

June 10, 2005

Mr. Thomas Rothmann
Planning Associate
Los Angeles City Planning Department
200 North Spring St., 7th Floor
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Re: 1767-1787 Westwood Blvd.; ENV-2005-1543-MND

Dear Mr. Rothmann:

I am writing to formally comment on the above referenced project. I have reviewed the proposed MND sent me by the Planning Department, including the mitigation measures and traffic ISAF. I also attended a meeting with the developer and several other parties on June 7, 2005 in his office at 1777 Westwood Blvd. I am opposed to the approval of this project as currently proposed and request that an Environmental Impact Report be prepared prior to any further action on this project. There are many reasons.

A. The Project is inaccurately described in the MND.

1. The MND states that apartments are proposed. The developer and my conversation with you revealed that "guest rooms" are proposed, which include no food preparation facilities. If apartments were proposed, the number of parking spaces under the code would be greater.
2. The developer stated that the project would be Senior Housing, for ages 55 and older and that meal service and maid service would be provided. The Senior Housing aspect was not disclosed in the MND. This is now much more like a hotel, with many new trips of food deliveries, linen service, employees, etc.
3. There is no condition proposed to ensure that the property will remain Senior Housing in the future. There is quite a difference between senior housing and student housing, for example.
4. The MND includes a discussion of school capacity. It appears the developer is not sure what he is proposing – seniors or families – and therefore clearly has not fully described his project.
5. The traffic ISAF states that the commercial uses in the proposed project will be "other retail". The developer hinted that perhaps there would be a ground floor restaurant. The number of trips then would be different, and again, the developer has not accurately described the project.
6. The discussion of mitigation for aesthetic impacts includes many ideas for landscaping. However, the only "open space" in the project is the balconies from each room, which the developer has no control over once the project is rented. The MND should accurately state that there is no planting or landscaping on the project other than the 5-foot setback along Westwood Blvd.
7. The documents state that the proposed building would be 15 feet higher than existing ones on site. This is inaccurate. The tallest existing building is 2 stories, not 45 feet.

B. RAS Zoning is inappropriate for this site. RAS Zoning is intended for "underutilized commercial and transportation corridors...It will help transform the City's underperforming transit corridors into beautiful boulevards while improving mobility, reducing traffic and upgrading neighborhoods" (City Planning website).

1. Both Westwood and Santa Monica Blvds. are active, utilized transit corridors.
2. As discussed more specifically later in this letter, this project would add to the congestion at an LOS F intersection, contribute to parking shortages, and be a detriment to an attractive neighborhood that does not need upgrading.
3. RAS 4, especially with an added request for a 60 foot building height, is inappropriate as it is adjacent to an R-1 neighborhood and no buffer zone is provided.
4. Similarly, it is inappropriate in a Pedestrian Oriented District (POD), and this particular project is particularly not pedestrian oriented. It has no substantial landscaping or amenities at the ground level. The requested 60 foot height is also 15 feet above the height in the POD.

C. The Project is poorly designed.

1. If the project is truly to be senior housing, the floor plan and amenities are not an asset to the project. There are no communal spaces on the residential floors so there would be no gathering place for neighbors or visitors other than the individual room. The dining /recreation room is proposed underground in the parking garage – not an attractive or healthy situation.
2. The Loading Dock is on a 20 foot wide alley that is used by municipal trash trucks and Midvale residents. This limits the size and turning radius of vehicles that could be used.
3. The 60' height would block sun to the adjacent R-1 residences.
4. The upper floor balconies facing the residences would eliminate privacy in the adjacent homes and yards.
5. The lack of landscaping and open space is not in character with the residential neighborhood and obviously does not contribute to a "beautiful boulevard".
6. Even though the project meets the parking requirements in the code, this is inadequate. There are no spaces allotted to guests, contract workers, or employees. There is no way to enforce someone owning a car and parking it nearby. Midvale Ave. already has permit parking so other businesses may be impacted by this lack.
7. The design lacks consideration for the neighbors to the rear (height, balconies, alley traffic, etc.) A blank wall, while not beautiful, would be a better neighbor.
8. The project does not respect the spirit or intent of the POD.
9. The 3000 sq.ft. dining/recreation area has not been well defined. The developer mentioned this area as encompassing the kitchen, dining area, TV room, exercise room, library, and party space. How can the impacts be determined if we don't know what is proposed? How many seats would be required for dining? What size kitchen? What is the relation to the loading zone for deliveries? Will there be venting or safety requirements?
10. The plans do not address the methane accumulation risk.

