

Minutes of the Huntington Park Planning Commission meeting held on January 16, 2008.

Chairman Molina called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. Present: Commissioners Eddie Benitez, Marial Sanders, Veronica Lopez, and Chairman Andy Molina; Absent: Commissioner Rosa Perez (due to professional commitment; declared excused by Chairman Molina). City staff members present were Director of Community Development Henry Gray, Planning Manager Gabriel Bautista, Senior Planner Eric Garcia, Assistant Planners Albert Fontanez and Gabriela Silva, Office Assistant Velvet Ruiz, Recording Secretary Genny Ochoa, and Interpreter Alicia Grubic (City-contracted).

Approval of Minutes

Motion by Commissioner Sanders, seconded by Commissioner Benitez, to approve the minutes of the meeting held January 2, 2008, as submitted. Motion carried as follows: Ayes: Commissioners Benitez, Sanders, Lopez, and Chairman Molina; Noes: None; Absent: Commissioner Perez.

Public Appearances

None.

Continued Public Hearings

None.

Public Hearings

A. CASE NO. 1861-DP/VAR: Request by Viridiana Garcia for approval of a Development Permit and Variance to construct a new residential dwelling unit on a property currently developed with two dwelling units at 5919 Riverside Avenue within the High Density Residential (R-H) Zone.

Assistant Planner Albert Fontanez presented the Administrative Report for Case No. 1861-DP/VAR, which included the Municipal Code Requirements and Required Findings for a Development Permit and Variance, Administrative Comments and Analysis, and Recommendations. Mr. Fontanez stated that the requested Variance is to deviate from the minimum lot width and lot size as required in the High Density Residential (R-H) Zone. However, the development complies with the more restrictive Medium Density Residential (R-M) Zone density and development standards, which City Department policy allows for a Variance request. Mr. Fontanez stated that the project is not expected to create negative impacts to the surrounding properties and that staff recommended the approval of Case No. 1861-DP/VAR, subject to Conditions Nos. 1-23, as outlined in staff's Administrative Report.

Chairman Molina declared the public hearing open and called for those wishing to speak in favor of or against Case No. 1861-DP/VAR. Mr. Oscar Macias (4023 60th St., Huntington Park), came forward and through Interpreter Grubic stated that there were too many insufficient parking problems in the area. Mr. Macias stated he was in favor of the project as long as enough parking was provided to support the residential development.

Mr. Victor Orozco (1354 S. Monterey Ave., Ontario, CA), project designer, came forward to speak in favor of the requested Development Permit and Variance. Mr. Orozco stated that the project complies with the Municipal Code parking requirements, and requested the approval of Case No. 1861-DP/VAR.

After a brief discussion and with no one else coming forward to speak for or against Case No. 1861-DP/VAR, Chairman Molina declared the public hearing closed.

A motion was made by Commissioner Lopez, seconded by Commissioner Sanders, to APPROVE CASE NO. 1861-DP/VAR, subject to Conditions Nos. 1-23 as outlined in staff's Administrative Report. The motion carried as follows: Ayes: Commissioners Benitez, Sanders, Lopez, and Chairman Molina; Noes: None; Absent: Commissioner Perez.

B. CASE NO. 1864-DP: Request by B. Raean Construction for approval of a Development Permit to construct a 4,196 sq. ft. expansion to a commercial building located at 6224 Pacific Boulevard, within the Pacific Paseo (PP) Zone.

Assistant Planner Gabriela Silva presented the Administrative Report for Case No. 1864-DP, which included the Municipal Code Requirements and Required Findings for a Development Permit, Administrative Comments and Analysis, and Recommendations. Ms. Silva stated that the existing commercial structure is currently being renovated and divided into seven tenant spaces and that, upon completion, the structure will comprise of 13 total tenant spaces. Ms. Silva added that the proposed project is deficient 17 parking spaces; however, the subject site is within 500 feet of a public parking lot in the Central Business District, allowing the applicant to pay in-lieu parking fees for the specified deficient parking spaces. Ms. Silva further added that the parking area would include a four-bike parking rack, in addition to perimeter landscaping. Ms. Silva stated that the proposed project is consistent with the City's General Plan and added that the Planning staff recommended approval of Case No. 1864-DP, subject to Conditions. Nos. 1-33 as outlined in staff's report.

