



Belmont Heights Community Association
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Comments on the EIR for the 2030 General Plan:
Land Use Element | Urban Design Element

Craig Chalfant
Senior Planner
Long Beach Development Services
333 W. Ocean Blvd, 5th Floor,
Long Beach CA 90802

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Dear Mr. Chalfant,

The following comments are representative of the Board of the Belmont Heights Community Association (BHCA). The comments seek to address those areas of the Land Use Element and the Urban Design Element that affect the residential and commercial areas within the boundaries of our neighborhood (7th to Livingston and Ocean, Redondo to Nieto).

Belmont Heights Neighborhood

Over 10,000 residents live in this neighborhood with structures dating from the early 1900s through the current period, with architectural styles representative of various eras. Founding commercial strips border and weave through the residential core, serving residents and visitors alike with shops, services and restaurants. Portions of the neighborhood are identified as parking-impacted. Two historic districts are located within these boundaries. At least one public school is wholly within these boundaries, and several border the neighborhood. Private preschools are also located here.

Belmont Heights Community Association

The BHCA is a non-profit organization made up residents who volunteer their time and energy to improve the quality of life in the neighborhood. The Association works closely with residents, historic districts, local businesses, schools, community organizations within Belmont Heights, the 3rd District Council office, City staff, and other neighborhood organizations.

Comments from the BHCA Board

The BHCA Board understands that the General Plan is a high-level overview – a guiding philosophy – for the City’s future growth. The use of PlaceTypes in the Land Use Element (LUE) attempts to provide useful tools in analyzing the current status of our neighborhood and where there might be room for manageable growth. The Urban Design Element (UDE) attempts to create a road map to how development might occur in our commercial areas with the least impact to the current built-environment. These are admirable goals and we commend City staff for the obvious care taken to seek a holistic and futuristic vision.

That being said, staff and elected officials have sought our input on specifics within the LUE and DE. This letter outlines our concerns, and where, appropriate, our suggestions.

Addressing Sec 4 - City Wide Goals, Strategies and Policies

Promote Appropriate Infill Development

Map LUE 19 identifies the Redondo Corridor from 2nd Street to 7th Street as an area that will be used to promote infill development and support transit. As a Neighborhood Serving Corridor – Moderate (NSC-M), and its southern companion as a Multi-Family Residential – Moderate (MFR-M), this could translate into bundling contiguous parcels that currently have smaller, single story structures, into parcels that could then be developed into three or four stories of either housing, commercial or a mixture of both.

In theory, the BHCA Board agrees that this corridor is appropriate for this type of future development. However, the BHCA Board is also cognizant of the historic character, massing, sightlines, and scale that draw people and merchants to invest in our area. With that in mind, and not wanting to create a plan that reduces the desirability of our neighborhood, here are our comments and suggestions:

A. Remove from the NSC-M and MFR-M the following areas:

a. 214-220 Newport Avenue, south of Broadway

Rationale – a pristine row of single family bungalows are located on the east side of the street (214-220 Newport). These are some of the oldest and most authentic reminders of the traditional development pattern of Belmont Heights near the area’s commercial ‘downtown.’

b. The intersection of Broadway and Redondo

Rationale – Belmont Heights was incorporated as its own town for 13 months between 1908 and 1909. At that time, the emergence of this area between Long Beach and the Orange County border was experiencing a growth in housing and commerce aided greatly by the Red Car’s expansion. The historic architecture (now in its post 1933 earthquake renovated state) located at the intersection of Broadway and Redondo is important to the cultural landscape of Belmont Heights. Several buildings should be surveyed for landmark eligibility, especially those found on the SW, SE, and NW corners

c. The Intersection of 4th and Redondo

Rationale - The BHCA recognizes that 3400 E. 4th Street (the SE corner of 4th and Redondo) has an especially important building that may be eligible for landmark status. The former Hunter Drug Store has only recently been adaptively reused as a barber shop. Its brick and tile exterior is intact along with much of its original design. The building extends east along 4th Street and it would be inappropriate – as well as a loss to the unique character of the neighborhood – to redevelop this into a 3 story structure.

B. Addressing Sec 5 - Implementation

a. Remove the last four residences on the north side of Broadway between Mira Mar and Grand (3843, 3841, 3819 Broadway and 228 Grand) from the 3-story development recommendation.

