

Los Angeles Is Dying

By Mark Dutton/Avalos Campaign Manager

The good people of this great city have collectively crossed the Rubicon. We are tired, broke, confused and angry, no longer willing to silently watch as our elected officials turn a deaf ear and a blind eye to our common needs, wants and desires. We are weary, but unwilling to allow the incremental dismantling of a city that was once a beacon of inspiration throughout the world. We can no longer stand by and bear witness to its transformation into a degraded unrecognizable shadow of its former self, where even the hope of living just a modest interpretation of the American dream has become unimaginable for the great majority of Angelenos.

The residents of Los Angeles are exhausted, relentlessly pursued by a hoard of representatives with an insatiable appetite for fees, taxes and ineffective regulation. Our city is being eaten alive from the inside, as tails wag dogs, and the people of Los Angeles are left to clean up their mess. All this, while the cost of living feasts on the poor with its sights set on a dwindling middle class for dessert.

We can no longer afford to place Los Angeles in the hands of politicians running on bumper sticker campaign slogans who go to sleep every night dreaming of sugar plum fairies and higher offices. The time has come to raise the bar and stop electing Stepford candidates who believe in nothing while promising everything.

Like it or not, our cities' problems are unique and complex. Their solutions lie, as most things do, in a place no longer traveled. A place where no one is overjoyed or consumed with discontent. A place of compromise and sacrifice, evenly dispersed amongst us all. A place where no one is left behind but no one gets a free ride. A place where the needs of the people are considered before party affiliation and special interests. A no-man's land called ...the middle.

It's outlandish....I know. But quell your liberal outrage, set aside your conservative talking points and hear me out. Call it the center, the middle, moderate or just plain reasonable, but most of us, the overwhelming majority of us, live together in this place every day, struggling with like issues and desires across a broad socio-economic spectrum.

We have so much more in common than we don't. True, it is not worthy of an unending digital shouting match that earns likes and views, but it is the truth. We all want to feel safe, knowing that our hard work and dedication will allow us a decent life in a decent city, able to talk about all our terrible ideas without indignant expectation that they will be implemented. Line the pockets of lobbyists while simultaneously silencing the cries of the Great Unwashed is a shell game that we will always lose. So, let's get into the weeds, shall we?

The Homeless

This is not just a concept. Call it vagrancy from the right or shelter- challenged from the left, they are, in reality, different groups of people populating categories including, but not limited to, the mentally ill, people addicted to drugs, mentally ill people addicted to drugs and people who lost their jobs and/or simply could not keep up with the high cost of living. There is no magic single solution. Are they just lazy? Some. Are they a tax burden? Yes. So are all our city services. It is the price we pay for civilization. If you want to fix it, I mean REALLY fix it, it will take more than a slogan or lip service. It requires an ongoing conversation that will be arduous and painful.

There are no super heroes in this movie. Only people either willing to do the work, or not. The solution will not be heard shouted from a political or religious bully pulpit. Instead, it will be unceremoniously and incrementally hashed out by groups of competent people working together who are focused on real achievable solutions.

Whether you like it or not, our brothers and sisters are living in tents on public property all over Los Angeles. This is a blight on all of us that needs to be addressed, so run up whatever banner you feel comfortable with, and march forth to push the city to fix it in a way we can all live with, financially and morally. St. Vincent Medical center could be a great start for a large percentage of our homeless population. It comes complete with a large hospital, apartments (previously inhabited by nuns!) and access to a large property full of every kind of office to provide a person with most of the things they need to get back on their feet.

Affordable housing

What does affordable housing even mean? The median household income in Los Angeles is about \$56,000. It is recommended in financial circles, that your mortgage be no more than three times your annual income, so unless you make over \$165,000 per year, you cannot afford a house over \$500,000.....and they are ALL over \$500,000! City hall must not be allowed to determine the parameters of a metric that should instead be left to simple economic math. News flash...we can't all live in Beverly Hills, but it's not the fault of the people who do, or a right of the people who can't.

That is not the end of the discussion though. If we are all going to play baseball, then we must regulate the bat size and level the playing field. Capitalism only works for "everyone," if "everyone" plays by the same rules. Don't bother calling me a socialist. I'm not. I am, however not a blind disciple of crony capitalism as my one and only true God. Capitalism is a post industrial concept, not mentioned in the Bible or the Constitution. It is neither a religious right nor a state mandate. I know this is hard to accept...let's take a breath together, you'll be ok. Moving on.

Housing Crisis

It's not a housing crisis. It is a cost of living crisis, that has driven some people out of their homes, out of the state and sometimes onto the streets. New construction mostly benefits the developers and the city coffers, it will not solve the homeless issue or even lower the cost of housing. Newer and bigger is not always better. If you don't want apartments being built in your affluent neighborhoods or gentrification pushing out the working class, then you must face the reality that Los Angeles is populated by the poor, middle class and wealthy alike, and all of them deserve a voice and a place here.

