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VIA TRUE FILING

Supreme Court of California
350 McAllister Street
San Francisco, CA 94102-4797

Re: **REQUEST FOR DE-PUBLICATION OF *STOPTHEMILLENNIUMHOLLYWOOD.COM, ET AL. V. CITY OF LOS ANGELES, ET AL.*** (Court of Appeal Case No. B282319)

Dear Honorable Justices:

The California State Association of Counties (“CSAC”) and the League of California Cities (“League”) respectfully request, pursuant to Rule of Court 8.1125, that the Court de-publish the opinion *Stopthemillenniumhollywood.com, et al. v. City of Los Angeles, et al.*, case No. B282319 (“Opinion”). The Opinion was drafted by a Judge of the Los Angeles Superior Court, assigned to Division Three of the Second District Court of Appeal, pursuant to Article VI, Section 6 of the California Constitution.

I. INTERESTS OF THE PARTIES

CSAC is a non-profit corporation. The membership consists of the 58 California counties. CSAC sponsors a Litigation Coordination Program, which is administered by the County Counsels’ Association of California and is overseen by the Association’s Litigation Overview Committee, comprised of county counsels throughout the state. The Litigation Overview Committee monitors litigation of concern to counties statewide and has determined that this case is a matter affecting all counties.

The League of California Cities is an association of 475 California cities dedicated to protecting and restoring local control to provide for the public health, safety, and welfare of their residents, and to enhance the quality of life for all Californians. The League of Cities is advised by its Legal Advocacy Committee, comprised of 24 city attorneys from all regions of the State. The Committee monitors litigation of concern to municipalities, and identifies those cases that have statewide or nationwide significance. The Committee has identified this case as having such significance.¹

¹ The Sohagi Law Group works for proprietary agencies of the City of Los Angeles, including Los Angeles World Airports and the Port of Los Angeles. However, The Sohagi Law Group has had no involvement in the current case, other than filing of the amicus brief in the Court of Appeal on behalf of CSAC and this letter.

II. INTRODUCTION

The case addresses two primary issues under the California Environmental Quality Act (“CEQA”; Pub. Resources Code, §§ 21000 et seq.; Cal. Code Regs., tit. 14, §§ 150000 et seq. [“CEQA Guidelines”]): (1) The adequacy/level of detail of the Project Description for an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) (i.e., the level of detail for the siting, size, mass, and appearance of the buildings), and (2) whether the Court of Appeal is required to address all of the alleged CEQA deficiencies raised by the parties. As outlined in greater detail below, the Opinion should be de-published because (A) it effectively makes modern land use and zoning regulations impermissible, (B) it completely omits discussion of the controlling legal authority on both legal issues, and (C) it is inconsistent with a well-established body of law and artificially distinguishes existing case precedent.

The level of detail of the project description is governed by the introductory language of CEQA Guidelines § 15124, which explains “The description of the project shall contain the following information but should not supply extensive detail beyond that needed for evaluation and review of the environmental impact.” (Emphasis added.) The Court completely omits any discussion of this standard, instead creating its own illusive standard. Aside from being inconsistent with the controlling law, this creates tremendous policy concerns for development in California and effectively negates the adoption of traditional development regulations, as outlined in greater detail in Section III(A) below.

Furthermore, it is difficult to discern the full holding of the Opinion on the adequacy of the project description. This lack of clarity also warrants de-publication. Under the *procedural background* discussion of the Opinion, the Court seemingly faults the *Initial Study* project description for not adequately describing the project’s *land uses*, stating “the initial study failed to describe a stable or finite commitment regarding *the uses* to be made of the undisclosed and undescribed constructed buildings.” (Emphasis added; Opinion p. 9). However, the Opinion’s legal analysis only faults the project description for not providing sufficient detail on the *siting, size, mass, and appearance of the buildings*, with no mention of adequacy of the land use description. (Opinion p. 23.) To the extent this procedural background discussion is interpreted to be a substantive ruling, it is inherently inconsistent with established case law, with no attempt to distinguish cases cited in the League’s amicus brief, such as *Maintain Our Desert Environment v. Town of Apple Valley* (2004) 124 Cal.App.4th 430, 441-442 [Project description did not need to identify the tenant/end-user].

