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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Landlords' primary beef appears to be with the 3-percent allowable yearly rent increase in the ordinance. For the record, annual allowable rent increases in other rent stabilized cities are at or close to the consumer price index of 2-percent but, here in Beverly Hills, landlords claim to need 7-percent just to keep up. This is absurd at face value, for what it says is that every year the increase in expenses to a landlord in Beverly Hills is 350-percent greater than other cities in the U.S., compounded year after year.

Landlords have also gone out of their way to misstate the entire purpose of the Rent Stabilization Ordinance as "to provide more affordable housing to those in need." Quite the contrary, its purpose is to provide basic security and protection for hardworking Beverly Hills residents and their families—people who contribute to our shared community, attend our schools, houses of worship, and patronize local businesses—yet are treated by some unscrupulous property owners as second-class citizens who live under the constant fear of no-cause evictions, retaliation, and unacceptable habitability standards. The landlord/tenant relationship is not one of equals, and the ordinance partially addresses this power imbalance by providing a system that ensures accountability for and enforcement of regulations that protect the rights of tenants to feel secure in their own homes.

The very notion of a Rental Registry is a major bugaboo for landlords, but the arguments they offer in opposition make no sense and, clearly, the honor system that been in place for decades has not been ineffective—good results only come with good data. Based on a limited study of landlord licensing, we have concluded that no less than 10-percent of all apartment owners are unlicensed in the City, and we are asked to trust that their \$300+ million in rents are being fully reported to the City. This is what the landlords are truly concerned about, and not their stated terms that they are nobly worried about public disclosure of "sensitive" information on behalf their tenants. All potentially sensitive and personal information is redacted from the registry, and the Renters Committee has offered up a plan that makes implementing it a cost neutral, and potentially even revenue-generating, proposal. Those who follow the rules and have nothing to hide have nothing to fear from transparency of information.

Another major argument from local landlords is that buildings of four or less units should be magically exempt from any Rent Stabilization Ordinance. A building's size has no bearing on the fact that the asset is a business with all the attendant financial benefits of depreciation, tax deductions, etc., or that the tenants are paying customers entitled to the same rights and consumer protections as anyone else. It may be your property, but it is our home and, as a sole-service provider of an essential commodity, landlords should fully expect a higher level of governmental regulation to help insure against abuse of this nearly monopolistic power, once their tenants have signed a lease and no longer have other free-market choices.

Finally, landlords want to categorically dismiss the 30-year-old rent control laws from neighboring cities like Los Angeles, West Hollywood, and Santa Monica as being outdated and anachronistic. These laws have stood the test of time, have addressed contentious issues, and withstood legal challenges, without substantially affecting property owners' ample financial gains on their investments.

No city we know of has ever discontinued rent controls once they have been established. In another publication, a representative of the Property Owners Association has urged for the passage of Rent Ordinance laws that, and I quote verbatim, "don't have any moral component to them." There is a name for a system in which a powerful minority imposes amoral laws upon the majority—Tyranny. Is this the system we want to be the law of the land in Beverly Hills?

Michael Schulman

As a resident of Beverly Hills for more than 40 years, I attempted to speak at two of the early meetings on the subject of rent control. However, I was totally ignored by the chairman and not allowed to speak.

I felt it important to bring up the subject of painting which is done every five year in rent controlled cities and carpeting which is shampooed every three years or replaced every seven years.

What's the problem?
C. R. Cavendish

Robert Block wrote a letter to the *Courier* last week decrying the disconnect between the residents of

our City and its government. Among his complaints, which he ascribes to "mediocre minds," is that our school system is "deeply in debt and bent on replacing our teachers with administrators."

This current school board inherited many challenging conditions—organizational, academic performance-wise, and financial; and we are committed to resolving them. But Mr. Block's focus misses the mark. Aside from the unfunded liability related to teachers' pensions which is quite ordinary, and the Christiansen court judgment which is under appeal, the BHUSD is not "deeply in debt." More importantly, we are not bent on "replacing teachers with administrators."

We are bent on reducing the overstaffing of teachers that has built up over the past several years as our student population declined, and accounts for our annual operating deficit.

Also, the school board supports Superintendent Bregy's wise decisions to hire a communications officer, missing from the district since the lighthouse years of Superintendent Ken Peters and Communications Officer Ken Gelm, and a student services officer to improve the district's educational program.

Mr. Block's statement is false, and a disservice to the community.

Mel Spitz, President, BHUSD Board of Education

As a resident of Beverly Hills for the last 40 years, I am embarrassed to walk down South Beverly Drive with out-of-town guests. Recently, one guest remarked that, although we may have many large rashes, we still have the filthiest sidewalks that he has ever seen! How ironic is this!

Our multi-cultural population enjoys visiting south Beverly Drive because it is populated with an eclectic range of restaurants.

Unfortunately, it is one of the filthiest areas of any place I have visited, including Marrakesh, London, Paris, Berlin, and several east European cities. Many U.S. cities such as Carmel and Redlands that also have high traffic eating areas, are cleaned multiple times a day. In spite of voicing my concerns to our City on numerous occasions, nothing has changed. In order to see positive change, it is imperative that members of our City Council develop a new action plan to address this urgent need, especially with the increase of pedestrian traffic on South Beverly Drive.

