

June 11, 2018

Attn: Mayor Eric Garcetti
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Los Angeles, CA 90012
Email: mayor.garcetti@lacity.org; david.e.harrison@lacity.org

Attn: Herb J. Wesson, Jr.
City Hall Office
200 North Spring Street, Room 430
Los Angeles, CA 90012
District Office
1819 S. Western Avenue
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Re: Proposed Homeless Shelter at 682 South Vermont

Dear Honorable Mayor Garcetti and Honorable Council President Wesson,

The January 2017 annual homeless census revealed that there are nearly 58,000 homeless individuals in Los Angeles County. We agree that this is a big community issue. We also agree that it is urgent. Our community has been trying to resolve the homelessness problem for years. We all agree to the above.

The issue is not about whether we should help, but how we should do it. As everybody, including Councilman Wesson agrees, there was a procedural issue, in that Councilman Wesson and the City completely failed to have any public input in the procedure of preparing the plan regarding 682 S. Vermont, in direct violation of Constitutional Due Process Rights. In response thereto, on May 22, 2018, the councilmembers at the Homeless & Poverty Committee Meeting stated generally that they thought we needed to proceed with the plan because helping the homeless is an urgent matter, though it recognized a procedural problem. Again, the discussion of HOW is missing.

None of the councilmembers at the committee meeting discussed anything about HOW. After discussing only whether, they approved the motion.

The City plans to spend \$1.3 million on 682 S. Vermont to allegedly help the homeless, but the facility will only provide 65 beds. 682 S. Vermont provides a small piece of land, approximately 24,600 square feet of space that is unlikely to accommodate the large number of homeless people in the Mid-Wilshire area. Councilman Wesson said 682 S. Vermont would be the only emergency homeless shelter in City District 10.

This is the plan Councilman Wesson and the City presented as the answer to the question of “How.” We say this is the wrong answer. But nobody wants to talk about it.

Councilman Wesson himself has said that there are approximately 400 homeless individuals only in Koreatown. However, according to the 2017 Los Angeles Homeless Count report, prepared by the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (“LASHA”), Wilshire Center-Koreatown Neighborhood Council (WCKNC) District has about 368 homeless persons, and in all of City District 10, there are about 1,475 homeless persons, primarily in the Baldwin Hills/Crenshaw (440 homeless persons) and West Adams-Expo Park areas (435 homeless persons). Further, about one fourth of WCKNC belongs to City District 13.

682 S. Vermont is located in the opposite direction, near the northeastern tip of City District 10, on the edge of the District’s eastern border. The proposed shelter at 682 S. Vermont will only have 65 beds, after spending \$1.3 million, because of the small size of the location. That’s roughly \$20,000 per bed.

Councilman Wesson claims that Koreatown has the largest number of homeless persons in District 10. This turned out to be false, according to the data from LASHA’s 2017 Los Angeles Homeless Count report. In fact, more than 875 of the estimated 1,475 homeless individuals identified in City District 10 are located in the Southern part of District 10, including the Baldwin Hills/Crenshaw and West Adams-Expo Park areas. There are far more homeless individuals living near Councilman Wesson’s home and office than in Koreatown. Councilman Wesson owes people an explanation about this “misinformation”.

Even if we assume relying on the “misinformation” was an innocent mistake, it brings a lot of concern and “fear” in the community about the city leaders’ ability to analyze the situation and come up with a solution that will truly help the homeless in District 10.

682 S. Vermont is not the solution. It’s too small to accommodate the more than one thousand homeless people in City District 10. It’s not accessible to the vast majority of homeless individuals in City District 10, who are unlikely to be within walking distance of 682 S. Vermont. And it’s not close to the areas where most of the homeless population in City District 10 have been found, on the opposite side of the District.

With the same amount of money, \$1.3 million, we could get a larger piece of land that is more accessible and more closely located to the majority of homeless individuals staying in District 10.

Mayor Garcetti has stated that he plans to spend \$20 million for emergency shelter services, like 682 S. Vermont, across the county. Yet, this \$20 million budget will only provide 15 shelters for a total of only 1,500 beds, which the City claims will help tens of thousands of homeless people. One of these proposed shelters will only have 35 beds. Increased taxes are being collected to raise this money, but, based on the information available, if all of these proposed shelters are planned in the same manner as 682 S. Vermont, the \$20 million meant to help the homeless may be wasted.

Councilman Wesson and Mayor Garcetti say they can keep everything clean and safe for the community, suggesting they can maintain control. In fact, they have yet to explain why, over many long years, they could not do anything about Skid Row, which now suffers from a homelessness problem that is totally out of control, and why the pre-existing shelters are not being used by the homeless persons.

