

"Together  
we have  
clout!"

## ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ COMMUNITY MEETING ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18, 2026 - 7:00 PM — SOCIAL HOUR/DINNER - 6:15 PM

SHERMAN OAKS EAST VALLEY ADULT CENTER • 5056 VAN NUYS BLVD

# JAMIE HALL OF CHANNEL LAW GROUP SUED CITY OF LA LATE LAST YEAR ON FIRE SAFETY



**"IT'S A TRAVESTY THAT THE CITY HAS TO BE SUED BY ITS OWN CITIZENS IN ORDER TO PROTECT PUBLIC SAFETY"**

- **Why Does LA Play Fast and Loose with California Minimum Firesafe Evacuation Regulations?**
- **Would Palisades Have Burned If LA Actually Paid Attention To Existing Fire Safety Rules?**
- **Why Does LA Think It Can Defer State-Mandated Fire Evacuation Studies So You Can't Escape**

Jamie Hall, Managing Partner of Channel Law Group, fights to uphold California Land Use and Environmental Law. His practice represents nonprofit organizations, neighborhood associations, and residential groups – challenging our local governments' poorly conceived policies and development decisions. On December 23 last year, Channel Law Group, representing the Federation of Hillside and Canyon Associations and the State Alliance for Firesafe Road Regulations, filed a lawsuit against the City of Los Angeles alleging an unlawful pattern and practice of failing to enforce the State Minimum Fire Safe Regulations.

Don't miss our live meeting and the opportunity to ask questions directly to Jamie. You can email questions to [SOHAZoomMtg@gmail.com](mailto:SOHAZoomMtg@gmail.com) no later than noon Tuesday March 17th. Streaming starts at 7:00 pm. Zoom ID 876 7050 9461; Zoom Passcode SOHA914. To stream the meeting, go to our website at [www.SOHA914.com](http://www.SOHA914.com) and click the "Stream SOHA Meeting" button. Meeting video is available on our website a day after the meeting by clicking the "SOHA Meeting Videos" button.

## YOU WANT TO RUN THE ENTIRE CITY?

*by Matt Epstein, SOHA President*

**What Is a Constituent?** – Webster's Dictionary defines a constituent as "A component, element, or necessary part that helps form a whole." It also refers to a person – a voter – represented by an elected official, someone who authorizes another to act on their behalf. A necessary part of the whole. Not a special interest group. Not a political ally. Not a campaign donor. Us! And yet, too often in today's political climate – on both sides of the aisle – elected officials forget that simple definition. They are supposed to represent us – all the people – not just the politically convenient.

***Six Years of Asking for a Seat at the Table*** – For six years in my role as SOHA President, I have attempted to work collaboratively with our elected Councilmember Nithya Raman. For the past two years, I have made one very simple request – Give us a seat at the table. Let’s meet. Let’s share what we hear from residents every single day. Let’s fix problems before they grow. Because people call me. They email me. They stop me in the market or on Ventura Blvd and say “We can’t get a response.” That should never be the standard in a representative democracy.

***A Few Simple Requests Yet No Response, No Follow-Up*** – Let me be clear – these examples don’t even include the many unanswered calls regarding the unhoused crisis, crime concerns, or potholes. Those are ongoing. These are just a few basic constituent-service failures.

***The Illegal Billboard at Van Nuys and Ventura*** – For years, residents complained about the illegal billboard repeatedly installed at Van Nuys and Ventura Blvds. I have personally spoken to the CD4 office about this at least six times over six years. Here’s the pattern. The building owner earns thousands of dollars in advertising revenue. If reported, eventually a notice may be issued. A small fine – few hundred dollars – may follow. The sign comes down. Then it goes back up again. And no meaningful CD4 response. No consistent follow-up. No long-term solution.

***The ADA Curb Removal at Longridge and Little Ventura*** – At Longridge and Little Ventura, a street repair was completed. In the process, an ADA ramp – installed years ago when the city was required to become ADA compliant – was removed and replaced with a full curb and gutter. Why was an accessible curb removed? Residents asked. I asked. No explanation. No response. No follow-up.

***Rubber Traffic Monitors With No Communication*** – A few months ago, neighbors called asking why rubber traffic monitors were placed on their streets for about two weeks. No notice. No explanation. No outreach. Once again – no response. No follow-up.

***Basic Street Repairs Ignored – Except at the Field Office*** – For years, residents on our streets have requested simple asphalt repairs where pavement has washed away and sidewalks have become uneven – areas where people trip and fall while walking. These are not cosmetic issues. They are safety hazards. Repeated requests. No action. Then two Sundays ago, I drove past the CD4 field office at Ventura and Ethel. There was a full city crew outside fixing the sidewalk. At least six workers. On a Sunday. We are constantly told the city has no money. We are told budgets are tight. We are told resources are stretched thin. Yet somehow, the city can find funds to pay what is likely double or triple time on a Sunday to repair sidewalks directly in front of the Council Office – while residents wait years for basic street safety repairs. That’s not a good look.

