

## *Opinion*

# Let's stop getting in the way of a good housing development

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Once more, a Los Angeles City Council committee will have an opportunity to jump-start a smart affordable housing development in Boyle Heights. On Tuesday afternoon, the council's Planning and Land Use Management committee will discuss the Lorena Plaza development at the corner of East 1<sup>st</sup> and Lorena streets. The matter was continued from last week. Hopefully, today, the committee will let this development launch.

This is a badly needed project in a city with a dearth of affordable housing. The development, which would sit just west of the El Mercado shopping center, would have 49 residential units — half going to low-income veterans and families and the rest to homeless people in the form of housing with services. The well-designed development would also have 10,000 square feet of commercial space.

The homeless population has risen 20% since last year to more than 34,000; we obviously need a lot of housing across the city. Last November, city voters made it clear that they want that. They approved Proposition HHH bond money that will finance as many as 10,000 units of permanent supportive housing for homeless people across the city over the course of a decade.

This particular project has the blessing of the Boyle Heights Neighborhood Council, the L.A. City Planning Department, and the L.A. Metropolitan Transportation Authority, which owns the land. A highly regarded nonprofit developer, A Community of Friends, was chosen by Metro to be the developer. Since then, Dora Gallo, the chief executive of A Community of Friends, has changed the design to respond to concerns of the El Mercado owners and the suggestions of neighborhood residents.

City planning department professionals approved the developer's environmental analysis, but the El Mercado owners have appealed it, saying the developers should go through a full environmental impact review. This is little more than a ploy to kill the project.

Even this modest amount of housing for the homeless has drawn some neighborhood opposition. This project needs strong, smart advocates for the homeless and political leaders to show residents that there is little reason to fear a well-designed, well-run housing development coming into the neighborhood to fill a vacant lot across one street from a cemetery and another street from a Pizza Hut.

On Tuesday, Councilman Jose Huizar, who represents this area and also chairs the Planning and Land Use Management Committee, has an opportunity to lead here and push this project along. That's what he and his fellow council members should do. They should deny the appeal that will further delay the project and finally let it proceed.