Of the 290-plus pages of records disclosed by Councilman Wesson’s office,¹ there were no records of discussions, inquiries, or consultations with any

¹ On May 9, 2018, our office sent Councilman Wesson’s office a request for records under the California Public Records Act, asking for all records related to Councilman Wesson and the City’s plans for 682 S. Vermont and any other potential homeless shelters. Councilman Wesson’s office requested an extension of time to disclose the documents requested, which we

experts about the failures of existing homeless shelters, or measures the City would take to avoid the same failures. There were no records referencing or considering any real data or analysis, nor any records of any impact analyses or plans to minimize the impact on the neighboring area. There were simply no records that considered safety issues or maintaining safety for the community, nor records of any consultations with local law enforcement. No records showed any real discussion about how to build or operate the shelter.

Should we really call this a plan? Or the answer to the question of HOW?

This is why people should not stop their discussion of helping homeless people after merely answering the question of WHETHER we should help. We MUST seriously consider the question of HOW, we MUST look for the real answers thereto, and we MUST genuinely try to help the homeless with a REAL PLAN.

Mayor Garcetti says he understands the “fear” people have, but does not seem to understand where the community’s fears come from. These fears do not come from people’s prejudices or stereotypes about homeless people at all. The fears reasonably center on the City’s ability to keep the homelessness problem under control.

So far, the City has failed to properly run even the simplest shelter. The Korean news media has investigated other existing shelters and discovered that people are refusing to stay in them because they are dirty, bug-infested, and dangerous. One woman complained of being raped twice. Others complained of a complete lack of privacy. The records do not demonstrate any consideration of these and other issues, or plans to address the failings of other shelters. The records disclosed show that no discussion about these and other past failures has occurred, there has been no consideration of why these shelters have failed, and no plans have been made to avoid repeating these failures. The City has based its proposed shelter at 682 S. Vermont on the baseless assumption that if we simply build the shelter, the homeless will stay there. The City’s existing shelters suggest otherwise.

Another fear is that, after spending \$1.3 million in District 10 and \$20 million in Los Angeles County, the City may end up wasting the money and not really

granted. On or around the extended due date of June 1, 2018, Councilman Wesson’s office disclosed approximately 295 pages of documents without qualification.

helping homeless people, while only hurting the neighboring areas, as shown by their track record so far.

Based on this fear, our community is offering to help the city. Strangely, Councilman Wesson and Mayor Garcetti have refused to even discuss it.

We all say homelessness is a big community issue, we all want to help them to get off the street and live their lives, and in the process of helping, we will keep everything under control for the safety of the people. In short, we together have the same goal, but strangely, we cannot discuss it together, try together, or help together, because the City has been refusing to do all of this together.

Rather, Councilman Wesson's secretary, Ms. Vanessa Rodriguez, provided major media more "misinformation" by stating "a lot of misinformation had been spread in the Korean-language media, which could be partly responsible for the heated opposition." Not surprisingly, it turned out to be false again, and Councilman Wesson had to visit Korea Daily's office to apologize.

In addition, on June 5, 2018, at the entrance to the "Homeless Resolution" workshop prepared under the name of Mayor Garcetti, the security guard had the names of some of WCC members who did RSVP for the event, in order to prevent them from entering the workshop. Later, Mayor Garcetti's office tried to justify this by stating the workshop was for only invited guests. Had it been true, why did the guard not have the list of the invitees, but only WCC member names? We also know there was at least one person who was not invited but allowed in.

This is so low, low, and low. It is very unfortunate that Mayor Garcetti and Councilman Wesson are only wasting time and resources in order to avoid sitting together and discussing this together.

We know this is not the only approach. For instance, Councilman Paul Krekorian has reached out to his community in District 2 to let them know he has requested feasibility studies for eight potential shelter sites, and expressed his intention to receive public input before making decisions on the use of city-owned property. Why can't we do that in District 10? You want to rush it in helping the homeless? We agree we need to take action as soon as we can. However, notwithstanding whether we rush it or not, you **MUST** do it right, by properly thinking about **HOW!**

Though you have been aware of this problem for the last six or seven years, it seems strange that you are rushing to implement a multi-million dollar plan without any input from the communities directly affected by it.

I understand that you both may have plans to run for higher offices. We have heard that Mayor Garcetti may be running for President in 2020, and Councilman Wesson may be running for Mayor. To become bigger leaders in bigger offices, you really need to show good leadership, not whatever you have done to this time regarding 682 S. Vermont.

I am begging both of you, let's please talk, discuss, try, and resolve this serious and urgent community issue together. Together, we can do a lot better than the current plans for 682 S. Vermont.

Again, please stay on point. It's about HOW, not WHETHER.



Jake Jeong
President, Wilshire Community Coalition