***These Aren’t Big Issues – But They Reveal Something Bigger*** – Individually, these may not sound like headline-grabbing crises. But together, they tell a story. A lack of communication. A lack of follow-through. A lack of responsiveness to the very people who elected our councilmember. When small issues are ignored, trust erodes. And if small things can’t get attention, how can residents feel confident about larger, citywide leadership?

***You Want To Run The Entire City?*** – Then show you can respond to a neighborhood. I’ve been an LA resident for 67 years. My phone works. My email works. Sherman Oaks residents are engaged, informed, and paying attention. Good luck, Sherman Oaks. And good luck LA, if this becomes the standard for constituent services. Because representation isn’t complicated. It starts with answering the phone, returning calls, following up, making calls, and showing up to meetings.

## **NOT YOUR PARENTS’ SOHA ANYMORE**

*by Larry Slade, SOHA Planning and Land Use Committee Co-Chair*

In 2003, when the City of Los Angeles formed Neighborhood Councils, I ran for the first Sherman Oaks Neighborhood Council and was elected. As a lawyer new to local politics, I was appointed Chair of the Land Use Committee. I had a lot to learn, but I was excited for the opportunity. At the time, development in Sherman Oaks was booming. My philosophy – then and now – was simple – if a lot is empty, it should be built on. I found and still find vacant lots to be eyesores. Coming from New York City, I was comfortable with mixed-use housing. It strikes a balance between commercial growth and the very real need for housing – something LA needed even 23 years ago.

My committee supported several proposed projects in Sherman Oaks. It wasn't long before I began clashing with the "old" Sherman Oaks Homeowners Association. Their approach was predictable – all discretionary projects were too high, too dense, too close to the curb, not enough parking, and not enough traffic mitigation. SOHA seemed determined to preserve the status quo at all costs. I saw it differently. If someone buys property, they deserve a meaningful say in how it's developed. Of course, development doesn't occur in a vacuum – we share the same air, streets, and public spaces. Balance is essential. But the old SOHA wasn't looking for balance – it wanted a veto. And often, it got one. I was and remain uncomfortable with that level of NIMBYism.

Today, years later, I serve on the "new" SOHA Board. Before joining, I told my longtime friend and client Matt Epstein (SOHA President) that if SOHA's mission was simply to oppose development, I wasn't interested. He assured me that wasn't the case – and he was right. SOHA today is not a reflexive anti-development group. We recognize that housing is needed. Our focus is different. We oppose state legislation that threatens single-family neighborhoods without reason and the character of our community. We advocate for mixed-use and multi-family development (just not everywhere), for public safety, for enforcement of existing criminal laws, and for policies that keep our streets and schools safe. We push back against measures that would fundamentally alter Sherman Oaks without regard for its residents and that unnecessarily attack the American dream. Put simply – we can add hundreds of thousands of residential units without the need to tear my house down.

SOHA still fights to protect our neighborhoods – but not from housing. We fight to preserve what generations have worked for – a safe quiet street, a single-family home, multi-family development along transit corridors (think Van Nuys and Ventura Blvds) and a community free from encampments and unchecked lawlessness. This isn't your parents' SOHA anymore. It's a forward-looking organization working to protect our collective future – not from a single project, but from the erosion of safety, stability, and the American dream itself.

## **THE SUNKIST "BAIT-AND-SWITCH" – WHY LA'S NEWEST HOUSING POLICY IS A DISASTER FOR SHERMAN OAKS**

*by Tom Glick, SOHA Planning and Land Use Committee Co-Chair*

In 2020, the Sherman Oaks community reached a hard-fought compromise on the historic Sunkist Building site. After years of debate, we agreed to a 249-unit residential limit specifically because the iconic Brutalist headquarters was to remain a "commercial employment anchor". It was a balanced vision for Citrus Commons – one that paired luxury apartments and a Trader Joe's with 127,000 square feet of office space to preserve the site's historical identity as the heart of California's citrus industry.

Today, that balance is being dismantled through a bureaucratic "bait-and-switch". Developer IMT Residential is attempting to use the city's newly minted Citywide Adaptive Reuse Ordinance (ARO) – which took effect on February 1, 2026 – to bypass the public entirely. By filing ministerial permit application #25016-10001-04185 on February 16, 2026, the developer seeks to strip away 40,000 square feet of promised office space and jam in an additional 95 market-rate units. The city's interpretation that the ARO exempts this project from oversight is not just a policy error – it is a betrayal of the public trust.

