Summary of the Santa Monica City Council Meeting of November 18, 2025

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Core Points

1. Public Safety and Community Concerns
    - Santa Monica is facing ongoing challenges related to homelessness, mental health, substance abuse, and public safety, impacting the quality of life and business environment.
    - Residents expressed frustration with current harm reduction models for homelessness, citing inadequate oversight and negative impacts such as open alcohol containers and drug use in public spaces, particularly the Third Street Mall.
    - There is a strong call for better community engagement, transparency, and accountability from city officials regarding housing projects, public safety measures, and development decisions.
2. Historic Preservation Debate: Structure of Merit Designation for 1125 18th Street
    - A significant portion of the meeting was devoted to deliberation over the designation of a modest Craftsman bungalow at 1125 18th Street as a "Structure of Merit," a local historic preservation category.
    - The designation criteria include properties listed in the Historic Resources Inventory (HRI) or those that represent unique or rare architectural styles or historic types.
    - The Landmarks Commission had designated the property as a Structure of Merit by a 4-2 vote, citing its rarity as a variation of Craftsman architecture and its representation of Santa Monica's residential development history.
    - Staff and outside consultants recommended denying the designation, arguing the house is neither unique nor a good example of Craftsman style and that it does not meet the criteria for historic preservation.
    - The City Council discussed the legal standards, the weight given to the HRI listing, and the balance between historic preservation and the need for new housing. They acknowledged the structure's modest architectural value but recognized that it met the ordinance's criteria.
3. Local Hazard Mitigation Plan and Emergency Preparedness
    - The updated Local Hazard Mitigation Plan was presented as a comprehensive, FEMA-required strategy to identify risks, prioritize mitigation actions, and improve disaster preparedness in Santa Monica.
    - Risks highlighted include earthquakes, tsunamis, wildfires, flooding due to dam failure, and climate change effects such as sea level rise.
    - The plan incorporates community input from surveys, workshops, and commission feedback and includes a five-year action plan with mitigation measures such as

evacuation planning, wildfire preparedness, infrastructure improvements, and public education.
    - Significant concerns were raised by residents and council members regarding the adequacy of evacuation route capacity analyses, especially considering expected population increases due to housing developments.
    - The city emphasized education on tsunami evacuation by foot rather than vehicle and acknowledged the need for improved warning systems, including potential sirens and better signage.
    - Although the plan itself does not mandate response actions, it supports eligibility for FEMA grants and is intended as a living document updated regularly.
4. Community Input and Public Comment Process
    - Over 25 public speakers participated, representing a wide range of community concerns including homelessness, housing affordability, transparency in city decisions, workers' rights (especially related to Rusty's restaurant closure at the pier), tenant harassment, racial justice, and historic preservation.
    - Many speakers criticized perceived secrecy and lack of genuine community engagement in decision-making, particularly regarding housing projects and public land use.
    - Workers displaced by sudden restaurant closures urged for lease conditions that ensure worker retention and fair treatment.
    - Several speakers emphasized the need for accountability and tangible progress following the city's 2023 Black Apology, urging sustained action rather than symbolic gestures.
    - Concerns about public safety, environmental impact assessments, and procedural fairness in zoning and development decisions were also voiced.
5. City Council Actions and Announcements
    - The Council adopted the updated Local Hazard Mitigation Plan, recognizing its importance for federal funding eligibility despite acknowledging its limitations and the need for further detailed studies and community education.
    - They approved contracts for expanding electric vehicle charging infrastructure.
    - The Council appointed a new member to the Housing Commission to maintain quorum and continued other agenda items for future meetings.
    - Proclamations were made honoring World Day of Remembrance for Traffic Victims, Transgender Awareness Week, and Movember, reflecting the city's commitment to inclusivity, safety, and health awareness.
    - The meeting concluded with a memorial tribute to a beloved community crossing guard, Barnaby Kono, highlighting the city's appreciation for its public servants.

Key Conclusions

1. Historic Preservation Requires Balancing Heritage and Development
    - The City Council affirmed that the structure at 1125 18th Street meets the criteria for a Structure of Merit designation based on its inclusion in the Historic Resources

Inventory and its unique architectural features relative to the neighborhood context.
    - However, there is a recognition of the challenges historic preservation poses to new housing development and the need for collaborative solutions that respect both preservation and growth.
    - The designation provides a procedural pause for negotiation and potential adaptive reuse, rather than outright preservation or demolition mandates.
2. Local Hazard Mitigation Plan Is a Critical, Yet Evolving, Framework
    - The updated plan is a necessary tool for identifying hazards and mitigating risks but does not fully address all community concerns, especially quantitative evacuation route capacity assessments.
    - Public education and outreach are crucial components to improve community preparedness, with plans to develop multilingual resources and accessible materials.
    - The plan's approval enables the city to pursue FEMA funding, vital for ongoing hazard mitigation projects.
3. Community Trust and Transparency Remain Central Challenges
    - Repeated public commentary underscored a widespread perception of inadequate transparency and insufficient community involvement in major city decisions, particularly related to housing projects and land use.
    - The Council and city staff acknowledged these concerns, emphasizing efforts to improve communication and engagement, though residents expressed skepticism about current practices.
4. Social Issues Require Integrated, Accountable Solutions
    - Homelessness, mental health, and worker rights were prominent public concerns, with calls for more effective housing programs, oversight of service providers, and protections for displaced workers.
    - The city's commitments to racial justice and equity require more visible action and accountability to maintain public confidence.
5. Ongoing Public Safety and Infrastructure Enhancements Are Priorities
    - Investments in electric vehicle infrastructure, emergency preparedness, and public safety continue to be key focus areas for Santa Monica's city government.
    - Proclamations and community events reinforce the city's values of inclusivity, health awareness, and remembrance.

