

# YES on City Zoning Reform

**ISSUE: Los Angeles' inadequate planning and zoning laws permit abuse and outright corruption. Will the electorate tolerate more?**

The investigations and indictments growing out of Los Angeles City Hall zoning scandals finally have resulted in reform legislation—Charter Amendment 1 on next Tuesday's ballot.

Influence in planning and zoning decisions "can and has been and in all probability will be exerted through the medium of campaign contributions, political obligations and friendships," concluded the 1966 Grand Jury after indicting a City Hall "expediter" on bribery charges.

The grand jurors' warning led to an independent study of municipal land use practices and procedures by a committee of independent citizens headed by the late Mayor Fletcher Bowron.

Charter Amendment 1 represents the initial legislative product of the Bowron Committee's two-year inquiry. Unfortunately, such important recommendations as restrictions on conflict of interest and campaign contributions were not included in the current measure. They should be submitted to the voters at the earliest possible opportunity.

The Times nevertheless urges a YES vote on Charter Amendment 1 as a significant start on planning and zoning reform, particularly those provisions

aimed at abuse of the variance procedure.

Loopholes in the present law have permitted variances to be granted for land use changes that actually amounted to spot rezoning. Such variances figured largely in the cases of zoning conflict of interest uncovered by The Times' Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative team.

Charter Amendment 1 would strengthen the protection against abuse by tightening the legal definition of a variance and by limiting the authority of the present Board of Zoning Adjustment.

"A variance shall not be used to grant a special privilege," the revised definition states, "nor to permit a use substantially inconsistent with the limitations upon other properties in the same zone and vicinity, nor to grant relief from self-imposed hardships."

The present BZA would be renamed the Board of Zoning Appeals and be restricted to reviewing decisions of the Zoning Administrator. Taking of additional evidence would be prohibited. Board decisions, now subject only to court review, could be appealed also to the City Council.

In the final analysis, the effectiveness of any law depends upon the quality of the elected and appointive officials who administer it. But the reforms in Charter Amendment 1 would make it tougher to use the planning and zoning process for personal gain instead of in the public interest.