**Legal Loophole, Not Housing Solution** – The city's ARO was designed to streamline the conversion of underutilized buildings into housing by providing "by-right" or administrative approval for structures at least 15 years old. The developer's own leadership has admitted that these new rules allow them to "move forward a lot faster" and – critically – avoid a potentially lengthy environmental impact review. But the Sunkist Building is not just any "underutilized" office. It is a Historic-Cultural Monument. The original 2020 approval came with a complex set of conditions, including the preservation of the office component to maintain the building's integrity. By allowing a "ministerial" permit to override these project-specific conditions, the city is effectively rendering its own Planning Commission and City Council determinations meaningless.

**Zoning Windfalls with Zero Affordability** – While Los Angeles is gripped by a housing crisis – especially affordable housing – this "bait-and-switch" provides a massive density bonus and lucrative zoning windfall to the developer without requiring a single affordable housing set-aside. Under the ARO, the developer can add nearly 100 units exclusively at market rate. This is a slap in the face to the concept of inclusionary housing. If the city continues to allow developers to bypass public hearings and affordability requirements through administrative "fixes", our neighborhood's character and the public interest will be sold to the highest bidder as in this case.

**Deafening Silence of Leadership** –The contradiction in local leadership is glaring. Council District 4 has long positioned itself as a champion for equitable housing. Yet, as a developer bypasses the safeguards meant to protect our community, CD4 remains silent. Advocacy is hollow if it stops at the gates of an “over the counter” permit. CD4 must explain how they can support a 100-percent market-rate expansion that completely erases the “employment anchor” status they once defended.

**Outdated Science and Real-World Impacts** – The original Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for this site was based on a daytime office population. Replacing that with a 24-hour residential population fundamentally changes the impact on our infrastructure – from sewage and power peaks to emergency response times. To skip a new environmental review via a ministerial permit is a clear violation of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Furthermore, our neighborhood has endured years of construction noise and traffic. We were promised an end was in sight. Now, the developer wants to pivot and effectively start a “brand-new” project, extending this disruption indefinitely.

SOHA is calling for an immediate stay on this permit. We’re not against change, but we are against a process that rewards “bait-and-switch” tactics and ignores the community’s input. The city – and specifically CD4 – must halt this permit and return this project to the public arena where transparency and history are valued over developer convenience.

## **THE BEST OF A BAD THING FOR SB79**

*by Maria Kalban, SOHA Housing Committee Chair*

The City Council will soon weigh in on how LA is going to implement SB79. This bill allows certain areas like high fire zones, low resource areas, and Historic Preservation Zones to be deferred from the bill’s impacts for three years – giving the city time to figure out how to add density in these areas. For the rest of us within the half-mile areas around qualifying transit stops, SB79 goes into effect in July 2026. But the city asked the Planning Department for options on how to defer more areas without going afoul of the state. The Planning Department had four options but was asked to study one option that the City Council Planning and Land Use committee preferred – Option C.

There are three approaches within Option C. C1 allows three-story apartments in single-family zones that qualify for SB79 but does not allow the full impact of seven stories. C2 allows what C1 allows but adds higher density around existing rail stops. C3 allows seven stories in single-family neighborhoods and at all rail stops.

The PLUM committee had only three members (Blumenfield, Nazarian, and Raman) in attendance at its February 24 meeting. They seemed to favor C2 but could not get all members to agree. So, the Planning Department’s preferred C2 will go for a full City Council vote with just the PLUM Chair (Blumenfield) recommendation – as opposed to a full committee recommendation. The pro housing people in LA want option C3 because, as you all know, they think seven stories in neighborhoods is the only way to get the housing we need.

We feel there are no good choices here. But given what we have, C1 or C2 are our best bet. We are vehemently opposed to C3. We insisted at the PLUM meeting that all residents and property owners must be notified by mail that their neighborhoods were going to change. Too many people have no idea that this is happening and as a result their voices are not being heard. We thank Councilmember Nazarian for agreeing with us that notification is the right thing to do – he directed the Planning Department to do so.

Ultimately, the best path forward is for SB79 to be amended or repealed at the state level because it can cause so much harm to our communities. LA has the capacity to add all the housing it needs without impacting our neighborhoods, but we need an advocate in Sacramento to make this change. We aren’t sure we have a fearless advocate there.