Important Details

1. Homelessness and Harm Reduction Model Critique
    - Transition from sober living requirements to harm reduction in homeless programs has led to increased funding but reportedly less effective outcomes.
    - Vulnerable populations are exposed to negative influences such as drug dealers near benefit distribution points.
    - Open alcohol containers and needles in public spaces like the Third Street Mall negatively impact community safety and business vitality.

2. Rusty's Pier Workers' Displacement and Worker Retention Demands
    - Rusty's restaurant closure led to job loss for long-time workers without a right of return under the proposed new lease for the same space.
    - Workers, union representatives, and community allies demand that any new lease include worker retention policies to ensure laid off employees have first opportunity to return.
    - Workers have organized pickets and are considering boycotts to press for fair treatment.
3. Historic Preservation Ordinance and Structure of Merit Criteria
    - Criterion A: Inclusion in Historic Resources Inventory (HRI) is necessary but not sufficient alone for designation; normally combined with criterion B.
    - Criterion B: Property must be unique, rare, or representative of a no longer prevalent style or historic type.
    - The property in question was built in 1923, considered a modest Craftsman bungalow with unusual features like side entrance and a bank of windows facing the street.
    - The Landmarks Commission's designation was split 4-2, reflecting differing interpretations of rarity and significance.
4. Local Hazard Mitigation Plan Highlights
    - Extensive collaboration with city departments, emergency responders, community organizations, and public surveys informed the plan.
    - Major hazards include earthquakes (local faults and San Andreas), tsunamis (local and distant), wildfires (notably post-Palisades fire changes), flood from dam failure, and climate change impacts.
    - Public education tools in multiple languages and formats are planned to ensure community awareness.
    - Tsunami evacuation is recommended on foot due to anticipated vehicle gridlock, with challenges acknowledged for persons with mobility issues.
    - Current evacuation routes are mapped qualitatively with plans to develop more detailed quantitative capacity analyses in the future.
5. Public Comment Themes and Specific Concerns
    - Calls for increased transparency and genuine community participation in city decisions.
    - Criticism of use of "common sense" exemptions to bypass environmental review on rezonings and developments that may have significant impacts.
    - Concerns about tenant harassment and inadequate city response to complaints.
    - Requests for enhanced tenant protections and worker rights, especially related to public land leases and redevelopment projects.
    - Emphasis on racial justice accountability following the city's Black Apology, with demands for concrete progress.
6. City Council and Staff Updates

    - Announcement of special holiday programming and encouragement to support local businesses during the holiday season.
    - Food insecurity addressed through donation boxes placed at multiple city facilities.
    - Introduction of an adoptable dog "Target" from the Animal Shelter as a community engagement effort.
    - Recognition of the need for continuous improvements in city infrastructure maintenance and realignment efforts.
7. Close Session Report Outs
    - Settlement reached with Constance White regarding alleged wrongs related to Ebony Beach Club, including a $350,000 payment and commemorative actions like renaming a street segment and establishing a library exhibit.
    - Direction given to cease nuisance operations at two Broadway properties with threat of litigation if non-compliance continues.
    - Settlement approved in a class action lawsuit related to civil rights claims from 2020 events, with payment of $150,000 and denial of liability by the city.
8. Procedural Notes
    - The City Council meeting was conducted with adherence to the Brown Act, including public comment periods, declarations of ex parte communications, and motions requiring roll-call votes.
    - Some agenda items were continued due to quorum or procedural requirements, reflecting the complexity of city governance.
9. Community and Council Member Interactions
    - Council members disclosed ex parte communications related to the historic preservation item.
    - The Council expressed appreciation for the extensive community involvement and expertise presented during the historic preservation deliberations.
    - Members recognized the difficulty of balancing preservation with development needs and acknowledged the evolving nature of relevant ordinances and city plans.
10. Proclamations and Observances
    - World Day of Remembrance for Traffic Victims: Emphasized the preventable nature of traffic fatalities and the city's commitment to Vision Zero goals.
    - Transgender Awareness Week and Transgender Day of Remembrance: Acknowledged the ongoing challenges faced by transgender individuals and honored those lost to violence.
    - Movember Month: Promoted awareness of men's health issues, including cancer and mental health, encouraging community participation and early detection efforts.

This summary synthesizes the key aspects of the Santa Monica City Council meeting on November 18th, 2025, capturing the substantive discussions, community input, city planning initiatives, and procedural outcomes critical to understanding the city's governance and priorities at that time.

Please note that this transcript/summary was generated by an AI and may contain errors or omissions. For complete and accurate information, please consult the original audio or video recording of the meeting.