D. The project impacts are not fully disclosed.

1. What are the impacts of automobile exhaust from the parking garage on the residents in the (only) communal area of the facility? Seniors are particularly sensitive to respiratory ailments.
2. The number of trips credited to the existing uses is unreasonably high. A traffic study needs to be performed and an actual trip count made to validate these assumptions. The current uses of "other retail" are credited with 301 daily trips. These consist of a locksmith who comes to you, an art studio, a smoke shop, and a dry cleaners. Of these only the dry cleaners would generate any significant number of trips. The restaurant uses are credited with 1,387 trips. These are 6 small cafes (two of which deliver) who currently have a total of 13 parking spaces they share with the retail uses. Each has less than 45 seats for a total of 197 seats.
3. Because the number of trips credited to the existing uses is high, the impact of the project appear artificially low; in fact claiming to reduce the total number of trips. A validation of the numbers is needed. In addition, is the number for "apartment" use the same as for a "guest room"? Guest rooms have the additional food and maid service related trips, employee trips, and trips from residents leaving to go out for meals. What would a hotel of this size generate?
4. Would the ingress and egress through the alley (deliveries as well as residents) adversely impact Midvale residents or trash collection? How many trips are anticipated?
5. What is the effect on the ADT or the intersection LOS on Santa Monica and Westwood Blvds. of the project? What circulation issues would arise from the likely restrictions to travel north or east from the project site? Since this intersection is already LOS F, wouldn't any adverse effect from turning movements and increased volume but significant?
6. What are the impacts in the Westwood corridor of a building 15 feet higher than the POD limit? Would other properties want to expand too and a precedent set? The IS should have indicated a possible impact in IXb.
7. If there is a restaurant on the ground floor, as indicated by the developer as a possibility, what would the hours be? Would a liquor license be requested?
8. A shade/shadow study needs to be prepared and assessed. The project is proposing a 60 foot building adjacent to a 20 foot residence. The angle of the sun blocked will be much greater with morning sun barely reaching the back yards of the homes.
9. The discussion of geological hazards does not mention the distance to the Santa Monica fault or the Newport Inglewood fault, nor discuss the design measures necessary to deal with liquefaction and seismic shaking. The project would be bringing people into the area.
10. Would the construction or operation of the subterranean garage cause ground born vibration?

11. How will neighbors be protected from possible methane hazards during excavation and construction?
12. The IS does not disclose that Emerson Middle School is nearby and that well over 25 students catch the bus at the stop in front of the project site. What are the impacts on these children?
13. What are the anticipated noise impacts of the project from construction (would this “temporary but substantial”)? What about noise from the traffic in the alley or residents on the balconies? There is no buffer to the R-1 uses.
14. In the IS, question XIIa., Why isn’t 111 units a “substantial” impact?
15. The impact to parking capacity should be addressed. There is no way to enforce only 64 cars to 111 units.
16. The impacts of mass, scaling, lack of setback, and lack of landscaping are not addressed.
17. What is the architectural historical impact of demolishing the existing brick buildings? These are very much in the style of the old Westwood Village.
18. What will the construction impacts be to the Midvale residents and garages as far as access to the alley (cars and trash trucks), noise, dust, etc?
19. There is no discussion of cumulative impacts or mitigation for cumulative impacts provided. XVIIb. defines these as “individually limited but cumulative considerable”, where cumulatively considerable means that “the incremental effects...are considerable when viewed in connection with the effects of past projects, ...other current projects, and ...probable future projects.” There should be an evaluation of the cumulative impacts of this increased density on
 - a. parking capacity,
 - b. LOS at intersections,
 - c. emergency vehicle access in congested areas,
 - d. cut through traffic in congested areas,
 - e. effects of population on the need for LAPD,
 - f. ambient air quality degradation from increased trips and density,
 - g. building heights and impacts to the POD, and
 - h. cumulative increases in wastewater disposal needs and landfill capacity.