Regarding the second issue, the legislature expressly declared that “any court, which finds, or, in the process of reviewing a previous court finding, finds, that a public agency has taken an action without compliance with this division, shall specifically address each of the alleged grounds for noncompliance.” This statutory directive has also been expressly acknowledged in several recent CEQA cases. The Opinion ignores these clear legal directives, and instead relied upon a *criminal* decision to come to the exact opposite holding, stating “An appellate court is not required to address every one of the parties’ respective arguments or express every ground for rejecting every contention.” (Opinion pp. 27-28.) As discussed in Section III(C), this creates a serious risk of obfuscation and delay.

III. BASIS FOR DEPUBLICATION

A. The Court's Holding on the Adequacy of the Project Description Has Disastrous Policy Implications

The current case involves the Millennium Hollywood Project (“Millennium” or the “Project”) which includes adoption of mixed-use development regulations (i.e., zoning) for four and a half acres of land, spanning nearly two city blocks. (Opinion at pp. 2, 9, AR page I-5, p. II-16.) The CEQA Guidelines make it clear that even when a project is the adoption of development regulations, such as a general plan, a specific plan, or zoning, that the project shall be described as a physical development proposal. (CEQA Guidelines, § 15378(d).) Consistent with this directive, EIRs often incorporate conservative “conceptual” buildout diagrams, such as the Millennium EIR, or make reasonable buildout assumptions, to give the public a sense of the type of development which could occur within the boundaries of these regulations.

For the Millennium EIR, one of the primary project objectives was to “[c]reate an equivalency program to allow changes in uses and floor area to support the continued revitalization of Hollywood and the region while ensuring the project has *the necessary flexibility to respond to changing market conditions and consumer need in the Hollywood area*” and “Provide flexibility necessary to ensure that the mix of uses will meet the needs of Hollywood *at the time of development.*” (Emphasis added; AR4254-55.)

Such flexibility is not surprising when a public agency is adopting development regulations, particularly those with buildout dates spanning approximately 20 years, i.e., 2035. (AR 4105-4106.) The demand for residential, commercial, and office space can vary greatly depending upon market conditions, which can fluctuate rapidly, as aptly demonstrated by this case. As noted in the Opinion, environmental review for this Project was initiated more than a decade ago, before the great recession. (Opinion p. 5.) Economic and social factors, such as increased automation, online shopping, telecommuting, driverless cars, and other unknown technological and social changes and innovations have changed, and will continue to change the types of buildings and the uses in those buildings in the next 20 years and beyond. It is impractical to foresee with any certainty these types of changes. If public agencies do not have development regulations in place to quickly respond to changing market conditions, they can lose out on such economic and social opportunities, which may ultimately plunge cities and counties into stagnation or blight. The ability of public agencies to quickly react to such changes is vitally important, as demonstrated by recent changes in the demand for retail and mall space.

Unfortunately, the Opinion dismissively rejected this flexibility out of hand, quoting the trial court's holding that “Millennium's uncertainty about market conditions or the timing of its build-out is an insufficient ground for the ambiguous and blurred Project Description.” (Opinion, pp. 17, 25.) Whether that is true is *a policy decision* for public agencies to make, particularly when the underlying project *is the adoption of development regulations*. The Courts are supposed to give “great deference” to such policy decisions, and public agencies are expressly allowed to consider numerous factors including “*economic, social,*

technological, or other considerations.” (*California Native Plant Society v. City of Santa Cruz* (2009) 177 Cal.App.4th 957, 997-1000; Pub. Resources Code, § 21081(a)(3); CEQA Guidelines, § 15364.) The Opinion cannot be reconciled with this bedrock principle.

Numerous other factors also limit the level of detail of an EIR’s project description. The Supreme Court has explained that EIRs should be prepared as early as feasible in the planning process to enable environmental considerations to influence project program and design. (CEQA Guidelines, § 15004(b); *Save Tara v. City of West Hollywood* (2008) 45 Cal.4th 116, 130.) Consequently, at such early stages, particularly for projects which involve approval of development regulations, it is not feasible to identify the precise mix of uses, or the “*siting, size, mass, or appearance of the buildings*,” as mandated by the current Opinion.

