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SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA
FOR THE COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES

FIX THE CITY, INC., a California
nonprofit corporation,

Petitioner and Plaintiff,

v.

CITY OF LOS ANGELES, a municipal
corporation; LOS ANGELES CITY
PLANNING COMMISSION;
VINCENT P. BERTONI, in his capacity
as Director of City Planning for the City
of Los Angeles; and DOES 1 through
100, inclusive,

Respondents and Defendants.

ELLIOT NAYSSAN; ROBhana, INC.;
NHD TERRACE, LLC; and ROES 1
through 100, inclusive,
Real Parties in Interest.

Case No. 19STCP03740
Related to Case No. 20STCP01569
Related Case No. 20STCP03529

Assigned for All Purposes to the
Hon. Mitchell L. Beckloff, Dept. 86

**PETITIONER'S REPLY TO REAL
PARTIES IN INTEREST'S OPPOSITION
BRIEF AND RESPONDENTS'
OPPOSITION BRIEF ON PROJECT
SPECIFIC ISSUES**

Dept.: 86
Trial Date: July 14, 2021
Time: 9:30 a.m.

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1 an abuse of discretion to ignore state and city law regarding the presumption of off-site fault traces in
2 reliance on these distant sites. Replacing the otherwise required setback with a reinforced foundation
3 under these circumstances is unsupported by the facts before the city and inconsistent with the law, and
4 must be reversed.

5 ARGUMENT

6 I. THE EXHAUSTION DOCTRINE DOES NOT BAR THE PETITION

7 Rather than engage with the merits of Petitioner’s writ of mandate, Real Parties in Interest
8 (“RPIs”) premises their entire opposition to Petitioner’s challenge on their contention that Petitioner
9 failed to exhaust administrative remedies and thus should be barred from maintaining this action. (Opp.
10 at p. 6.) The exhaustion doctrine should not bar the Petition in this case because Petitioner did not have
11 notice and opportunity to pursue administrative remedies, and because Petitioner lacked an
12 administrative remedy through which it could raise its objections.

13 A. Petitioner Was Unable To Exhaust Administrative Remedies Because Respondents 14 Failed To Provide Public Notice of the Project’s Approval.

15 As RPIs note, “[w]hether a party has exhausted administrative remedies in a given case depends
16 on the procedures applicable to the public agency in question.” (*Tahoe Vista Concerned Citizens v.*
17 *County of Placer* (2000) 81 Cal.App.4th 577, 591-92 (“*Tahoe Vista*”).) Though the Los Angeles
18 Municipal Code (“LAMC”) is hardly a model of clarity on this question, RPIs properly identify the
19 LAMC provisions and internal cross-references setting forth the applicable procedures for
20 administrative appeals of project approvals. (Opp., pp. 5-6.) While it is indeed undisputed that Petitioner
21 did not appeal the Project approval within 15 days of the January 17, 2019 Determination of the Director
22 of City Planning (Opp., pp. 5-6), it is also undisputed that Respondents did not provide the public, let
23 alone Petitioner, with notice of that Determination in time for Petitioner to file an appeal by the
24 deadline. (AR0579 [affidavit of mailing]; Lake Decl., ¶¶ 3-4.) Respondents failed to provide notice of
25 the Determination to Petitioner as an “Interested Party” even though Petitioner had submitted a letter
26 commenting on the Project to Rudolf Kinar Melikoff at the Department of City Planning (“DCP”) and
27 Hagu Soloman-Cary of Council District 5 in the months leading up to the Determination. (AR0695-
28 696.)

It bears noting that no public hearing was held before the Director issued the Determination,

1 notwithstanding the fact that the LAMC provides for public hearings on Site Plan Review applications
2 “[i]f the Director finds that the matter may have a significant effect on neighboring properties.” (LAMC
3 § 16.05 G.3(b).) Had the matter been set for public hearing, Respondents would have been obligated to
4 provide public notice of that hearing (*id.* [requiring notice of public hearing to be published in at least
5 one publication in a newspaper of general circulation in Los Angeles], and Petitioner would have
6 participated in that hearing. (Lake Decl., ¶ 6.)

