

Tower project exposes gaps in L.A.'s oversight; Community activists, not city planners, take the lead in bringing Hollywood fault concerns to light.

Xia, Rosanna; Lin, Rong-Gong, II; Smith, Doug . Los Angeles Times ; Los Angeles, Calif. [Los Angeles, Calif]15 Aug 2013: A.1.

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ABSTRACT

The City Council in 2008 approved his plans, known then as the Yucca Street Condominium Project. In signing off on this revision on June 21, 2013, planning officials reviewed the original environmental impact report and decided not to update the report with further studies.

FULL TEXT

Eight years ago, real estate developer David Jordon bought the former site of the KFWB radio studios in the heart of Hollywood with plans to build a 16-story residential and office complex.

Los Angeles city officials reviewed his plans and approved the project without requiring seismic studies even though the property sat close to the Hollywood fault.

It was only recently, after homeowners appealed the city's approval, that Jordon became aware of the potential dangers of the fault, which experts say is capable of producing a devastating earthquake. Now, he's planning to do his own seismic study before building the tower.

"It's always our intent to build safe buildings," said Jordon, president of Second Street Ventures. "The information on the area that we had was different than what" we know now.

Jordon's project at 6230 Yucca St. is one of at least two developments along the Hollywood fault that city officials approved without requiring a detailed fault investigation. The Hollywood fault runs through an area that has seen a boom in development over the last decade as the neighborhood has revitalized.

The community activists who appealed Jordon's project said it was troubling that the city didn't require any detailed earthquake fault studies.

"We shouldn't have to do this policing. The city shouldn't have this level of disregard," said George Abrahams, president of the Argyle Civic Assn. "It's taken us money, it's taken us time. We're doing the due diligence the city should be doing. And it shouldn't be like that."

Planning officials did not respond to questions from The Times about the property.

Several geologists interviewed by The Times have said it is important to dig trenches and bore holes under proposed developments to determine the path of the fault because buildings constructed on top of them can rip apart in a major earthquake as one side of the fault slides past the other.

California law requires builders to conduct detailed underground investigations in active fault zones mapped by the state to ensure that no active fault passes under the proposed structure. The Hollywood fault falls in a gray area. The state geologist said it is active but officials have not completed the mapping that shows which properties fall under the landmark Alquist-Priolo Act. That mapping is supposed to be drawn sometime in 2014.

Until then, it is up to the city to require developers to do quake fault studies.

Once a fault is located in a state-mapped zone, owners are generally barred from building within 50 feet.

The city has the power to require fault studies before approving a project. The Los Angeles Department of Planning approved the environmental impact report for Jordon's project without a fault investigation.

No fault studies have been filed with the city's Department of Building and Safety, said the agency's spokesman, Luke Zamperini. The city geologist could require extensive digging to locate the presence or absence of the fault before it issues permits allowing construction. But Jordon has yet to apply for those permits.

Jordon purchased the property in 2005, at a time when developers were flocking to redevelop the intersection of Hollywood and Vine. The KFWB radio station had moved to a Wilshire Boulevard high-rise.

The City Council in 2008 approved his plans, known then as the Yucca Street Condominium Project. It would have built nearly 14,000 square feet of office space and 95 condo units. The property, on the southwest corner of Yucca Street and Argyle Avenue, is just northeast of the Capitol Records Tower and borders the site of the Millennium Hollywood skyscraper project.

Construction was put on hold because of the recession, Jordon said. Ready to build again, he applied in 2012 to change the condo project to apartments. That gave the planning department a second chance to require a fault study, but officials did not do so. In signing off on this revision on June 21, 2013, planning officials reviewed the original environmental impact report and decided not to update the report with further studies.

Three days later, Abrahams, the Argyle Civic Assn. president, was reviewing files in the planning department. Abrahams is opposed to the Millennium project -- which would dramatically change the Hollywood skyline with 35- and 39-story skyscrapers -- and was looking to see whether any of Millennium's neighbors had researched their proximity to the Hollywood fault.

Instead, he discovered that the city had green-lighted Jordon's development without requiring a detailed earthquake fault study.

He filed an appeal, asking why officials agreed again that the property was 0.3 miles away from the nearest earthquake fault despite well-documented studies showing that the property is much closer, and possibly on top of, the fault.

"Certainly, we don't like the idea that [the department of] planning is not using its head," Abrahams said. "Two adjacent properties might have exactly the same problem."

The Hollywood fault runs east and west with numerous strands that can encompass a large area, making it difficult to pinpoint its location without digging.

Last month, state geologist John Parrish told The Times that sections of the Hollywood fault appear to run underneath the Millennium towers site and said that further tests are needed for final confirmation.

The City Council last month approved the Millennium project, which will bring 1 million square feet of retail, restaurant, office and residential space to the neighborhood. But the city geologist has ordered more investigations, and the developers have agreed to dig a deep trench to determine the presence or absence of the fault under the site.

The city did not require an underground fault investigation before approval of the \$200-million commercial and residential development near the Millennium project. The development, known as Blvd6200, is under construction.

The Hollywood fault was last known to have ruptured about 7,000 to 8,000 years ago.

It joins with neighboring fault systems and is believed to be capable of producing an earthquake greater than magnitude 7.0.

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Illustration

Caption: GRAPHIC: MAP: No fault study required; CREDIT:Los Angeles Times

DETAILS

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