LC won 60 to 40; Measure D lost 60 to 40. Those figures were similar in *almost every* voting precinct.

What’s more, LC was endorsed by many public officials, and organizations such as the League of Women Voters of Santa Monica, the SM/M PTA Council, Residocracy, SMCLC, the SM Democratic Club, SMRR, the Sierra Club, Santa Monica Next, Santa Monica Spoke, FOSP, NEN, NOMA, OPA, PNA, and Wilmont. Those endorsements are still posted at [www.ItsOurLand.org](http://www.ItsOurLand.org)

### **1) Our opposition to Healthy Democracy (HD) is based on these facts:**

- a) **Cost:** Healthy Democracy’s Eugene, Oregon Review Panel on Housing was budgeted at \$60,000. The budget discussed on page 16 of the staff report for this Airport process totals nearly \$3 million. The staff’s suggested \$3 million seems outrageous, and at least a large portion could go to building a park.

- b) **Schedule:** Page 3 of the staff report discusses “personal barriers to participating” in past planning processes. On page 11 it proposes that the panel convene for six 3-day weekends (Friday to Sunday). How could any single parent, or any parent of young children, who might be interested in parks or other open space for their children on the Airport land, possibly participate in a panel with such a schedule?
- c) **Impartiality:** Healthy Democracy claims to be a nonpartisan nonprofit organization, but seems to be aligned with a developer lobby that would favor an outcome at the Airport in direct conflict with the expressed preferences of almost all residents of the city for ultra-low-density open space.
- d) **Conflicts of interest:** Healthy Democracy is not a disinterested party and has clear conflicts of interest:

Healthy Democracy is identified as a “Project of” and “Resource to” an organization called **Public Access Democracy (PAD)** <https://publicaccessdemocracy.org/resources/> PAD’s 3-member Coordinating Committee includes **Leonora Camner**, Executive Director of **Abundant Housing LA**, a 501c3 which added a 501c4 Political Action Committee in 2021. <https://publicaccessdemocracy.org/about/>

Leonora Camner engineered an increase in the housing allocation for Santa Monica.

On 10/11/2019, an attorney for Abundant Housing LA sent a letter to the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG), which resulted in the increase in Santa Monica’s housing allocation from **4,829 to 9,058** housing units.

[https://scag.ca.gov/sites/main/files/file-attachments/101119abundant\\_housing\\_la.pdf?1605421607](https://scag.ca.gov/sites/main/files/file-attachments/101119abundant_housing_la.pdf?1605421607)

On 10/25/2019, Ms. Camner had an Opinion piece published in *the Los Angeles Times*: “SoCal’s new housing plan is going to make traffic and air pollution worse for everyone,” in which she wrote “Abundant Housing L.A. research director Anthony Dedousis... recently developed a data-driven methodology to determine ...**Santa Monica**, with its massive job base and access to rail, would get **14,155**...”

<https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2019-10-25/housing-crisis-los-angeles-scag-homeless-development>

On 8/29/2020, Ms. Camner took credit for the increase to the Santa Monica housing requirement in an Opinion piece published in the *Santa Monica Daily Press*: “Hope for a Pro-Housing Future.” She wrote, “**Fortunately**, Santa Monica has been given a target of building nearly 9,000 new homes by 2029.”

<https://www.smdp.com/letter-to-the-editor-hope-for-a-pro-housing-future/195952>

On 11/16/21, the Abundant Housing LA Blog announced Ms. Camner's plan to support YIMBY candidates with "Our Own Abundant Housing LA PAC."

<https://abundanthousingla.org/announcing-our-own-ahla-pac/>

On 11/18/2021, during Ms. Camner's term on the Santa Monica Housing Commission, **Healthy Democracy was Action Item 3-D on the Commission agenda:**

[https://www.santamonica.gov/media/HED/Housing/2021\\_11\\_18\\_HousingCommissionAgenda.pdf](https://www.santamonica.gov/media/HED/Housing/2021_11_18_HousingCommissionAgenda.pdf)

HEALTHY DEMOCRACY -- Follow-up discussion and possible action regarding a recommendation to City Council to adopt a lottery-based selection process for housing-related work groups, panels, etc.

