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LETTERS

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# Making Hill out of high-rise

## No more quick fixes

**B**RAVO to James D. Hill (“GROWING PAINS / May troubled tower bring city a tool kit,” Outlook cover, Nov. 4) for explaining the difference between zoning and performance standards, and why the “property rights” argument commonly used to thwart efforts to improve performance standards is both antiquated and unreasonably dismissive of the rights of neighboring property owners.

The Ashby high-rise is simply the latest of many calls to action that Mayor Bill White and City Council have heard from countless neighborhoods cannibalized by thoughtless development that often poses increased risks to the life, health and safety of all. The city’s practice of implementing “quick fixes” aimed at individual projects should be abandoned as shortsighted, and White should make a comprehensive rewrite of the city’s development codes the primary goal of his final term.

— JANE M. CAHILL  
Houston

## Respect rights

**J**AMES D. Hill tries to convince readers that though traditional zoning conceived more than 90 years ago in New York City has proved itself to be “heavy-handed” and “inflexible,” the planning

industry has now invented a substitute called form-based zoning that is context sensitive.

The criticisms of zoning are much more extensive than he acknowledges. One is that zoning is easily corrupted, either by property owners who pay for variances or changes in the code to get their project approved, or by NIMBY-motivated homeowners who intimidate policymakers by threatening loss of support unless project applications are denied. Both of these tendencies will be in play if Houston adopts form-based zoning, just as they are today in permit decisions made by City Hall.

Only respect for property rights will avoid exacerbating problems that sully Houston politics too much as it is.

— AL HARTMAN  
vice president, Houston Property  
Rights Association

## Wealth not a factor

**I**N this section in the Chronicle, several citizens have asserted that this administration has moved more aggressively on an ordinance to blunt the traffic impacts of high-rise developments because one of those developments threatens a higher-income neighborhood. That is not true. The vast bulk of the neighborhood protection activity during this administration — as measured

by spending, personnel and new laws — has dealt with chronic problems in some of the city’s most neglected neighborhoods. We moved swiftly, for example, to shut down two apartment buildings with health violations in moderate- to low-income areas.

At least two controversial high-rise developments are being built near some of the highest-income areas of the city, over neighborhood opposition. In both cases there were reasonable plans to deal with the traffic impact.

Beginning last February — before we learned of the controversial project on Bissonnet and Ashby — I directed the Department of Public Works to implement new policies for dealing with the large volume of high-rise construction in any area to the west of Main Street and to the east of Loop 610. The Ashby project demonstrated a weakness in the legal authority required to successfully implement the policies we had implemented, at the direction of members of council in open session.

Our reaction to this issue has nothing to do with the income of the residents in specific neighborhoods, and the ordinance would apply throughout the city. We are committed to work hard for the betterment of all neighborhoods.

— BILL WHITE  
mayor of Houston