Chairman Molina declared the public hearing open and called for those wishing to speak in favor of or against Case No. 1864-DP. Mr. Bahram Raean (3280 Motor Ave., #226, Los Angeles, CA), applicant, came forward to speak in favor of the request, and displayed a rendering of the commercial site.

With no one else wishing to speak in favor of Case No. 1864-DP, Chairman Molina declared the public hearing closed.

Director of Community Development Gray reported that the most recent use on the subject site was a "Pizza Loca" restaurant. Mr. Gray stated that the project was designed for

commercial retail establishments and that it was not yet known if restaurant uses were being contemplated. Commissioner Lopez expressed her concern for the deficient parking on Pacific Boulevard, and stated that payment of in-lieu parking fees would not reduce the existing parking problem.

Mr. Gray reported on a recent downtown parking analysis, which found that the downtown area was at 85% capacity in its parking utilization, with a 15% vacancy factor. Mr. Gray added that the City Council would be considering in the near future approval of increasing the in-lieu parking fees for the continued objective of creating more parking in the downtown area.

After a discussion, a motion was made by Commissioner Sanders, seconded by Commissioner Benitez, to APPROVE CASE NO. 1864-DP, subject to Conditions No. 1-33 as outlined in staff's Administrative Report. The motion carried as follows: Ayes: Commissioners Benitez, Sanders, and Chairman Molina; Noes: Commissioner Lopez; Absent: Commissioner Perez.

C. CASE NO. 1866-ZOA/GPA: Consideration of a resolution recommending to the City Council the adoption of Zoning Ordinance and General Plan Amendments to establish the Northwest Area Specific Plan in for two land tracts – one at the southeast corner of Slauson Avenue and Alameda Street, and the other at the northwest corner of Slauson Avenue and Pacific Boulevard; and recommendation that the City Council certify the Environmental Impact Report associated with the proposed Amendments.

Planning Manager Gabriel Bautista conducted a PowerPoint presentation summarizing the Administrative Report for Case No. 1866-ZOA-GPA, which included the Administrative Comments and Analysis. Mr. Bautista stated that the proposed amendments would modify the land use designation, zoning designation and development standards for properties within the Northwest Area Specific Plan area, encompassing approximately 80 acres. The Specific Plan area, located on the north and south of Slauson Avenue from Alameda Street to Pacific Boulevard, and west of Pacific Boulevard from Slauson Avenue to 52nd Street is made up of four land use subdistricts, each having their exclusive features, briefly summarized as follows:

Alameda/Slauson Gateway: Streetscape enhancement; commercial/retail emphasis;
Slauson/Pacific Gateway: Street-oriented, pedestrian-focused development; prominent commercial/retail district; mixed use development;
Community Commercial: Smaller-scale commercial development; street-oriented, pedestrian-focused development;
Residential/Commercial: Functional connections between residential and commercial uses; variety of residential development types.

Mr. Bautista stated that the Zoning Ordinance amendment would change the zoning designation for the properties within the Specific Plan to “Northeast Area Specific Plan.” The General Plan amendment would add the Northwest Area Specific Plan to the list of land uses within the General Plan, amending the land use map by changing the designation for the properties bound by the Specific Plan to “Northeast Area Specific Plan.”

Mr. Bautista stated that, in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act, an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) had been prepared concurrently with the Northwest Area Specific Plan document preparation. Mr. Bautista stated that the EIR concluded that redevelopment within the Specific Plan area may potentially cause temporary unavoidable significant environmental effects during construction of development projects, in addition to significant unavoidable adverse effects to traffic and transportation during operations. However, the anticipated impacts are acceptable in order to gain the potential economic development benefits of the proposed Specific Plan. Mr. Bautista added that staff would properly document cultural resources, i.e., historical industrial/manufacturing structures, if demolition would become unavoidable. However, the proposed Specific Plan is an advance-planning document, which is designed to increase commercial land uses in the area, implement a streamlined administrative project review process, as well as improve the aesthetics in the northwest area of the City.