In such circumstances, historically a “public agency can make reasonable assumptions based on substantial evidence about future conditions *without guaranteeing that those assumptions will remain true*.” (*Environmental Council of Sacramento v. City of Sacramento* (2006) 142 Cal.App.4th 1018, 1036; see also *High Sierra Rural Alliance v. County of Plumas* (2018) 29 Cal.App.5th 102 [General Plan EIR project description population growth assumptions based upon Department of Finance projections]; *Rominger v. County of Colusa* (2014) 229 Cal.App.4th 690, 712 [A land use is not reasonably foreseeable under CEQA simply because it is allowed by zoning]; *Save Round Valley Alliance v. County of Inyo* (2007) 157 Cal.App.4th 1437 [Project Description did not need to assume second dwelling unit would be constructed, even though allowed by zoning.]; See *San Diego Citizenry Group v. County of San Diego* (2013) 219 Cal.App.4th 1 [EIR project description for winery land use regulations properly based upon buildout assumptions from a questionnaire to local property owners.] (“*San Diego Citizenry*”).)

Similar, to the current case, Petitioners in *San Diego Citizenry* also challenged the adequacy of an EIR’s project description where the San Diego Board of Supervisors allowed new wineries by right (i.e. with ministerial review), such that they would not be subject to further CEQA review. (*San Diego Citizenry Group, supra*, 219 Cal.App.4th at 13-15.) In rejecting Petitioner’s project description challenge, the Court explained that “CEQA does not restrict an agency’s discretion to identify and pursue a particular project designed to meet a particular set of objectives.” (Internal quotes omitted; *Id.* at 14.) That Court further explained that “[i]t is not within the province of a judicial officer to second guess the policy decisions of the members of the [Board of Supervisors], so long as there was substantial evidence to support their decisions.” (*Id.* at 12.) Without expressly stating so, that is precisely what the Opinion does here. The Court arbitrarily dismisses the legitimate policy decision made by the City of Los Angeles (i.e., development regulation flexibility), faulting the City of Los Angeles for creating a ministerial review process for the ensuing entitlements. The Opinion concludes that the project description, and therefore the underlying regulations, cannot incorporate the flexibility inherent in traditional development standards. (Opinion p. 18.)

Other Courts have explained that a “city’s authority to exercise police power in land use matters is broad... California courts permit vague standards because they are sensitive to the need of government in large urban areas to delegate broad discretionary power to

administrative bodies if the community’s zoning business is to be done without paralyzing the legislative process.” (*Sacramentans for Fair Planning v. City of Sacramento* (2019) 37 Cal.App.5th 698, 708, 713 [Petition for review pending]; *People v. Gates* (1974) 41 Cal.App.3d 590, 595; *Novi v. City of Pacifica* (1985) 169 Cal.App.3d 678, 682; *Groch v. City of Berkeley* (1981) 118 Cal.App.3d 518, 522.) As explained in the Governor’s Office of Planning and Research (OPR) General Plan Guidelines, “given the long-term nature of a general plan, its diagrams and *text should be general enough to allow a degree of flexibility in decision-making as times change.*” (Office of Planning and Research, 2017 General Plan Guidelines, page 52).

The Opinion’s callous dismissal of the City’s project objectives is deeply concerning. The League and CSAC have serious concerns that the Opinion’s new amorphous standard for the adequacy of the project description is inherently in conflict with the policy discretion afforded to public agency land use decisions, including the adoption of General Plans, Specific Plans, Zoning, Long Range Development Plans for Universities, and similar land use regulations. The level of detail demanded by the Opinion is simply unworkable from a policy perspective and inherently conflicts with the police powers granted to public agencies. As outlined in the subsequent section, the Opinion not only raises serious policy concerns, it also ignores the controlling precedent and artificially narrows the existing body of law on this issue.