7 Instead, Petitioner did not learn of the Determination until after the window to file an appeal had
8 closed, and only by virtue of a member of Petitioner observing the posted public hearing on the site.
9 (Lake Decl., ¶ 10.) Even though LAMC section 16.05 H.2 broadly permits “any interested person
10 aggrieved by the Decision of the Director” to file an appeal, the 15-day appeal window begins on the
11 date “of the mailing of the decision *to the applicant*” (LAMC § 16.05 H.2, emphasis added) regardless
12 of whether all potentially interested persons have received notice. It is thus wholly possible that these 15
13 days will run without an interested party having any knowledge of a project approval—particularly
14 where that project has been approved in the first instance without a hearing. In addition, the Letter of
15 Determination was not posted on the Planning website for the public to read. (Lake Decl., ¶ 5.)

16 Respondents’ failure to provide public notice of project approvals undermines the public’s ability
17 to participate in the administrative appeal process. (*Cf. Stockton Citizens for Sensible Planning v. City of*
18 *Stockton* (2010) 48 Cal.4th 481, 502 [“Public notification serves the public’s right . . . to be informed of,
19 and to have a voice in, the process of evaluating the environmental issues surrounding a contemplated
20 action or decision. . . . Where constructive notice is provided by this overt means, the statute
21 contemplates that lawsuits making such claims thereafter will be filed expeditiously.”].)

22 In fact, Respondents’ failure to provide public notice of determinations has been the source of
23 confusion and controversy. Respondents are aware of this confusion. In the related case number
24 20STCP01569, the Director of Planning for Council District 4 testified at a January 9, 2020 City
25 Planning Commission (“CPC”) hearing regarding the difficulty of tracking down Letters of
26 Determination (“LODs”), noting that while some LODs are on the website, some aren’t. “LODs come to
27 our offices in all kinds of ways, I get hard copies, I get electronic versions, they come to different e-
28 mails depending which – which email signed up. . . . I spend a lot of time tracking down the LODs for

1 constituents and these determination letters matter substantially to communities. It tells them what
2 exactly was approved and gives them a timeframe in which to decide if they wanna face an appeal.” (*Fix*
3 *the City v. City of Los Angeles*, 20STCP01569, AR0871:16-872:3.) The CPC President responded that
4 he would “make a formal request to have a commission discussion about everything that Emma just
5 presented to us and hopefully, out of that presentation to us from the director, we can take some concrete
6 steps forward to address some of these issues.” (*Id.*, AR0877:9-13.)

7 As RPIs recount, on February 1, 2019, the Century Glen Homeowners Association (the “HOA”)
8 appealed the Project approval to the CPC. (AR0637-644.) The appeal was set for hearing by the CPC on
9 May 9, 2019. (AR0671-672.) Respondents once again failed to provide Petitioner with notice of the
10 CPC hearing, despite the fact that Petitioner had, on February 13, 2019, sent a letter to the Director of
11 DCP formally requesting that DCP send it “Director’s Determinations [in all TOC Guidelines cases] at
12 the same time that parties within 100 feet of a project are notified,” and requested all relevant documents
13 be sent electronically. (AR0665.) When Petitioner did learn of the hearing by virtue of a public notice
14 posted on the site, counsel for Petitioner sent a letter to the CPC on April 29, 2019, requesting a
15 continuance of the hearing and an opportunity to appeal the decision, given the lack of public notice of
16 the Determination. (AR0694.)¹ Petitioner never received a response from the CPC. (Lake Decl., ¶ 13.)

