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April 15, 2025

Senator Catherine Blakespear, Chair, Senate Environmental Quality Committee (via Legislative Portal)

RE: SB-607 (Wiener): OPPOSE
CEQA: Categorical Exemptions

Dear Senate Environmental Quality Committee:

What problem is SB-607 intended to solve? This bill would remove the requirement to identify environmental impediments before approving a development project. The bill exempts most projects from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). It reduces the rigor of an Environmental Impact Report (EIR). In this way, SB-607 solves a problem for developer/ investors by speeding up the building process with disregard for environmental impacts.

What is the likelihood of success? SB-607 bill is likely to achieve the stated developer/investor goals. However, developer/investor goals are out of alignment with constituents' environmental goals. In addition, there is no evidence this bill meets the state goal of providing housing that is affordable for wage-earners.

What are the core problems with SB-607?

1. Over 50 years ago, conscientious legislators affirmed their commitment to protect the environment from aggressive, profit-driven building that caused harm to water, air, ecological, and human life. Dismantling CEQA to build higher and taller buildings in environments unsuited for density is a disservice to Californians who long to preserve the Golden State as a public treasure for everyone.
2. Blanket exemptions invite irreversible harm to residential communities.
3. Eliminating the "Fair Argument" standard puts the foxes (developers) in charge of protecting the hen house. Ignoring obvious, unmistakable evidence that a project induces harm (fire, flooding, erosion, etc.), without providing housing that is affordable is a threat to future generations.
4. Throwing the baby out with the bathwater is not a solution to the problems with CEQA. Environmental, cultural, and health risks are rarely disclosed by project proponents. Making long-term decisions with scanty information leads to poor decisions with long-term unintended consequences that could be avoided with appropriate CEQA/EIR improvements.
5. Weakening public participation diminishes oversight and accountability at a time when we, your constituents and the general public, long for transparency in working towards a common goal to protect the environment.

Your vote to OPPOSE SB-607 matters: Don't give in to the chainsaw image of change advocated by Elon Musk. Stand with the advocates and agencies who fight to protect the environment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Susan Kirsch". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Susan Kirsch, Director
Catalysts for Local Control