## **WHAT IS THE HILLSIDE FEDERATION? WHY SOHA IS A MEMBER AND SUPPORTER**

*by Jay Weitzler, SOHA Hillside Federation Liaison*

Los Angeles, of course, is surrounded by amazing mountains and steep hillsides that are replete with beautiful views, an abundance of wildlife, a wide variety of trees, and lovely vistas – but also with narrow and twisting streets with lots of homes and people living there. As a result, these areas have an ever-present fire danger with difficult access for fire and safety help or evacuation in emergency times. In the post-WWII boom, LA began expanding upward into the hills. Developers saw the ridges as blank canvases for high-density projects, often ignoring the geological risks and environmental impacts.

As a result, in 1952 a non-profit group called The Federation of Hillside and Canyon Associations was formed, now comprising almost 50 groups, with members from the Pacific Palisades to Mount Washington. The Hillside Federation is a powerful voice for the residents living in the mountains, hillsides, and nearby areas, all joining to preserve the natural topography, wildlife, and safety of LA's most fragile ecosystems against the pressures of urban sprawl. The group realized that a unified front was the only way to influence city hall and ensure that hillside development remained responsible and sustainable.

Over the ensuing years and continuing today, the Federation has been instrumental in stopping projects that threatened public safety, exacerbated fire risks, or destroyed natural beauty. Here are just some of their most significant accomplishments:

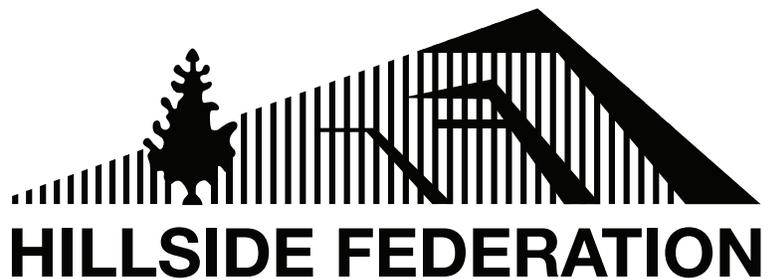
- **The Mulholland Scenic Parkway Ordinance** – By advocating for strict zoning and design reviews, the Federation prevented the “backbone of Los Angeles” – world-famous Mulholland Drive – from being turned into a high-speed commercial corridor, preserving it as a scenic and recreational treasure.
- **The “McMansionization” Fight** – The Federation was a lead advocate for the Baseline Hillside Ordinance, preventing the construction of oversized, out-of-scale homes that destabilized slopes, blocked views, and overwhelmed narrow, winding canyon roads.
- **Wildlife Corridor Protection** – The Federation has always fought to preserve habitat connectivity, ensuring that mountain lions, bobcats, deer, and more can navigate the Santa Monica Mountains despite city encroachment. A great example is the Federation’s support for the Annenberg Wildlife Crossing in Calabasas.
- **Maintaining The Geography** – Over decades, the Federation has successfully blocked numerous megaprojects – from massive luxury hotels on unstable ridges to high-density apartment complexes in areas with zero fire-evacuation capacity to such ideas as a freeway replacing Laurel Canyon.

The Federation knows that hillside development isn't just an aesthetic issue – it's also a public safety issue. Their advocacy focuses on three critical pillars:

- **Fire Safety** – The Federation ensures that new developments do not clog narrow canyon roads which serve as vital evacuation routes during California's perennial wildfire seasons. For example, the city has approved, or has attempted to approve, a number of homes that clearly do not have room for the entry and exit of fire equipment. The Federation works to prevent this type of building.
- **Geological Stability** – They prevent over-grading of hillsides that can lead to landslides and debris flows during heavy rains.
- **Resource Preservation** – They protect the last remaining stands of California Black Walnut and Coast Live Oak trees, plus many other types of vegetation.

Today, the fight continues unabated. As recently as last December, the Hillside Federation joined as a major voice in a lawsuit against Los Angeles County because the City of LA repeatedly approves development in fire-prone areas in violation of state standards for safe evacuation and firefighter access. The lawsuit lists 75 examples of building permits and other plans approved by the city that allegedly violate requirements known as the state's “minimum firesafe regulations”.

The city has a long history of struggling to adopt and enforce wildfire safety regulations and the Federation believes that the local citizens can more readily identify these violations than the city – which either ignores the safety issues, is beholden to developers, or is so understaffed they don't even recognize the problems. This is who the Hillside Federation is and why SOHA is a member.



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## IN THIS ISSUE OF SOHA NEWS

▶ **- DON'T MISS OUR COMMUNITY MEETING -**  
**Meet Jamie Hall of the Channel Law Group**  
**who's suing the City of LA to keep you fire safe.** ◀

▶ **Also: You want to run the entire city?; not your parents'**  
**SOHA; the best of a bad thing; the Sunkist "bait and**  
**switch"; and what is the Hillside Federation.** ◀