Healthy Democracy Presentation (34 slides):

[https://www.santamonica.gov/media/HED/Housing/2021\\_09\\_23\\_HC3A\\_HealthyDemocracyPresentation.pdf](https://www.santamonica.gov/media/HED/Housing/2021_09_23_HC3A_HealthyDemocracyPresentation.pdf)

Healthy Democracy Handout (18 pages): Eugene, Oregon -- Middle Housing Code Amendments Project -- 2020-21

[https://www.santamonica.gov/media/HED/Housing/2021\\_09\\_23\\_HC3A\\_EugeneHB2001ReviewPanelProposedProjectPlan.pdf](https://www.santamonica.gov/media/HED/Housing/2021_09_23_HC3A_EugeneHB2001ReviewPanelProposedProjectPlan.pdf)

We urge Council to reject the proposed contract with Healthy Democracy. Its relationship with political activist Leonora Camner precludes its impartiality.

## **2) Our opposition to a Lottery-selected panel process:**

A lottery is most applicable when the impacts of an issue are uniformly spread across a population. In fact, Sunset Park will be disproportionately impacted by traffic congestion and pollution from any non-park development.

Also, the project involves highly technical financial elements which the average person is not equipped to understand.

The huge scale of either a park or development is far beyond any current City financing capabilities. Significant tax hikes will be required to finance the project and those will fall disproportionately on property owners. Randomly selected residents with no technical background in the relevant financial issues are not likely to know what questions to ask.

A lottery will create conflict, as stakeholders question why they're left out of the final process. Santa Monicans worked hard to pass Measure LC. The highly disparate impacts of various changes to Airport land use require the full participation of all city stakeholders.

### **The Slippery Slope of "Co-Governance"**

The online publication *New America* described Healthy Democracy's involvement in the Petaluma Fairgrounds issue as "collaborative governance" or "co-governance."

<https://www.newamerica.org/political-reform/briefs/citizens-assemblies-petaluma-california-cogovernance/>

Staff should not be allowed to introduce “co-governance” to Santa Monica, and the Council should certainly not approve such a radical departure from our rules of governance without clear, unambiguous, voter consent.

“Democratic lotteries” are not democratic elections, and “random” does not mean “unbiased.” Lottery-selected panels can be led astray with incomplete, biased, or deceptive information inputs. City decision-making, and engagement by all stakeholders, is the responsibility of our elected City Council and the staff hired by the City to inform and serve the Council.

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**Background:**

The Healthy Democracy process and efforts in these two contentious land use projects seems to have led to greater division:

**Healthy Democracy at work in Eugene, Oregon**

**“Fear and Chaos at Eugene City Council Middle Housing Work Session”**

April 22, 2022 – *Eugene Register-Guard*

<https://www.registerguard.com/story/opinion/columns/2022/04/22/fear-and-chaos-at-eugene-city-council-middle-housing-work-session/65351116007/>

“This is a column about how Eugene will meet the June deadline to allow more housing flexibility, as required by House Bill 2001 and passed by the Legislature in 2018. Except this is not a column about the policy changes that have been required, proposed or contemplated.

The policies are important but they obscure something that matters more — our societal order. Strip away the policy details and a starker image emerges — one that looks vaguely familiar. It resembles the storming of the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021. Eugene City Council work session this week extended past midnight, because 125 participants gave testimony. Councilor Mike Clark said he’d never seen anything like it.

The city council knew from the start this was a hot potato. It delayed its deliberation for as long as possible. It used that time to extend the public outreach deep and wide. It added extra layers of inclusion with an Equity Roundtable, **Healthy Democracy Panel**, **Middle Housing Review Panel**, and other outreach efforts.

The Middle Housing Review Panel was designed to reach beyond “the usual suspects.” These were not policy wonks or growth management experts. They were citizens. They met 15 times over 6 months, carefully weighing how each policy change would affect everyday life. They wrestled with trade-offs, complying with legal requirements, as well as economic changes the policies could invite.

Their hard work was unanimously approved by the Eugene Planning Commission. The planning commission then launched its own process, including robust public comments, before sending to the Eugene City Council its unanimous policy recommendations.

City council will continue to solicit public comment with two more work sessions. That's an important part of the public process. The testimony that would be most useful to them at this point would be details and data that hadn't been considered earlier in the process. There wasn't much of that at Monday's work session.

Councilors Clark and Alan Zelenka worried aloud about the strident tone in some testimony, as well as the unprecedented volume. Councilors should consider whether the last-minute intensity was evidence not of a failed process but of a deliberate attempt to inject fear and chaos as the decision deadline nears.

Those who stormed our Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021 wanted to disrupt the democratic process for certifying the election. They insisted that their voice hadn't been heard, but their only evidence was they weren't getting their way. Because that bullying was not immediately and unanimously condemned, it has provided a playbook that imperils democratic values and processes everywhere, including here.

