



WINNETKA NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL
c/o Valley Village
20830 Sherman Way, Winnetka, CA 91306
www.winnetkanc.com



August 28, 2013

Priya Mehendale
South Valley Planning Commission
Valley Neighborhood Projects
6262 Van Nuys Blvd. Room 430
Van Nuys, CA 91401

Re: 20460 Sherman Way (APCSV-2012-2487-ZC and ENV-2012-2488-EAF)

Dear P. Mehendale:

On August 20, 2013, the Winnetka Neighborhood Council (WNC) Planning and Land Use Management Committee (PLUM) discussed the developer's proposed revised development plan for the property located at 20460 Sherman Way, Winnetka.

The developer presented a revised plan that retained the four story height of the original proposal with a gradual step back to a two story at the rear of the property. However, while he has kept the original four story concept, he has now also added a request to raise the height level of the project to what is essentially a four and a half story project in the front. The additional height is "justified" by the need to have the first level of the parking garage, which was supposed to be underground, slightly above ground. Apparently the developer has decided they cannot dig down any further to obtain two completely submerged parking levels. This would leave the first story of residential units approximately 5 feet above ground level. The revision also included the elimination of the retail space on the ground level. The project also included the promise of increased landscaping around the exterior of the building. Finally, the revised project changed the planned use from senior housing to market based residential rental units. This last change increased the total number of residential units for the project over what was previously proposed.

Between twenty and thirty stakeholders were present and given an opportunity to express their opinions regarding the project. The unanimous opinion of all stakeholders in attendance was the revisions were unacceptable. The developer failed to adequately address any of the concerns that were previously raised by the WNC in its February letter to the Commission and those of the residents who attended the Planning Commission hearing.

The PLUM Committee voted unanimously to recommend the WNC Board deny the developer's request for support of the project. The Board will make its final recommendation at our September 10th meeting.

The PLUM Committee felt that the proposed use for this property is simply not an acceptable plan. The property is far too small to support a development of this size. The WNC PLUM Committee continues to share the same concerns as the stakeholders about the proposed development. I will discuss some of those concerns here, but I suspect these are only a snapshot of a myriad of concerns the community has:

- The proposed project remains a four story project. While the developer has removed the proposed commercial aspect, he has maintained the fourth story and as mentioned increased the height to an effective four and one-half story project. The WNC previously expressed that the surrounding community consists of single story houses, single story retail complexes and two story apartments and condominiums. We understand the developer terraced the back half of the property so that it would be two and one-half stories (due to the partially submerged ground level parking) facing the residents across the alley. This does not change the fact that the project is far too large for this location. This project would be taller than any building within several blocks of this location. The height would significantly change the character of the neighborhood.
- The developer has removed the commercial aspect of the property. His argument for doing so is that it would address our concerns regarding adequate parking. We also acknowledge that the developer claims he will have more guest parking than required by City code. His proposal allowed for 69 spaces, whereas the City parking requirement would require approximately 64 spaces. However, this does not allay the primary concern we stressed about parking for this project. City codes require approximately 1.5 spaces per unit. Unfortunately, this is completely inadequate to accommodate a typical two adult family. Most two adult families have at least two cars as most families have two working adults. This proposed project will include 1, 2, and 3 bedroom units raising the possibility of additional adults in the unit. This property sits on a corner of two very busy streets (Sherman Way and Mason Avenue [a main transportation corridor for Pierce College]). The curb on the west side and north side of the property are all red – meaning there is no street parking. There is no parking along Mason Ave either further south of the proposed project. The Committee and residents already recognize that we have a significant parking problem on the side streets (Fulbright Ave and Enadia Way and further in). We already suffer from overflow parking from apartment units on the north side of Sherman Way. Residents can barely find parking for themselves due to this overflow.
- The developer has made absolutely no plans to mitigate the increased traffic congestion this development will cause. The development calls for an entrance/exit from Mason Ave and one from Sherman Way. However, Mason Ave, as we have already expressed is extremely congested during morning and evening hours. Residents leaving and returning each day will find it nearly impossible to access or leave the property. The City may well require a right hand only turn for all cars leaving the property so that they can merge with the flow of traffic. This will increase the delay for residents of the property

The resulting queue of cars trying to enter the property will cause extensive delays and backups exasperating an already existing problem. Cars attempting to enter the property will wind up either queuing in the left most lane of the southbound traffic on Mason Avenue, or in the curbside lane for those cars traveling north on Mason Avenue. This will effectively leave one single lane each way (north/south) along Mason Ave that will have unrestricted traffic flows.