B. The Opinion Ignores the Controlling Legal Authority on the Level of Detail of Required of a Project Description

The level of detail of the project description is controlled by the introductory language of CEQA Guidelines section 15124, which clearly explains that “[t]he description of the project shall contain the following information *but should not supply extensive detail beyond that needed for evaluation and review of the environmental impact.*” (Emphasis added.) While the Opinion cited the ensuing list of requirements under Section 15124(a)-(d), this governing language *is found nowhere in the Opinion*, nor is it applied anywhere in the Opinion’s legal analysis.² (Opinion p. 20.) The Supreme Court has explained that while the courts have yet to definitively decide whether the CEQA Guidelines are regulatory mandates or aids in interpreting CEQA, courts are supposed to afford “great weight” to the Guidelines

² While the implication is that more detailed information on the “*siting, size, mass, or appearance of the buildings*” could be relevant to aesthetics, the Opinion fails to tie this information to the aesthetics methodology or analysis from the Millennium EIR. Impact analysis methodology is left to the discretion of the lead agency, and the Court’s demand for this information is an indirect challenge to that methodology, which is subject to a traditional substantial evidence test. “A project opponent or reviewing court can always imagine some additional study or analysis that might provide helpful information. It is not for them to design the EIR.” (*Laurel Heights, supra*, 47 Cal.3d 376, 415.) Furthermore, in many instances, aesthetics is no longer an environmental consideration for mixed-use projects in urban areas. (Pub. Res. Code, § 21099(d)(1).) The Millennium Project is a mixed-use project within a Transit-Oriented District (“TOD”), less than one block from the Hollywood Nine Metro Red Line Station, and within a five-minute walk to the Metro Local lines 180, 181 and 217 and the Metro Rapid line 780. (AR 4211, 4217.)

except when a provision is clearly unauthorized or erroneous under CEQA. (*Laurel Heights Improvement Ass'n v. Regents of Univ. of Cal.* (1988) 47 Cal.3d 376, 391 FN2).

Unfortunately, the Opinion provides no weight to the CEQA Guidelines directive. Instead, the Opinion relies upon inapplicable case law and an undefined standard of review. (Opinion pp. 20-26.)

“Project opponents will often assert that the EIR contains an unstable and inaccurate project description. However, such assertions often mistake project description flexibility (e.g. options of replacing commercial uses with office uses), for an inaccurate project description (e.g. internal inconsistencies between EIR chapters).” (Lexis Practice Advisor, Practice Note, *California Environmental Quality Act Compliance*, 2019, p. 6.) That is precisely the error the Opinion makes here. The Court reaches the conclusion relying upon two inapplicable CEQA opinions. (1) *Washoe Meadows Community v. Department of Parks & Recreation* (2017) 17 Cal.App.5th 277, 286-287, and (2) *County of Inyo v. City of Los Angeles* (1977) 71 Cal.App.3d 185. Neither of these cases addresses the appropriate level of detail for a CEQA project description.

Washoe Meadows involved an EIR that described five different alternative projects, but did not identify a “proposed project” which the Court determined violated CEQA’s legal requirements. And *County of Inyo* involved water pumping information which “expands and contracts from place to place within the EIR.” (*County of Inyo, supra*, 71 Cal.App.3d 185, 190.) “*County of Inyo*...did not address a situation where the project description was rendered unstable simply because specific building and design decisions were not made in the EIR...Thus, the problem with the EIR in *County of Inyo* was that the project description changed throughout the document itself.” (*Citizens for a Sustainable Treasure Island v. City and County of San Francisco* (2014) 227 Cal.App.4th 1036, 1054-1055; see also *South of Market Community Action Network v. City and County of San Francisco* (2019) 33 Cal.App.5th 321, 335.) Neither of the issues from *Washoe Meadows* or *County of Inyo* are applicable in the Millennium project EIR, which turns upon a separate body of law related to the appropriate level of detail for a project description.