E. The Mitigation proposed is inadequate. Many measures are listed but almost all are either required by code anyway (1b4, 1b5, VIc1, VIIb2, VIIb5, VIIIc2, XIId1, and XIVa) or are not applicable to this project. Mitigation measures must also be reviewed for environmental impact so those for geologic hazards, etc. need to be disclosed.

1. 1b2, Aesthetics: “All open areas not used for buildings...shall be attractively landscaped...” There are no such areas. The only area available is the 5 foot setback in the front.
2. 1c1, Light: There is no outdoor lighting of landscaping near the residential area (since there is no landscaping) and there is no way to shield the adjacent residents from lights from the balconies.
3. 111d1, Air quality: There is no mitigation for the air quality impacts the project adds to the ambient air quality.
4. VIb1, Haul Routes: There is no mitigation for the impact of trucks on pavement or the air quality contributions of diesel engines and construction dust.
5. VIIb2, Explosion: There are no measures to protect the adjacent residential properties from accidental explosion on the site.
6. VIIIc2, Water Quality: Bullets 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 18, and 18 are irrelevant as there is no place to plant trees, use the water, irrigate, have a swale, etc. Bullets 9 and 11 duplicate and are done anyway. Bullets 12 and 13 are irrelevant as there are no creeks in the project area, and bullets 14, 15, and 16 are irrelevant since there is no space for an outside enclosure anyway and any storage would have to be in the garage.
7. XIIIa, Fire: Saying a fire truck needs at least 20 feet is not much mitigation when the alley is only 20 feet wide and is also used by trash trucks and other vehicles, and for trash cans, all of which could block access. There needs to be a fee or other mitigation to cover the cumulative impact of increasing the number of unit and residents that require protection. Personnel and equipment needs may increase. Also, if this is senior housing there may be a disproportionately high number of medical emergencies. Can the local station handle an increase?
8. XIVa, Recreation: Does this money stay in the local geographic area (council district, for example) to meet needs here?
9. Xvd, Safety: Why does this mitigation not address access into the Westwood/Santa Monica intersection?

10. XVIIIf, Solid Waste: This mitigation measure does not require recycling or provide enforcement. There is no promise of reduced waste.
11. XVIIId: This statement is untrue.
12. NO mitigation is proposed for
 - a. parking capacity
 - b. traffic congestion or reduced LOS at intersections
 - c. construction noise
 - d. impacts to the POD as a precedent or cumulatively
 - e. impacts to roads (other governmental services)
 - f. cumulative impacts.

SUMMARY

In summary, this project is poorly conceived, designed, and described. Impacts are not fully disclosed and most likely not accurate given the fluid project description. Trip generation numbers are overstated with the result that several impact categories are understated. The community cannot support a precedent setting request such as this, especially when there is no protection offered against future uses that may be allowed under this zoning. Either the proponent needs to build within the existing zoning and overlay zone or the project needs to be defined and conditioned to respect and protect the community.

On a more general note, an environmental review of RAS zoning as a whole needs to be done prior to implementation. There should be criteria set for adjacent uses, buffer zones, and neighborhood protections. Cumulative impacts of zone changes as well as the impacts of increasing density in general need to be defined and mitigated.

The MND has NOT clearly demonstrated (as CEQA requires) that there is no significant effect on the environment even after mitigation. There is definitely the potential for substantive adverse change. As such, more studies are needed and an Environmental Impact Report needs to be prepared.

I hereby request to be notified by the City of any further hearings and actions on this project, whether they originate from the Planning Department, Building & Safety, or another department. I look forward to reading a revised project description and environmental analysis.