The situation along Sherman Way will be even worse. Because the project is on the corner, there is virtually no way to queue cars attempting to turn into the property for residents traveling east on Sherman Way. This will only be compounded by the fact that there is a bus stop immediately in front of the proposed project and the adjacent retail property has their only entrance/exit next to the proposed projects driveway. Since there is a median along Sherman Way, there would be no way for residents traveling west along Sherman Way to enter the property. This will likely cause residents to queue in the left hand turn lane and attempt a u-turn to try to queue in the eastbound traffic. However, again, since the property is on the corner, there is no safe way for a resident doing a u-turn to queue for entry from Sherman Way. Or they will simply attempt to queue for the Mason entrance – further complicating what we have already discussed.

We expect that residents would also see an increase in traffic along the side streets between Mason Ave and Oso Avenue and Sherman Way and Hart Street as residents of the proposed project would likely try to take the long way around to queue up for entrance along Mason in the northbound direction. Or residents would attempt to use the alley behind the property to reach Mason Ave. Please keep in mind this alley cannot be blocked as it provides entrances to the garages for the houses along Sherman Way and I believe for some of the houses on Enadia Way as well.

Both situations will cause backups at the intersection and could increase the possibility of traffic collisions. There is no turning signal at this intersection.

It is worth noting that we have had hearings for a number of other large projects (one near DeSoto and one on Roscoe and Mason). Both of these developers included a pull out so that traffic entering and exiting their property could pull out of the flow of traffic to queue and turn into the properties. This particular location is simply too small to accommodate such a pull out. The developer “addressed” this by promising that at least one car could pull into the driveway before entering the gated parking for the project. This was a disingenuous attempt to provide a “pull out” and lessen the traffic flow issues.

Just explaining the traffic flow problem is complicated and without a doubt a full traffic study would be needed. Quite frankly, we can see no possible mitigation for these problems.

- The developer’s proposed design remains attractive architecturally. However, the Board expressed concerns about the lack of landscaping plans. The developer professed to have included additional area for landscaping but could not provide any details. The Board and the community are very concerned about the character of the neighborhood. A quick drive along Sherman Way will demonstrate that almost all the apartment buildings east of the property along Sherman Way have significant grass areas in the front of the buildings. Immediately east of the property, and on the same side of Sherman Way, the adjoining properties are single family homes with typical front yards with landscaping. The same exists to the west along Sherman Way. The proposed development does not retain any of this look and feel and would simply be out of place. Because of the size of the property and the proposed size of the development there is no way the developer could provide for any significant landscaping. The set-backs simply aren’t there.
- The developer addressed plans for a common open space area within the center of the project for the residents. However, due to the limited footprint of the project, the developer seems to

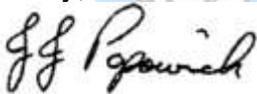
have included a common use room in the first level parking garage as part of the City required “open space”. This is again, another example of a disingenuous way of circumventing the intent of the City codes and the needs of the future residents of the property. Open space was really intended to be open air space such as an internal courtyard.

- The stakeholders also expressed concern about upkeep of the property to date. Over the last several years the property has been an eyesore. Trash has piled up along the rear of the property in the alley way and weeds have grown up around the edges of the “pit”. Since the green canvas has been introduced to hide the pit from view, it has been covered with graffiti. We bring this up as it does raise a concern about the commitment of the developer to be a good neighbor. No efforts appear to be made to upkeep the property until a hearing or meeting date approaches and then the bare minimum activity occurs.
- Residents of the nearby single family dwellings are extremely worried about the changes this proposed development will bring to the community. The increased traffic problems, the increased parking issues, and the encroachment of a multi-family dwelling in what is essentially a single family dwelling area will impact their quality of life and the property values. Please keep in mind that along the north side of Sherman Way, this area is all single family dwellings from Mason Ave to Oso Ave, and Sherman Way to Vanowen. The single family dwelling character also extends to the west on the other side of Mason Ave.

In our previous letter from the Board, we recognized this property is an eye sore. In fact, we currently refer to the property as the “great pit of Winnetka”. We continue to wish to see something done with the property. However, the Committee, and I expect the Board as well – based on our last discussion - feel this project is inappropriate for the area and will cause a significant detrimental impact to the surrounding area. Whatever is ultimately done with the property it has to be significantly scaled down so as not to cause a detrimental impact and to ensure it is a good fit for the community.

We strongly recommend the project be denied. We simply cannot see any way the developer can modify his plans to create a viable project for this location. If you have any questions or concerns please feel free to contact me at 818-648-6219.

Sincerely,



JJ Popowich
Treasurer, PLUM Committee Chair
Winnetka NC

C: Mark Tavakoli, MDT Developers
Bob Blumenfield, LA City Councilmember, 3rd District
LA City South Valley Planning Commission
Winnetka Stakedholders