



CASE NUMBER: UNASSIGNED

City of Los Angeles – 14th District

City of Los Angeles Department of City Planning

Date: January 21, 2021

SUBJECT: Demand for the extension of sale conditions at Sakura Gardens and support of legislation to block the Pacifica/ICF Conversion.

Sakura Gardens (formerly Keiro) has been a place of comfort, care, and cultural familiarity for the Japanese, and Japanese-American community for fifty years, and has been a senior care facility in the Boyle Heights community for one hundred years from it's original inception as The Jewish Home of the Aged.

In September 2020, the Boyle Height's Neighborhood Council discovered that Pacifica Companies filed plans to build 50 residential unit's on the Sakura Gardens campus, as well plans to phase out intermediate care at the Intermediate Care Facility tower in order to convert the tower to 45 multi-family residential unit's.

Numerous community members, and concerned individuals from across the nation, called in to voice their concerns on this proposal. Many people were alarmed about integrating a multi-family housing development on to the campus of a senior care facility – especially where there are seniors of advanced age and those that require specialized care. This concept was unprecedented and incompatible with it's use as a senior care facility. More concerning was the lingering uncertainty of what would happen to the residents at Sakura Gardens and the ICF tower – especially during a pandemic unlike any we have seen in our lifetime. U.S. Representative Maxine Waters, who was present at the September, 2020 Planning and Land Use Meeting stated “Many of my constituents have parents and grandparents that were in (Keiro) and are very concerned about how this will affect their families. We're talking about a cultural interruption here. We can't allow profit motive alone to dictate such important decisions. Please allow our seniors to continue living in their home, eating the food they like, interacting with the people who understand them, and ask yourself, ‘How would you feel if they were your parents?’

To add to this uncertainty, the conditions of sale expire in February, 2021, which occurred from the sale of Sakura Gardens (Keiro) to Pacifica in 2016. Pacifica was required to maintain culturally sensitive services for it's residents. Why are the conditions important? For residents who do not speak English, it is a crucial lifeline to be able to communicate their needs and health problems to nursing staff and doctors that are fluent in Japanese. One of the few pleasures in their remaining years is to enjoy Japanese food like Anpan, crafts like Origami, and celebrate holidays like Shōgatsu. These elements are offered under the current conditions.

While many of these residents are able to afford the facilities with the help of Medi-Cal, Pacifica has been reducing its Medi-Cal occupancy. The Sakura Gardens facility seniors have seen their monthly rent rising for a total of 17% over the last four years.

Once the conditions expire on Feb. 5, 2021, there will be no obligation for Pacifica to continue the bilingual and bicultural services, and no control over increasing the rent.

The above prospect is so alarming, that Assemblymember Al Muratsuchi (D-Torrance) is proposing a bill that would prohibit a senior residential care facility from making significant changes to the delivery of residential care services during the COVID-19 state of emergency unless the owner of the facility declares bankruptcy.

Significant changes would include the termination of services as well as the transfer of residents to other facilities unless the resident consents to the termination or transfer.

The bill would also require any and all conditions of sale of assets from a not-for-profit entity to a for-profit entity approved by the California Attorney General to remain in effect at least during the duration of the state of emergency.

Finally, the bill would also require the owner of the facility to give at least six months advance notice of any proposed termination of the licensed operation to each and every resident.

To quote Assemblymember Muratsuchi “We have a moral obligation to do everything we can to protect these seniors from eviction or transfer trauma. At the very least, we should allow these seniors and their loved ones the peace of mind knowing that their current homes will not be taken away from them during a pandemic.”

Based on the above timeline of events, The Boyle Heights Neighborhood Council continues to remain steadfast in its opposition of Pacifica’s development on the campus of Sakura Gardens.

We also call for the extension of conditions to ensure that culturally sensitive care and services continue.

Finally, we are in support of the proposed bill by Assemblymember Al Muratsuchi as we must protect the most vulnerable in our community.

Respectfully submitted,

The Boyle Height’s Neighborhood Council