17 **B. Petitioner Lacked An Adequate Administrative Remedy For Raising Its Objections**
18 **to the Award of Improper Discretionary Incentives and Non-Compliance with the**
19 **Alquist-Priolo Act.**

20 It is well-established that the exhaustion doctrine is inapplicable where administrative remedies
21 are inadequate, unavailable, or futile. (*Unnamed Physician v. Board of Trustees of Saint Agnes Medical*
22 *Center* (2001) 93 Cal.App.4th 607, 620.) The exhaustion doctrine should not bar Petitioner’s challenge
23 because even if Petitioner had received notice of the LOD in time to appeal to the CPC, Petitioner would
24 have lacked an adequate administrative remedy to raise its objections.

25 RPIs maintain that Petitioner cannot maintain this action “because Petitioner did not avail itself
26 of prescribed administrative remedies.” (Opp., p. 6.) The LOD itself sets forth the two available
27 administrative remedies:

28 ¹ Even in the days leading up to the hearing on the appeal, the LOD was not publicly available
online. (Lake Decl., ¶ 5.)

- 1 1. “Pursuant to LAMC Section 12.22A.25(g)(2(i)(f), only an applicant, abutting property
2 owners, and abutting tenants can appeal this Determination” to the City Planning
3 Commission; and
- 4 2. “The applicant or any person aggrieved by the Site Plan Review may appeal the decision
5 to the City Planning Commission.”

6 (AR0615.) But RPI neglects the reality that Petitioner could not have raised its objections via either of
7 these prescribed administrative remedies. Without notice, no remedies are possible.

8 First, RPI fails to acknowledge that Petitioner was ineligible to bring an appeal pursuant to
9 LAMC Section 12.22A.25(g)(2(i)(f), which is limited to abutting property owners and tenants. Next,
10 RPI likewise fails to acknowledge that the remaining avenue for an administrative appeal is available
11 only to a “person aggrieved by the Site Plan Review.” (*Id.*) Petitioner has never contested the Site Plan
12 Review, and RPIs’ opposition thus neglects the fact that the issues raised by Petitioner—“that the TOC
13 component relied on fundamentally improper TOC Guidelines ... and failure to comply with the
14 Alquist-Priolo Act”—thus fall outside the permissible scope of this administrative remedy. (Opp. Br. at
15 6.) Petitioner does not challenge the Site Plan Review findings in this action, but rather challenges the
16 award of discretionary TOC incentives and the failure to comply with the setback requirements of the
17 Alquist-Priolo Act in the absence of an off-site investigation. Neither of those issues directly impacts
18 Site Plan Review.

19 In that sense, *Park Area Neighbors v. Town of Fairfax* (1994) 29 Cal.App.4th 1442, relied on by
20 RPI, supports Petitioner. In *Park Area Neighbors*, a group of neighbors opposing a project failed to
21 bring an administrative appeal of a planning commission determination regarding a permit and
22 variances. (29 Cal.App.4th at p. 1447.) The court concluded that the failure to utilize available appellate
23 processes meant that the neighbors failed to exhaust their remedies on those grounds, but that as to
24 traffic impact permit, where no administrative appeal was available, the neighbors could pursue the
25 claims that they had properly raised before the town council. (*Id.* at pp. 1447 & 1450.) Unlike the
26 plaintiffs in *Park Area Neighbors*, Petitioner is not challenging the findings in support of Site Plan
27 Review. Although RPI misleadingly implies that the issues in Petitioner’s litigation were not raised to
28 the City, *the record contains Petitioner’s comments on all of the issues that Petitioner raises* in this

1 litigation. (See AR07820-789 [Alquist-Priolo issues]; AR0665-680 [comments on TOC program
2 incentives].) RPI even responded to Petitioner’s comments. (AR0804-805.) Petitioner’s litigation
3 concerns issues for which there was no administrative remedy available to Petitioner and therefore
4 Petitioner may pursue the issues that it raised during the administrative proceedings.