Stanley Bauer

Last week's letter to the editor from members of the Beverly Hills City Council rightfully condemned the hate groups prevalent at the riots in Charlottesville (i.e. Neo-Nazis, racists, anti-Semites, the KKK, et al), none of which should ever be welcome in our City.

I'm certain it was an oversight but no mention was made of another prominent (and often) radical group, namely Antifa which is seemingly composed of paid, often masked, thugs recruited on the Internet whose entire purpose is to incite fights and brass knuckle violence to play to TV news' appetites.

Let them stay in Berkeley, Seattle, Ferguson, Baltimore, San Jose, Chicago, downtown L.A., or wherever. We certainly don't need nor want any of their kind invading Beverly Hills.

M.S. Lawrence

No sooner than my article concerning our sidewalk safety and some solutions get published, but when I read our always pondering City Council decides that it is going to have tables and chairs on Rodeo Drive for people watching.

Who is going to watch who? We don't know anyone walking in the street anymore since a great meeting area has been turned into a tourist location. Unless you are a fan of unusual attire, then I can't imagine what else is there to see. However, it does increase risk in the City.

I like classical music, my youngest grandchild likes childrens' songs, the older ones prefer Lady Gaga, etc. Who decided to have music in the streets?

Was it by majority or just because the City wants to blow money. There are a lot of hungry people roaming the City and all our schools are inadequately protected because not enough money is directed toward security by police officers.

Frankly, I don't care what the city/school debates are, but I definitely do care about our schoolchildren being safe.
Pablo Nankin, MD



Cartoon for the *Courier* by Janet Salter

In a recent editorial, former City Treasurer Elliot Finkel asserts that the BHUSD "lags in both test scores and college acceptances."

The fact is that our K-8 schools continue to be ranked in the top 1-percent of all schools in the state. Last year, state testing placed the BHUSD in the top 1.27-percent of all school districts in California. The BHUSD also ranks 4th out of all Basic Aid school districts in the state.

U.S. News & World Report continues to rank Beverly Hills High School as a top high school, and considering the significant increase in state test scores, improved National Merit Scholar Results, and an increase in AP test scores, our school district is on an upward trajectory for success. Beverly High students are consistently admitted to top universities in the country, including Harvard, Yale, Princeton, UC Berkeley, USC, UCLA, Stanford, Vassar, Brown, Georgetown, and Mr. Finkel's own alma mater, the University of Chicago.

He further asserts that this board has "shirked its financial responsibility." He is apparently unaware that in late 2016, Moody's Investors Service had assigned an AAA rating to BHUSD. Moody's noted that the AAA rating reflects the "district's stable financial position with healthy reserves." Mr. Finkel is also incorrect that BHUSD spends "over 50 percent more per student than comparable districts, \$15,600 versus \$10,000 or less." San Marino and Santa Monica-Malibu spend more than \$14,000 per student, Pasadena spends over \$13,000 per student.

Mr. Finkel speciously proclaims that: "Instead of being open and transparent about its finances, the board has been secretive and opaque." He fails to recognize that the California Education Code requires our board to submit two interim financial reports and one final financial report each year to the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) along with a certification about the ability to continue paying obligations in the current and two subsequent budgetary years, not five years as Mr. Finkel incorrectly asserts. The board copiously discusses and approves all financial reports in open session before they are submitted to LACOE.

Finally, he does not understand the purpose and importance of the JPA to this community. The joint use of facilities benefits children and the wider community by providing safe, accessible places for recreation after school hours and on weekends. Increased opportunities for physical activity can improve overall health and well-being, prevent obesity, and improve academic performance. Joint use of facilities provides an opportunity for the City and BHUSD to work together to maximize resources, keep costs down, and achieve shared goals.

Howard Goldstein, Member of the BHUSD Board of Education

I am a private citizen, living over 45 years in Beverly Hills. I do not know much about finances of our municipality nor the BHUSD, but something strikes me as odd.

The BHUSD is paying up to \$59,830 for an audit to evaluate the JPA to find the maximum it can charge for its services as if it were a real estate entity in the field of renting sports and community facilities.

The BHUSD gets most of its revenue from the local property taxes, the majority from households that no longer have students in district schools.

Where is the evaluation of how the JPA enhances the life of the citizens of Beverly Hills, mostly the families of your students, past present and future? It does that at a small incremental cost to its budget, for which it should be reimbursed. The BHUSD is also entitled to be reimbursed by the City for the cost of the additional 38 out-of-district students. Since it is a bonus for the City employees, it can be paid from the tax revenue.

If you ended up having revenue of \$572,450 for a year in the past, it was a relatively small amount but was a win-win situation to the City and the school district as it enhances both sides, and is augmented by the added value to life in this great City.
Susanne Spira

**The Courier Welcomes And Appreciates
Letters To The Editor**

Please remember (1): Keep to one subject—the shorter the better; (2): Avoid personal insults; (3): Do not send letters appearing in other publications; (4): Include address to assure local residency.

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