Diversity is what makes this city great. No group is right by default or wrong in total. Housing is not an investment for most. It is a place to live, to call home. Prioritize that, and a healthy building market will follow...as it should, but the reality is...we live in a three dimensional space. As hard as it is to accept, there is a limit to how many people and structures a city can sustain. Are we at capacity? I don't know, but to ignore the question is cowardly and will surely bring disaster.

Traffic

Our city traffic problem is only getting worse, and a literal or metaphorical "road diet" is not the answer. There are too many cars in a system of too little roads. Should we build more? Maybe. Should we carpool or create a more effective public transit system? Probably. I do know, we can't wish it all away, or blindly trust our city officials to solve the problem while lunching and dining with lobbyists selling stories of a bedazzling future where cars drive themselves and conveniently abolish the need for parking.

Throwing endless amounts of our money away to fund ill- conceived programs to fix misunderstood and under researched problems is a recipe for failure and bankruptcy. Should we all ride bikes? Probably. Will we or can we? Not likely. Welcome to Los Angeles. You don't have to go home, but you can't afford to stay here.

Police

De-fund the police may be one of the worst branding ideas the left has ever imagined, right along side the tone and contextual deaf cry from the right that "blue lives matter." Of course they do! "All lives" matter, but that sentiment is so obvious, it is a waste of a bumper sticker. We cannot ignore that the police come in all colors, flying a blue flag to protect themselves and the public. Let's assume for the sake of this argument though, that the branding genius who came up with it meant well and perhaps may have had a caffeine or booze fueled emotional moment, feeding their latent masochistic urges. The reality is, police, unlike corporations, are people too, and like the rest of us, there are good ones and bad ones. I have encountered both. Some need to adjust their approach, but most were simply doing a tough job to enforce the laws that we have all agreed upon.

Encounters with the police are stressful for everyone....the officer included. Being forced to submit to someone else's will is emotionally difficult for most and requires respect and patience on both sides. It is critically important however, for that stress to be equal for all. When it is not, even occasionally, it damages the whole system and creates resentment and fear. Vitriol aside though, taking away funds from the enforcement division of the law is a recipe for disaster since it will metaphorically result in shooting ourselves in both feet. Talk to the police. They will agree that they need help. Most are on-board with supplemental agencies carrying some of the load. It will cost money, demand research and require compromise.

Fire

Widespread fire danger is inevitable and climate change is only partly responsible. Gratuitous development provides profit for the developer and kindling for fires. There are countless articles illustrating the dangers of building in high fire hazard areas and Wildlife corridors. We need buffer zones between housing and open space, manicured, financed and maintained by the city, making it possible for our firefighters to do their job. A job that requires adequate trucks and equipment to fight these new world fires.

There is no profit here! It is simply something that needs to be done, so send the endless parade of high priced consulting firms packing and gather the civic minded experts...the real experts, not the ones with their hands out who peddle the city narrative and see everything as a potential opportunity to line their pockets by greasing the wheels of city government in the form of campaign contributions.

We must listen to local fire chiefs who know their area better than anyone else. They must be given a seat at the table when policy is being written. To ignore them is not only foolish, it is dangerous and will always result in more costs for the city...fiscal and loss of life.

The west is losing open space to human development at the rate of an area the size of Los Angeles every year. The plan cannot simply be to build over all the remaining space so as to eliminate the threat of wild fires by burying California in concrete...can it? In 2018, according to The Trust For Public Land, Los Angeles ranked 74th out of 100 cities in public park land. 74th!

As our city moves forward in the name of progress defined by everyone except the residents, and spends our money in the pursuit of "necessity," defined by people we have never met, we are inadvertently building our own prison, brick by brick. If our meds aren't working, we just up the dose and then become angry that we are addicted to a drug of our own making.

Nap time is over Los Angeles. While we are all arguing about events taking place three thousand miles to the east, our city and way of life are being pilfered from under our noses. Los Angeles is being fashioned after someone else's dream, and if we don't wake up, it will soon be our nightmare. Our city officials seem to think that it is okay to solve one problem while creating another. Not enough houses? Build more in high fire hazard zones. Homeless encampment on the street? Just go around them. Increased fire danger? Call it "the new normal."

It is time to take back our city before we no longer recognize it. It is time to hold both our city officials and its citizens responsible for their actions, while according each of them the respect they deserve. It is time to assume our responsibilities as individuals and hold ourselves to the same standards as we hold others. It is time to allow the voice of the people an equal platform with big business and special interest groups. It is time to consider quality over quantity, while recognizing the need for, and redefining, a healthy marketplace. It is time to talk about Los Angeles, together, a conversation for all to participate in. It is necessary. It will not be pleasant. There will be blood.