5 In fact, a petition for writ of mandate will lie where, among other things, a petitioner has no
6 “plain, speedy, and adequate alternative remedy.” (Code Civ. Proc. § 1086.) Petitioner’s lack of an
7 alternative remedy is precisely the basis for its resort to the courts. Petitioner lacked an appropriate
8 administrative channel through which it could raise the issues with the Project approval that it raises in
9 this lawsuit. (See AR838-839 [stating that decision “is final and effective upon the mailing of this
10 determination letter and not further appealable].)

11 **II. RESPONDENTS DEMONSTRATE THAT THE PROJECT DOES NOT COMPLY**
12 **WITH THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE ALQUIST-PRIOLO ACT AND CITY**
13 **PROVISIONS TO IMPLEMENT THE ACT**

14 Respondent’s Opposition Brief on Project Specific Issues makes several critical admissions that
15 simplify the legal issues associated with the Project and the Alquist-Priolo Act. First, there is no dispute
16 that the Project site is located in a mapped Alquist-Priolo Earthquake Fault Zone in which compliance
17 with the requirements of the Alquist-Priolo Act is mandatory. (Respondents’ Project Specific Opp.
18 (“PSO”), p. 5:6-13.) Respondents agree that the Alquist-Priolo Act, the regulations of the State Mining
19 and Geology Board, and the Los Angeles Department of Building and Safety Bulletin P/BC 2017-129
20 (“Bulletin 2017-129”) apply to the construction of the Project. (PSO, pp. 9:24-10:22; 10:25-11:23.)
21 Respondents agree that the City must adopt equal or more stringent criteria to state law. (PSO, p. 10:25-
22 27.) Respondents do not dispute that Bulletin 2017-129 “requires a 50-foot setback” unless data
23 regarding the location, trend and nature of a particular fault trace justifies the reduction. (*Id.*, p. 11:24-
24 25.) Respondents also do not contest that the Project’s Geologic Report did not include any off-site
25 study. (*Id.*, p. 12:23-25.)²

26 Respondents therefore recognize the applicable law, but they have erred in following that law in

27 ² Respondents note that the study did not extend off-site to north. Nor was there off-site study to
28 the east, south, or west, even though the entire site lies with the Alquist-Priolo Earthquake Fault Zone.
(AR1332; AR1321; Petitioner’s Request for Judicial Notice, Exhibit 2.)

1 the approval of the Project. First, it is necessary to clarify some terminology. Respondents' Project
2 Specific Opposition utilizes the terms "fault" and "fault trace" interchangeably. (Compare PSO, p. 9:24-
3 25 ["The purpose of the Alquist-Priolo Act is to prohibit new construction of structures for human
4 occupancy on top of an existing fault."] to p. 9:26-28 [purpose of Act is to "provide policies and criteria
5 to assist cities, counties, and state agencies in the exercise of their responsibility to prohibit the location
6 of developments and structures for human occupancy across the trace of active faults."].) These terms
7 are not the same. An "active fault" is "a fault that has had surface displacement within Holocene time
8 (about the last 11,000 years), hence constituting a potential hazard to structures that might be located
9 across it." (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 14, § 3601(a).) A "fault trace" is "that line formed by the intersection of
10 a fault and the earth's surface, and is the representation of a fault as depicted on a map, including maps
11 of earthquake fault zones." (*Id.*, subd. (b).) So, a fault trace is not necessarily located in the precise
12 same location as an active fault. An active fault may have many fault traces as shown in the Metro map
13 of fault investigation along Santa Monica Boulevard adjacent to the project site. (AR0784-785.) The
14 question here is not whether the active fault is present on or immediately off the project site, but whether
15 the applicant can refute the *presumption* that a fault trace exists immediately off site.

