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June 6, 2013

Mayor O'Connor and members of the Santa Monica City Council:

The Santa Monica Democratic Club Executive Board urges you to vote for item 13-C on the June 11th City Council agenda, amending the planning priorities for downtown Santa Monica.

Our Club is deeply committed to effective public process and community involvement in local decision-making. It has become evident to us and others that polarized positions on certain downtown "opportunity sites" are making effective public process difficult and threaten to preclude thoughtful deliberation on the Downtown Specific Plan as a whole.

Further, the LUCE we adopted in 2010 sets aside downtown as an area of crucial concern, stating on page 2.1-48 that "Prior to the completion of a new Downtown Specific Plan, the existing Bayside Specific Plan and applicable land use designations will apply." Under the maximums allowed in the 1984 LUCE as amended, no building in downtown can exceed 84 feet in height.

Under these circumstances, for projects proposing heights in excess of 84 feet, to proceed with float-ups, EIR scopings, and other public hearings--whether before the City Council or its advisory bodies such as the Planning Commission--seems inadvisable, and is likely to further confuse and complicate the much-needed public process on a new Downtown Specific Plan.

It is by working within the process for the Downtown Specific Plan that Santa Monica can best consider comprehensively our downtown skyline, and how maximum heights affect that skyline and the scale of our city. Individual tower-based projects should fit within community consensus on a Downtown Specific Plan, not the other way around.

The Santa Monica Democratic Club Executive Board therefore asks the Council to heed the groundswell of community concern over letting "opportunity site" proposals higher than 84 feet precede the Downtown Specific Plan, and urges you to pass and implement item 13-C.

Yours truly,

Santa Monica Democratic Club