



"Great Apartments Start Here!"

Janet M. Gagnon
Senior Vice President, Government
Affairs & External Relations
janet@aagla.org
213.384.4131; Ext. 309

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Via Electronic Mail

Mayor Rex Richardson and
Members of the Long Beach City Council
Civic Chambers
411 West Ocean Boulevard
Long Beach, California 90802

Re: Agenda Item 49 – Public Comment Process for City Council Meetings

Honorable Mayor Richardson and Members of the Long Beach City Council:

The Apartment Association of Greater Los Angeles (“AAGLA”) represents more than 10,000 rental housing providers and 350,000 units throughout Southern California, including the City of Long Beach. More than 80% of our members are independent, mom-and-pop owners. AAGLA regularly speaks in front of 120 city councils throughout Los Angeles, Ventura and San Bernardino counties. We know firsthand what works to improve community engagement and what discourages it. **We strongly urge the City Council to reject the draft ordinance and allow for additional engagement with AAGLA, Long Beach Chamber of Commerce, city unions and other professional organizations to develop changes that will enhance community engagement rather than severely damaging it.**

Creating A New Cap Of 60 Minutes In Total For All Speakers On AGENDIZED ITEMS

Staff has used the most UNdemocratic of all 88 cities within Los Angeles County as its “model” for these changes, L.A. City. L.A. City is the absolutely worst city on community engagement and has completely destroyed real community input at city council meetings with their maximum speaker cap for agendized items.

An arbitrary cap of any kind for speakers on all agenized items purposefully disenfranchises many speakers on many different items that are unrelated to one another. On tonight’s agenda alone there are over 50 items listed and that is common for Long Beach’s city council agendas. Individuals that take the time and effort to attend city council meetings, either in-person or virtually, deserve the basic democratic principle of being heard by their elected city council members. **An arbitrary speakers’ cap turns the speaking process into a “lottery” with many individuals never given the opportunity to be heard at all before action is taken. This is the surest way to discourage community members from every attending a city council meeting ever again as a complete waste of their time for merely the “chance” to speak. Once that trust is destroyed with community members it will be a nearly impossible task for the City Council to rebuild now or in 6 months from now or ever.**

If the City wants to suddenly experiment with the extremely dangerous concept of a speakers’ cap it should be limited to general public comment only. Then the City Council will be able to clearly see how it is received when speakers are denied the opportunity to speak that purposefully showed up to do so on a general topic. In contrast, agendized



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items are specifically on the agenda to be acted upon by the City Council and therefore deserve full community engagement before such action is taken. It should not be put at risk by an untested concept of a speakers' cap.

Very few cities amongst the other 87 incorporated cities have such speakers' caps as they know that true community engagement is vital to well-informed decisions. Please do NOT follow the one outlier that is the absolutely WORST and has already destroyed its own community's spirit of engagement.

Taking Speakers For Agendized Items All At One Time

The very concept of taking all speakers at one time on all items is a clear recipe for disaster. It assumes a superhuman power by City Council members to remember in detail comments made hours early and in chronological order. There is simply NO possibility that this will lead to productive consideration of input received from the community and serves as a slap in the face to those community members that signed up, attended and spoke at the city council meeting.

The Mayor made a comment at the last meeting regarding some high school students waiting too long to speak. However, the Mayor already has the authority to take any item on the agenda out of order. So if he wishes to take any item sooner, he can easily do so. In fact, this is regularly done in other cities where either a ceremonial item or other highly attended item is on the agenda.

Taking all comments on agendized items at one time simply creates complete chaos and confusion as to what was said, by whom and on what item that was mentioned hours earlier. **It sends a clear message to the community that even if they are allowed to speak, their comments will be completely ignored by the City Council.**

Speakers For Agendized Items Capped At 90 Seconds Each

A 90 second cap is yet another clear message that anything a speaker may say is unimportant and not worth being heard by the City Council. **The fear of public speaking is greater than the fear of death for the vast majority of individuals as studies have shown repeatedly. To now rush speakers through their comments as if they are professional auctioneers is unrealistic, insensitive and grossly disrespectful.**

Speaker time must consider that the vast majority of speakers are NOT professionals and need time to get the words out of their mouths that they have in their heads or even written on paper. Public speaking to elected officials is extremely scary and very different from normal conversations. It is more akin to pleading before a firing squad in how the room is designed and the intimidation factor inherent in the process.

Speakers should not be made to feel as if they are an inconvenience for the City Council and be rushed through as a "check the box" activity. Would the City Council members abruptly cut someone off who is speaking to them at their office, at the grocery store or anywhere else? Why should speakers be given LESS respect when speaking at a formal city council meeting?!

Start Time For City Council Meetings Moved To Earlier In The Day

In all 88 incorporated cities within Los Angeles County, the overwhelming majority start their meetings at 6:00pm or later. Only 5 (including Long Beach) start at or before 5:00 pm and, of those, only 2 of those start earlier than 5:00pm namely L.A. City and Inglewood. The City of Los Angeles holds all-day meetings because they have a full-time city council and are the absolute WORST city at encouraging community input. Why did staff not do a



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thorough review of all cities within Los Angeles County to see when other meetings were being held instead of relying on a single outlier city within all of Los Angeles County? Now that this item is no longer tied to SB707 (which is addressed separately tonight as agenda item 26), the staff should be directed to go back and do a thorough review of neighboring cities to find out what the standard practice is within Los Angeles County for city councils on each of these proposed changes, including start times. **To make such sweeping changes without detailed research on a statistically relevant sampling of neighboring city councils is grossly irresponsible.**

Inability to Track Results

Making so many sweeping changes all at the same time precludes the ability for the City Council to determine which changes had positive results and which created negative results. At a maximum, ONLY changes to the General Comment Period should be adopted. By so doing, the City will be able to see the results of its experiment with a new speakers’ cap, new individual speaker times, and re-ordering of the agenda.

In AAGLA’s experience putting general public comment at the end of the agenda, rather than the beginning, frees up time for agendized items to be heard and acted upon. General comments are intended for new ideas or issues that the city may wish to take up at some future date. Thus, it is more appropriate to hold such comments until the end of the meeting.

Do these Proposed Changes Really Support More Community Engagement or Risk Far Less?

Based on AAGLA’s experience with 120 city councils throughout Southern California each of these proposed changes goes in the exact **opposite** direction from supporting more community engagement and will seriously damage trust with community members for the long term. Grouping unrelated agendized items for comments, shortening individual speaker times, and turning speaking at all into a “lottery” will substantially **discourages** community input. **It will be perceived as the City Council’s intentional desire to cut off meaningful engagement with the community and poison the well of real democracy going forward.**

Again, we urge the City Council to reject these proposed changes until hands-on experience and insights can be provided by professional organizations, including AAGLA, Long Beach Chamber of Commerce, the city’s unions (including police and fire) and others. SB707 can be passed as agenda item 36 with the city still meeting its state requirements. Also, rejecting agenda item 49 will give city staff additional time to prepare a proper analysis for the majority of Los Angeles County’s incorporated cities to provide detailed comparisons on each of the proposed changes rather than only relying on a single outlier that is the absolutely WORST model to follow for trying to achieve the goal of increasing community engagement.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Janet M. Gagnon".

Janet M. Gagnon, Esq.

CC: Daniel Yukelson, Executive Director, Apartment Association of Greater Los Angeles