Most case law on the applicable level of detail stems from *Dry Creek Citizens Coalition v. County of Tulare* (1999) 70 Cal.App.4th 20. In that case, Appellants challenged the EIR project description alleging that the “EIR provides an inadequate ‘conceptual’ description of the bypass channel cut-off walls, and in-stream diversion structures. The actual design of these structures is deferred until after project approval.” (*Id.* at 27, 31.) In determining that the project description complied with CEQA, the *Dry Creek Citizens* Court relied upon the language omitted in the current Opinion, namely that the project description “should not supply extensive detail beyond that needed for evaluation and review of the environmental impact.” (*Id.* at 27-28.) The Court reasoned that “Appellants do not point out how additional detail regarding the diversion structures would enhance environmental review in this regard. [Expert’s] contrary opinion regarding the significance of this project impact does not render the project description inadequate.” (*Id.* at 33.) The *Dry Creek Citizens* Court ultimately held that “Appellants have not established that the general description of the diversion structures in the EIR coupled with approval of final designs after the project is

approved violate any CEQA mandate.” (*Id.* at 36.) In so holding, the court explained, “Courts should not intercept CEQA to impose procedural or substantive requirements beyond those explicitly required in the statutes or CEQA Guidelines.” (*Id.*)

Relying upon *Dry Creek Citizens*, the First District Court of Appeal reached a similar conclusion, upholding the adequacy of an EIR project description in *Treasure Island, supra*, 227 Cal.App.4th 1036. The Opinion attempts to artificially narrow and distinguish *Treasure Island* asserting that “Unlike the Treasure Island developer, there were no contaminated sites on this property that interfered with making any firm commitment as to whether development would be possible, and if so, what type of development.” (Opinion at pp. 26, 17.) The Opinion’s interpretation of this case is artificially narrow and inaccurate.³

The Opinion’s attempt to distinguish *Treasure Island* conflates *two separate and distinct challenges* to the project description: (1) “Is the Project Description Accurate and Stable?” (*Id.* at 1052-1055), and (2) “Does the EIR Contain an Adequate Discussion About the Presence and Remediation of Hazardous Substances?” (*Id.* at 1056-1061.) The issue of the presence of contamination did not affect the Court’s analysis of the first issue.

As to the first issue, the *Treasure Island* Court *rejected* the argument that the EIR “analyzed an abstract and indeterminate ‘conceptual’ development scenario that lacks the ‘accurate, finite and stable’ project-level details necessary to fully analyze potentially significant impacts.” (*Id.* at 1053.) The Court reasoned that “the EIR made an extensive effort to provide meaningful information about the project, *while providing the flexibility needed to respond to changing conditions and unforeseen events that could possibly impact the Project’s final design.*” (Emphasis added; *Id.* at 1053.) Similar to the underlying development standards at issue in the Opinion, the *Treasure Island* development regulations established “specific ‘flex zones’--zoning districts in which a limited number of towers (taller buildings) may be located, subject to maximum height limit in that zoning district. The towers are also subject to quantitative standards dictating separation, bulk, and massing; these standards dictate the buildings’ relationship to one another.” Contrary to the Opinion’s discussion of *Treasure Island*, the issue of the Project Description flexibility was not tied to the presence of hazardous materials.

The secondary issue in *Treasure Island* did not play a large role in dictating the content of the adopted development standards. Instead petitioners simply alleged “the EIR does not describe, at a project level degree of detail, the existing location and nature of all hazardous materials or whether and how the City will remediate such toxic materials.” (Internal Quotes omitted; *Id.* at 1056.) Despite the Opinion’s summary of *Treasure Island*, the only relationship between development regulation flexibility and the presence of hazardous materials related to a single parcel which posed unique issues of capped contaminated soil. (*Id.* at 1056-1061.)

³ Furthermore, while there were contaminated sites in *Treasure Island*, “out of approximately 400 acres, about 170 acres have been cleared by the Navy and don’t contain any contaminants at all, or if they did, it’s already been cleaned.” (*Id.* at 1056.)

The Court’s attempt to distinguish *Treasure Island* is also deeply concerning, as it implies that projects similar in scale to the Treasure Island Project, but that do not contain hazardous materials, need to provide detailed siting, size, mass, and appearance of the buildings, regardless of whether it is environmentally relevant or feasible, even where buildout is over a 20 year horizon. The Treasure Island Project encompassed nearly 400 acres, 8,000 residential units, 140,000 square feet of new commercial and retail space, 100,000 square feet of new office space, 500 hotel rooms, and 300 acres of parks, playgrounds open space, bike and transit facilities, and a new ferry terminal and intermodal transit hub, all constructed over a 20-year period. (*Id.* at 1044.) The Treasure Island Project alone would have a population significantly larger than many cities in California. To suggest that EIRs for General Plans, Specific Plans, and other land use regulations of this size need to prepare detailed information on the appearance of individual building is troubling and an effort in futility given the ever-changing market conditions and unknown needs of future tenants during a 20-year buildout.