Remove one home on the south side of Broadway at Mira Mar (227 Mira Mar) from the 3-story development recommendation

Rationale - These are the last remaining examples showing the development of Broadway as a residential street. The neighborhood-defining Pacific Electric Red Car tracks did not reach this far, so residential structures tended to dominate the landscape, keeping the commercial buildings farther west toward Redondo.

- b. *Exempt the last two residences on the north side of 4th Street at Newport (3431 E. Fourth Street, and its companion home that faces Newport – 401 Newport) from the 3-story development recommendation*

Rationale - These are the last remaining examples showing the development of 4th Street as a residential street close to Redondo. A major (3-story) development at this location would adversely affect the character and value of the historic district homes adjacent and across the street. Any development should be done sensitively, acting as a buffer to the nearby Belmont Heights Historic District (BHHD). Keeping 3431 E. Fourth and 401 Newport as residences is a perfect way to transition from commercial to the abutting Historic District.

- c. *Exempt two residences at the corner of 4th Street and Grand (3731 and 3741 E 4th Street) from the 3-story development recommendation*

Rationale – These homes abut the BHHD and serve as an effective buffer to that district.

- d. *Exempt two residences on the north side of 4th Street at Tremont (4505 and 4515 E 4th St) from the 3-story development recommendation*

Rationale – These homes act as a buffer to the residential neighborhoods on both the north and south side of 4th Street at Tremont. The conversion of these lots into a 3-story parcel would overshadow the abutting residences, especially since these lots sit atop a rise, making any increased heights appear even taller and cast longer shadows.

- e. *Ensure that the BHHD map along both 4th St and 7th St correlates with the City's proposed heights as outlined on Map LU-7. For example, 404 Newport Avenue is in the BHHD district: Therefore, the northeast corner of 4th St and Newport should be excluded from the proposed 3-story development recommendation. Along 7th St, the BHHD extends to 7th St at Loma, Euclid, and Mira Mar. Those intersections should be excluded from the proposed 3-story development recommendation.*

Rationale – Contributing single family homes in the BHHD should be excluded from the proposed 3-story development recommendation and protected from inappropriate adjacent development.

C. Broader recommendations

- a. *Please clarify the **discrepancies** between maps LU7 and LU11.*

Namely, LU7 (height designations) shows the 4th Street corridor height changes as extending only to the alley between 4th and 5th. LU11, on the other hand, assigns the PlaceType "Neighborhood Serving Corridor Low/Moderate" along 4th all the way north to 5th Street, encroaching into the BH Historic District.

We are not in favor of height changes extending beyond the alleys or to the northernmost property line of 4th Street lots which do not have an alley on the north side. Maps LU7 and LU11 should reflect the same boundaries for the increased 3 story building height.”

- b. *The BHCA requests that the City identify (survey) important structures along Broadway, 4th Street, Redondo and 7th Street as **cultural resources** prior to finalizing the LUE and UDE of the General Plan*

Rationale – The architectural history of most of the commercial and mixed used buildings along Broadway, Redondo, 4th Street and parts of 7th Street is a major attraction for our City’s small, local-serving business owners, as well as an attraction for customers. Allowing wholesale redevelopment of most of these blocks would detract from the intrinsic property value (i.e., the reason people live and visit here in the first place). Adaptive reuse, and sensitive additions may be appropriate, but each project would best be served individually and with an eye for design.

- c. *Reach out to the fledgling **East Fourth Street Business Association** and the more established **On Broadway Business Association** for input on the design and development standards for the commercial strips in these areas*

Rationale – Most of the businesses are owned and operated by local residents who have chosen to locate their shops and restaurants on this street in large part because of the unusual and eclectic architecture, walkability, and location near a fairly dense population. The BHCA has advertised the EIR and encouraged residents to read it and comment, but as far as we know, the City has not conducted a business district presentation.

- d. *What can our residents expect in assistance (mitigation) for the loss of available breezes, sightlines (light) and warmth if a 3 to 4 story development affects their family home?*

Rationale – Traditionally, Belmont Heights homes and businesses do not have air conditioning, relying instead on the mild weather and evening breezes to regulate temperature. Promoting development that, in effect, encircles the neighborhood with 3-to-4 story structures can change that dynamic. Similarly, taller buildings affect the light and warmth available to single family residences located in the interior, founding neighborhood. Appropriate and relevant mitigation from developers might include funding for public open space in any new developments; funding for plantings or a multi-purpose community space on the Pacific Electric Rights of Way Park and Ximeno/Roswell node; Escrow account for future additional and appropriate needs.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments.



Maureen Neeley, President
Belmont Heights Community Association