

202 Vision: Economic Leadership for Our City's Future

Remarks presented to the Central City Association by Council President Eric Garcetti  
September 27, 2007

Good afternoon.

I hope you enjoyed lunch. And I know there's dessert waiting for you.

But I brought cupcakes.

I know I violated the first rule of elementary school. You're supposed to bring enough for everyone. Sorry: you're going to have to earn these cupcakes.

But first, I want to tell you about the woman behind the cupcakes.

Down the street from me is Delilah's Bakery. It's owned by a woman named Genevieve. In addition to cupcakes, Genevieve makes great sandwiches and a banana pudding without peer.

Genevieve had a dream.

At its best, government can be a tool to help us realize our dreams.

At its worst, it can give us nightmares.

In order to open, Genevieve was told that she had to install an industrial-strength grease trap that would have cost her up to \$40,000. She was told that her store, in a commercial building smaller than a craftsman house on a leafy street in my Echo Park neighborhood, would need underground parking. She was trapped in red tape.

Many of you have seen me in action in the past six years. You've seen me serve my district, this city, and as council president. Those of you who know my background know that I taught diplomacy. I don't resort to yelling, even at city departments.

But here's what I know:

- No one who dreams of owning her own small businesses deserves a death by red tape.
- A baker's dozen forms to open your own business is far too many.
- And if you're standing between me and a really good banana pudding, you're standing in the wrong place.

This story has a happy ending. My office gathered together the different departments that were playing ping-pong with Genevieve Ostrander's business. We sat them down. We made them get her business open. She told the L.A. Times that it was like getting "small-town service in a big city." And isn't that what we all want?

Now I'm working on one-stop shopping for Los Angeles business. And the new council committee that I have formed, the Jobs, Business Growth and Tax Reform committee will help us get the job done so the next Genevieve will fill out *one form*. And more importantly, she should know that her city is on her side.

These are the kinds of obstacles that our city can throw in the way of one small business on one city block.

But what happens when you want to build a whole city block?

The year 2020 isn't far away. There's no question that Los Angeles needs to plan for its future. Now is the time to sharpen our focus on our 2020 vision. Let's try to see the road to our future as clear as I could see the ocean from the Hollywood Hills after Saturday's rain.

We know we need more homes. We know need more jobs. We know we need them closer together.

I love this city. I love its people. I love its potential.

But the city you and I began our day in is not affordable. It's not sustainable. It's not a city where people can get where they need to go.

The question I put to you today is this:

*What are we going to do so that the city we lay our heads down in tonight is closer to the city we want to see?*

Let's take a look at what we've done so we can tell where we're going.

Downtown and Hollywood both map out the city's center, its surging economy, its beating heart. We've both got the transit infrastructure to truly give people options that let them leave their cars at home. We've both got billions of dollars in new investment, with a mix of residential and commercial uses and a mix of tourist and local attractions.

The urban future of Los Angeles has a lot to offer. In the Hollywood that's either live or in the pipeline, you can live right on the boulevard in any one of half a dozen adaptive reuse or new construction projects. You can see a movie at the Arclight, buy a disc at amoeba or your groceries, catch a show at the palladium, go to a world-famous restaurant, and while you have a drink at the hottest new nightclub, you can watch a celebrity embarrass herself.

What if you're not quite ready to take the Red Line to work yet? Well, because the uses I named are so close and so attractive, you've moved in from the Valley or the Westside or farther away, so your car is on the freeway half as much as it used to be. And because the world is at your door, you don't get back in your car once you're home – so your car is on the freeway one quarter as much as it used to be.

This didn't happen by accident. I fought for an adaptive reuse ordinance for Hollywood. Like the one in downtown, it fueled a housing boom. We've taken bold steps with redevelopment, and private investment has followed government partnerships.

But our vision has been clear:

- A Los Angeles where the middle class can thrive.
- A Los Angeles that lessens its impact on the planet while it stimulates commerce and the individual's pursuit of happiness.
- A Los Angeles whose streets move.

So what's in our way?

I see it this way:

We have to fight red tape. (Tom Gilmore calls it “death by a thousand paper cuts.”)

And we have to fight fear.

A major project approval in Los Angeles has to go through about twelve departments for approval.

I'm going to ask you to count them down with me. And count out loud, because I'm going to give the cupcakes to the table with the loudest count.

Can I hear a *twelve!*

Department of Building and Safety.

(11!) Department of City Planning

(10!) Bureau of Engineering

(9!) Fire Department

(8!) Department of Transportation

(7!) Los Angeles Housing Department

(6!) Community Redevelopment Agency

(5!) Urban Forestry

(4!) Bureau of Street Lighting.

(3!) Bureau of Street Services

(2!) Bureau of Sanitation

(1!) Department of Water and Power.

Twelve departments.

They're all important. Our city will always need to keep the lights on, the water running in and the sewage running out. But that's our job, not yours. I'm working with our departments on a proposal called "Twelve to Two." You go to Planning and Building and Safety. And you're done.

Twelve to two.

This is not going to happen overnight. But with the help of some smart, optimistic public servants, I'm going to fight red tape for you.

But I need you to fight fear with me. Not just at those self-interested moments when your project is on the line, but also in those selfless moments when your city is on the line.

It is not a choice between growth and no growth. It is a choice between planning and no planning.

We have the opportunity to create an urban Los Angeles. In fact, doing so is the only thing that will preserve the suburban Los Angeles that so many of us remember so fondly. I grew up in the valley. I loved having a neighborhood where I could ride my bike or play on my lawn.

The model we're proposing builds the city and keeps the village.

The old model, the model without planning for the future, is more of the same. More cars on the road, more people packed in to the same ailing infrastructure. More smog, more clog. We lose the middle class. We lose the creative class. We lose the young people, who can't afford to start out in Los Angeles. We lose the working class, the firefighters, teachers and nurses without whom our city fails. We lose the next Genevieve.

City-village or smog and clog. The choice is being made right now.

How are we going to do it?

You've probably heard the Woody Allen quote that "80 percent of success is showing up."

Every day, the fight between city-village and smog-and-clog gets played out in city hall.

*Show up.* I know that I am preaching to the choir here, and that CCA is working hard on a housing white paper to offer ideas to increase our housing stock, and several of you are working on recommendations to remove hurdles to growing business in L.A.. But it is worth repeating how important it is to show up and to retain our optimism to fight red tape.

Come to hearings. Even if it's not your project. Help continue to shape our city, the city-village model by providing a rational, optimistic voice of what we are for, not just what we are against.

The fear that's out there – that's swirling around density bonuses, around SB1818, around the prospect of urban Los Angeles – is fear of our own shortcomings. Fear that our imaginations will fail us.

Raise a glass with me now. Not of wine, but of water. It's the simplest, the most elemental thing. And twenty-five years ago, there were cries to put a moratorium on development for lack of water.

Today, we have one million more inhabitants than we did. We added a city slightly smaller than the Dallas of today to the Los Angeles of 25 years ago.

And we use the same amount of water. We are still facing a water shortage so use cautiously, but we know that imagination can take us further than fear.

We have faced the future before and figured it out. We can figure this out.

Robert Kennedy once said that "our future may lie beyond our vision, but it is not completely beyond our control."

The Los Angeles of tomorrow is just beyond our view. But like the rise of the sun, we can see its first rays.

I'd love to answer your questions.