Because the Opinion is (1) untethered to the legal standard under CEQA Guidelines section 15124, (2) artificially distinguishes and attempts to rewrite well-established case law, and (3) fails to explain why the level of detail, demanded by petitioners was necessary “for evaluation and review of the environmental impact,” it should be de-published. If the Opinion remains citable, it will inevitably be used to challenge all EIR project descriptions which fail to identify “*siting, size, mass, and appearance of the buildings*” even if that information is environmentally irrelevant or inconsistent with project objectives.

C. The Opinion Fails to Address All Alleged CEQA Deficiencies Thereby Creating a New Erroneous Rule of Law Which Conflicts with Clear Statutory Directives and CEQA Case Law

The trial court in this case ruled on several additional CEQA issues, aside from the adequacy of the project description. The trial court found that the EIR’s analysis of seismic impacts was consistent with CEQA, but also ruled that the lead agency violated CEQA because it disagreed with a responsible agency (Caltrans). (Opinion pp. 3-4.) The Opinion, however, fails to address these issues. Relying upon the *criminal* decision in *People v. Garcia* (2002) 97 Cal.App.4th 847, 853, the Opinion states, “An appellate court is not required to address every one of the parties’ respective arguments or express every ground for rejecting every contention.” (Opinion pp. 27-28.)

People v. Garcia involved no discussion of CEQA’s statutory directive that “any court, which finds, or, *in the process of reviewing a previous court finding*, finds, that a public agency has taken an action without compliance with this division, *shall specifically address each of the alleged grounds for noncompliance.*” (Emphasis added; Pub. Resources Code, § 21005(c).) Other Appellate Court’s have specifically acknowledged this obligation under CEQA. (*North Coast Rivers Alliance v. Kawamura* (2015) 243 Cal.App.4th 647, 654 [“Our findings of CEQA violations as to some issues does not relieve us from reviewing appellants’ other contentions. (§ 21005, subd. (c)...”]; see also *Cleveland National Forest Foundation v. San Diego Association. of Governments* (2017) 17 Cal.App.5th, 413, 434 [“we are mindful of

the Legislature's intent “that any court, which finds, or, in the process of reviewing a previous court finding, finds, that a public agency has taken an action without compliance with [CEQA], shall specifically address each of the alleged grounds for noncompliance.” (§ 21005, subd. (c).)”) This rule provides lead agencies with clear direction on what needs to be fixed in an EIR following judicial review, ensuring CEQA is administered in an expeditious manner.

The Opinion’s failure to address all CEQA issues raised in the trial court creates a dangerous precedent which may lead to abusive litigation tactics, including obfuscation, delay, and a loss of judicial economy when these unaddressed issues are re-litigated after the return on the writ. Courts have uniformly held that CEQA should not be turned into a delay tactic, yet that is precisely what the Opinion allows. By addressing a singular issue, the Opinion kicks the can down the road on the outstanding issues, which will certainly be raised by Petitioners in future litigation after the issue addressed on appeal has been resolved. (See *County of Orange v. Superior Court* (2003) 113 Cal.App.4th 1, 6 [“In CEQA cases time is money. A project opponent can ‘win’ even though it ‘loses’ in an eventual appeal because the sheer extra time required for the unnecessary appeal (with the risk of higher interest rates and other expenses) makes the project less commercially desirable, perhaps even to the point where a developer will abandon it or drastically scale it down.”].)

As detailed above, the Opinion should be de-published because it effectively makes modern land use and zoning regulations impermissible, omits discussion of the controlling legal authority, artificially distinguishes and narrows existing case law, and is inconsistent with a well-established body of law.

Very truly yours,

R. TYSON SOHAGI (SBN 254235)
On Behalf of the League of California Cities and the
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CC: See Attached Proof of Service

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