16 Next, a factual error in Respondents' Project Specific Opposition must be corrected.
17 Respondents assert at several points that the applicant's Geologic Report referenced prior investigations
18 "immediately adjacent to the site." (PSO, pp. 5:21; 12:13; see also p. 13:21 ["adjacent sites"].) As noted
19 in Petitioner's Opening Brief on Project Specific Issues, while the applicant's study contended that it
20 utilized studies conducted from properties "directly west" and "directly north" of the subject site
21 (AR1316-1317), both of these previous studies are located multiple city blocks distant from the project
22 site (AR1331). Specifically, 10604 Santa Monica Boulevard is 0.4 miles (2,000 feet) and 1645 S.
23 Beverly Glen is approximately 0.1 miles (670 feet) from the Project site at 10400 Santa Monica
24 Boulevard. (Petitioner's Reply Request for Judicial Notice, Request 2.) These sites are not "immediately
25 adjacent," and particularly where the relevant metric is whether something is within 50 feet of a site, a
26 study that looks at sites hundreds to thousands of feet away is not the same as one that looks at data
27 "adjacent or nearby," because such as site is not informative as to location, trend, and nature of a
28

1 particular fault as required.³

2 Respondents' Project Specific Opposition quotes at length from Bulletin 2017-129, setting forth
3 in full three key paragraphs. (PSO, p. 11:16-23.) The first paragraph provides that “[t]he default building
4 setback from an active fault is 50 feet. Reduced setbacks can be considered if the location, trend, and
5 nature of a particular fault trace are accurately established by several data points.” These provisions
6 make clear that the 50-foot setback is required *unless* “the location, trend, and nature of a particular fault
7 trace are accurately established by several data points.” These provisions refer to a “particular fault
8 trace,” meaning that a study has identified a trace and mapped its location sufficiently such that a
9 reduced set back can be supported. These provisions do not apply to the Project’s Geologic Report
10 because it did not locate a particular fault trace or establish any “location, trend, and nature” of a trace.

11 The second quoted paragraph of Bulletin 2017-129 applies to the situation “[w]here exploration
12 does not extend 50 feet beyond a property line.” When there is no such exploration “an active trace at
13 the property line *must be considered present and require a setback.*” (Emphasis added.) This paragraph
14 applies to the Project site, where there was no exploration beyond the property line. (AR1325.)⁴

15 The second paragraph then notes that “[d]ata from *adjacent* or *nearby* sites can be used to
16 *possibly reduce* a property line setback.” (Emphasis added.) This does not apply to the Geologic Report
17 for the Project site. No data from adjacent or nearby sites was provided. In the context of the question
18 whether the Geologic Report has *refuted* the presumption that the area within 50 feet of the site is
19 underlain by fault traces, the two sites identified on the map at AR1331 could not possibly rule out a
20 fault trace within fifty feet of the site. As Petitioner pointed out in its Opening Brief on Project Specific
21 Issues and in its pre-approval comments, *Metro’s study identified fault traces nearby the site, which, if*
22 *extended, could closely approach or possibly traverse the site.* (AR0784.) These data points from Metro

23 ³ Respondents also contend that the April 2017 Soils Report Approval Letter at AR1436-1439 is
24 the final approval of the Project’s Geologic Report. The City claims that this report responded to
25 “several rounds of comments.” (PSO, p. 5:17.) The April 2017 report also references a March 2017
26 submittal by the applicant. (AR1433.) None of these comments nor the March 2017 report is included in
27 the administrative record. Petitioner would have no way of knowing what these comments said or what
28 was provided in the March 2017 report, and nor would the Court.

⁴ In fact, the study provided a single “transect” or line of study running 10’ from the south
property line to 10 feet from the northern property line. The single transect was well in excess of 50 feet
from the eastern and western property lines. (AR1325.)

1 were far closer to the Project than the sites referenced in the Geologic Report. The sites at 10604 Santa
2 Monica Boulevard and 1645 South Beverly Glen are certainly not adjacent and not “nearby” in any
3 relevant sense. Moreover, the setback here was not *reduced*. The setback was *ignored*.

4 Finally, the third quoted paragraph of Bulletin 2017-129 provides that “[s]pecial/reinforced
5 foundations may be used to mitigate minor ground displacements that could occur near a more
6 significant fault trace.” This paragraph does not even mention setbacks, nor that compliance is grounds
7 to reduce a setback as the prior paragraph states. There is no indication in this paragraph that it is
8 intended to allow for disregarding of the presumption established in the prior paragraph, and that in the
9 absence of any off-site data or data from adjacent or nearby sites that the setback can be entirely
10 disregarded and replaced with a special foundation.

