

CALIFORNIA

# Council OKs plan for housing at former Times building amid calls for more affordable units



The Los Angeles City Council backed a proposal for a developer to erect two high-rise towers at the site of the old Los Angeles Times building in downtown L.A. (SCB Architects)

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The Los Angeles City Council on Tuesday approved a plan for two [high-rise residential towers](#) on a block near City Hall that was formerly known as Times Mirror Square.

The council voted 11 to 4 to recommend certification of the project's environmental report and the denial of an appeal sought by a nonprofit organization whose members are also in a union group.

Developer Onni Group plans to build more than 1,100 apartments and commercial space on the Civic Center property, which once housed The Times. The project will have 24 moderate-income units and 10 low-income units.

Supporters Alliance for Environmental Responsibility filed an appeal of the development, citing the risk of birds hitting the high-rise towers and construction equipment causing poor air quality. The group counts members of Laborers' International Union of North America among its group.

The Southwest Regional Council of Carpenters, which represents 50,000 union carpenters, also raised concerns about the development in a letter Tuesday to the council members.

Dan Langford, executive secretary-treasurer of Southwest Regional, criticized the project at Tuesday's meeting for not having local hiring or "skilled and trained" workforce requirements.

Onni Group purchased additional floor area rights from the city, allowing it to build a larger project than base zoning rules allow. Councilman Paul Krekorian questioned that approach at the meeting and criticized the project for not having more affordable housing.

"I believe that this project doesn't represent the public interest," Krekorian said.

Councilmen Mike Bonin, Mitch O'Farrell and Mark Ridley-Thomas joined him in voting against approval of the project.

De León said last month in a statement to The Times that he spent several months negotiating with Onni to include the low- and moderate-income units and fast-track a payment from the developer, with the money to be used for homeless housing.

"We get lemons and we make lemonade with it," De León said at Tuesday's meeting.

Onni Group's chief of staff, Duncan Wlodarczak, told The Times the project has agreements that include local hiring provisions. The developer also volunteered affordable housing, in addition to providing public benefits worth millions of dollars to the city, he said.

Advocates for birds also objected to the towers, arguing the glass design would prove fatal to a variety of bird species that pass through the area.

Nora Frost, public information officer for the city's Planning Department, said the city and the biologist from the firm that prepared the environmental report didn't agree with the claims made about the birds, including their migration patterns.



Dakota Smith covers Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti and City Hall for the Los Angeles Times.