Families of elected officials have been threatened at the front door of their houses. Volunteers have been disparaged and warned to watch their backs. Volunteers are essential to making our democracy work — the everyday citizens on the Middle Housing Review Panel, our planning commissioners, and everyone who made this process as robust and inclusive as possible.

Some will be unhappy with the final decisions. That's inevitable — and all the more reason we should respect our democratic processes and trust the outcomes they produce.”

### **“Eugene Officials Unanimously Pass Middle Housing Rules after Months of Community Feedback”**

May 25, 2022 – *Eugene Register-Guard*

<https://www.registerguard.com/story/news/2022/05/25/eugene-oregon-middle-housing-passed-tweaked-planning-commission-recommendation-hb-2001-duplex/65357451007/>

“After voting 7-1 to reduce the maximum lot coverage, City Council unanimously passed a surgically altered version of the planning commission's recommended ordinance to comply with House Bill 2001. That law, passed during the 2019 session, requires large cities to allow for development of diverse housing types such as duplexes and cottage clusters in historically exclusionary single-family zones. As Eugene has worked to pass regulations complying with the law or else have a model code automatically apply, the city's proposed ordinance has drawn both praise and ire....”

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### **Healthy Democracy at work in Petaluma, California**

**“Panel Selected to Help Guide Petaluma Fairgrounds Future”**

April 18, 2022 – *Petaluma 360*

<https://www.petaluma360.com/article/news/panel-selected-to-help-guide-petaluma-fairgrounds-future/>

**“Fairgrounds Panel Supports Sticking with Tradition While Considering Other Uses for Property”** -- July 14, 2022 – *Petaluma 360*

<https://www.petaluma360.com/article/news/fairgrounds-panel-supports-sticking-with-tradition-while-considering-other/>

“A park space and year-round farmers market are among other ideas floated for the Marin-Sonoma Fairgrounds property....”

**“Design Session Offers Glimpse at Possible Futures for Petaluma Fairgrounds”**

October 5, 2022 – *Petaluma 360*

<https://www.petaluma360.com/article/news/design-session-offers-glimpse-at-possible-futures-for-petaluma-fairgrounds/>

“The future of Petaluma’s Sonoma-Marin Fairgrounds is still unknown, but a recent workshop may have provided glimpses of that future by pairing up community members with professional architects in an unusual group design session....Architects had an hour and a half to draw up the design ideas, which will be presented to city leaders later this month....”

**“Poll: Majority Rejects City Council’s Takeover of Fairgrounds”**

November 3, 2022 – *Petaluma 360*

<https://www.petaluma360.com/article/opinion/poll-majority-rejects-city-councils-takeover-of-fairgrounds/>

“Nearly three-quarters of poll responders disagree with recent council action....”

**“What’s the Plan for the Petaluma Fairgrounds?”**

March 2, 2023 – *Petaluma 360*

<https://www.petaluma360.com/article/opinion/commentary-whats-the-plan-for-the-petaluma-fairgrounds/>

**“Fairgrounds Negotiations at a Standstill amid Finger Pointing”**

March 8, 2023 – *Petaluma 360*

<https://www.petaluma360.com/article/news/fairgrounds-negotiations-at-a-standstill-amid-finger-pointing/>

**“Petaluma Fairgrounds Talks Remain in Limbo”**

April 6, 2023 – *Petaluma 360*

<https://www.petaluma360.com/article/news/petaluma-fairgrounds-talks-remain-in-limbo/>

**Opinion: “Fairgrounds Solution at Hand”**

June 15, 2023 – *Petaluma 360*

“Petaluma’s elected officials are responsible for getting the most efficient utilization of this property for the benefit of its owners, the citizens of Petaluma,” writes Argus-Courier columnist John Burns.

<https://www.petaluma360.com/article/opinion/community-matters-fairgrounds-solution-at-hand/>

City update: <https://cityofpetaluma.org/fairgroundsupdate/>

“The City is negotiating with the 4th District Agricultural Association (DAA) in good faith and remains committed to transforming the Fairgrounds for community use, and further integrating the Fairgrounds into community life, while ensuring that the Sonoma-Marín County Fair can continue.

“However, your recommendations for additional City subsidies (referenced in your proposal as “potential funding opportunities”) to backfill the DAA’s operating deficit, including utilizing the voter-approved, locally-controlled Measure U funds, is not realistic.

“The City, cannot in good conscience, reduce the local funding that Petalumans voted to provide for rapid 911 emergency response; fire protection services and firefighting equipment; attracting and retaining well-trained community police officers; accelerating street and pothole repair; keeping our local public areas safe and clean; providing support for local businesses; and other public services essential to our community’s needs and quality of life....”

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