11 As the City acknowledged, the Alquist-Priolo Act does not allow for cities to adopt any criteria
12 less stringent than state law required. Under the act and its regulations, “*the area within fifty (50) feet of*
13 *such active faults shall be presumed to be underlain by active branches of that fault unless proven*
14 *otherwise* by an appropriate geologic investigation and report . . . no such structures shall be permitted in
15 this area.” (Cal. Code Reg., tit. 14, § 3603, subd. (a).) The record does not contain evidence that, under
16 the City’s own Bulletin 2017-129, the applicant *proved* that the area within 50 fifty feet of the site is free
17 of fault traces, and thus the City’s failure to require the 50-foot setback or off-site investigation was an
18 abuse of discretion.

19 CONCLUSION

20 Petitioner exhausted the remedies it had available to raise the issues that are being addressed in
21 this litigation. It raised all issues that are being litigated in this case to the attention of the City, thus
22 satisfying requirements of exhaustion. The Project approval was in violation of the Alquist-Priolo Act,
23 because the information in the record before the City does not refute the presumption, required by state
24 law, that the area immediately off-site is underlain by fault traces. A writ of mandate should issue to void
25 the Project approvals in their entirety.

26 //

27 //

1 DATED: June 7, 2021

2 Respectfully Submitted,
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4 Fredric D. Woocher
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6 By 
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PROOF OF SERVICE

STATE OF CALIFORNIA
COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES

Re: *Fix The City v. City of Los Angeles et al.*
L.A.S.C. Case No. 19STCP03740
Related Case No. 20STCP01569
Related Case No. 20STCP03529

I am employed in the County of Los Angeles, State of California. I am over the age of 18 and not a party to the within action. My business address is 10940 Wilshire Boulevard, Suite 2000, Los Angeles, California 90024. My electronic mail address is loliver@strumwooch.com.

On **June 7, 2021**, I served the foregoing document(s) described as **PETITIONER'S REPLY TO REAL PARTIES IN INTEREST'S OPPOSITION BRIEF AND RESPONDENTS' OPPOSITION BRIEF ON PROJECT SPECIFIC ISSUES** on all appropriate parties in this action, as listed on the attached Service List, by the method stated:

If Electronic Filing Service (EFS) is indicated, I electronically filed the document(s) with the Clerk of the Court by causing the documents to be sent to One Legal, the Court's Electronic Filing Services Provider for electronic filing and service. Electronic service will be effected by One Legal's case-filing system at the electronic mail addresses indicated on the attached Service List.

If fax service is indicated, by facsimile transmission this date to the fax number stated, to the attention of the person named, pursuant to Code of Civil Procedure section 1013(f).

If U.S. Mail service is indicated, by placing this date for collection for mailing true copies in sealed envelopes, first-class postage prepaid, addressed to each person as indicated, pursuant to Code of Civil Procedure section 1013a(3). I am readily familiar with the firm's practice of collection and processing correspondence for mailing. Under that practice, it would be deposited with the U.S. Postal Service on that same day with postage thereon fully prepaid at Los Angeles, California, in the ordinary course of business. I am aware that on motion of the party served, service is presumed invalid if postal cancellation date or postage meter date is more than one day after date of deposit for mailing contained in the affidavit.

I am a resident or employed in the count where the mailing occurred. The envelope or package was placed in the mail at Los Angeles, California.

I declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the State of California that the above is true and correct and that this is executed on **June 7, 2021**, at Los Angeles, California.



LaKeitha Oliver

SERVICE LIST

Fix The City v. City of Los Angeles et al.

L.A.S.C. Case No. 19STCP03740

Related Case No. 20STCP01569

Related Case No. 20STCP03529

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