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Garcetti defers to seismic experts on Hollywood skyscrapers

By Michael Finnegan
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Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti said Friday that he would rely on scientists to determine whether the city should issue permits to build two Hollywood skyscrapers on what could be an active earthquake fault running directly beneath the Vine Street property.

“There’s faults throughout the city of Los Angeles that are active that have construction,” Garcetti said. “That’s why we have seismic requirements, and why we rely on the government engineers who are experts in this area. They’re not softies. They’re people who are tasked with protecting lives and property.”

California’s state geologist has declared that the Hollywood earthquake fault is active and may run beneath the property where developers plan to erect 39-story and 35-story towers next to the Capitol Records building. The 1-million-square-foot project, Millennium Hollywood, won City Council approval last week.

California law bars construction of new buildings on a fault declared active and mapped by the state. A building over a fault can be sheared in half during an earthquake.

It’s unclear how active the Hollywood fault is. But the head of the California Geological Survey, John Parrish, told The Times there was ample evidence that it’s active and capable of producing a devastating earthquake. He called for further tests for confirmation.

Garcetti, who stated his approval of the project last week, said Friday that any information deemed credible by the city’s Bureau of Engineering would be “taken into account” before any decisions on building permits are made. He said he didn’t know whether the danger of a fault rupture beneath the skyscrapers was serious enough to warrant stopping the project.

“I know what I don’t know, and I don’t know seismic engineering,” he said. “Our people are neutral. They’re not tasked with ‘A is a project we want or don’t want. They don’t kill it or promote it accordingly. So I will just rely on their sober scientific assessments.’”

The mayor’s comments came in a brief interview Friday morning during his visit to a downtown conference of software developers and Internet entrepreneurs. Garcetti described himself to the crowd as a “high-tech mayor” who would promote a gamut of technological advances to make city government more efficient and responsive to the public.

He mentioned his plan to promote instruction in computer coding in L.A. high schools. A well-trained graduate of Crenshaw High School, he said, should be able to take one of the city’s new rail lines to work at a high-tech company on the Westside.

On another front, Garcetti announced that he had hired environmentalist Matt Petersen as the city’s first “chief sustainability officer.” Since 1994, Petersen has been president and chief executive officer of Global Green USA, an environmental group based in Los Angeles.

Garcetti said he was putting Petersen in charge of “developing environmental initiatives across all city departments to create healthier neighborhoods with cleaner air and water.” Petersen was also assigned to find ways to cut the city’s energy consumption and advance the mayor’s plan to stimulate “green” jobs.