Mr. Bautista reviewed the Required Findings for a General Plan Amendment and Zoning Ordinance Amendment, and stated that staff recommended that the Planning Commission adopt the proposed resolution recommending to the City Council approval of the Zoning Ordinance and General Plan amendments, as well as City Council certification of the EIR associated with the proposed amendments. Mr. Bautista noted that prior to the public hearing for Case No. 1866-ZOA/GPA, the following correspondence was submitted to the Planning Division staff:

1. Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro) – Specifically in response to review of the Draft EIR for the Northwest Area Specific Plan: an outline of suggested additional elements that “should be included for the final EIR”); and
2. Marshall Barth (business/property owner, Avon Rubber Company, 2001 Belgrave Ave., Huntington Park) – Expressing opposition to the proposed zone change, which would reduce the value of his property, and the inability to consider expansion and/or improvement to the business operation due to the City’s “indecision with respect to the project actually becoming a reality...”

Director of Community Development Gray stated that the subject area consists of mainly industrial sites, which are underutilized and in physical disrepair. Mr. Gray further stated that although the proposed zone change allowing the revitalization of the area with commercial development has the potential to increase property values, it would affect the properties by restricting their expansion. However, the subject properties/land uses would become legal, non-conforming uses, allowing their current uses to continue. Mr. Gray added that the City is working to bring a Costco Wholesale store to the Specific Plan area. Mr. Gray further added that the Specific Plan would benefit property owners by establishing rules for anticipated uses in the northwest area, and that there would not be a direct impact on the continued use of existing businesses.

Chairman Molina declared the public hearing open and called for those wishing to speak in favor of or against Case No. 1866-ZOA/GPA. The following is a list of those who came forward and spoke against Case No. 1866-ZOA/GPA, and their respective comments:

1. Eugene Gleason (Gleason Law Offices, A PLC, 15651 E. Imperial Hwy., Ste. 202A, La Mirada, CA) – Mr. Gleason presented to the Commission and staff a letter as formal objection on behalf of property owners of 2555 55th Street and 5425 Pacific Boulevard, Huntington Park. Mr. Gleason stated that i) the City’s Notice of Public Hearing for the subject matter did not provide sufficient information on the proposed amendments and did not contain “specific information” on the EIR; ii) his clients were not provided with adequate time to review the proposed amendments and proposed certification of the EIR; iii) the proposed zone change would devalue the marketability of properties in the subject area; and iv) the EIR “ignores the ripple effect” on negative impacts to parking on Slauson Avenue;
2. Harry Torres (City resident) – Mr. Torres stated that if the City plans to develop residential properties in the area, there is a need for parks, which are not proposed within the Specific Plan area. Mr. Torres further expressed his opposition to relocation of industrial businesses, resulting in loss of revenue and business activity in the City;
3. Eugene A. Gleason, Jr. (company president, 5921 Templeton St., “G”, Huntington Park)– Mr. Gleason questioned the “human impact” from the loss of high-paying jobs resulting from the elimination of the existing industrial businesses within the area. Mr. Gleason stated that properties within the subject area “have extreme contamination” and questioned who would pay for land clean-up costs of those properties;
4. Leilani Hickman (resident, 6413 Marbrisa Ave., Huntington Park) – Ms. Hickman expressed concern for 1) the potential increase in traffic along Randolph Street generated by commercial development, as well as from a proposed high school within three blocks of her property; and 2) an increase in the amount of trash generated by new commercial development;
5. Nick Alexander (Nick Alexander Imports, 6333 S. Alameda St., Los Angeles [Huntington Park]) – Mr. Alexander spoke against the proposed zone change, and stated that commercial and residential zones require more (municipal) “attention and services” than industrial zones. Mr. Alexander stated that the proposed development project has been delayed to the extent that area property owners have been unable to expand or remodel their existing businesses. Mr. Alexander expressed his opposition to the establishment of a Costco Wholesale store and added that the proposals presented were a “horrible idea.” Mr. Alexander suggested that the City “romance” a “clean industry, high-tech” business, e.g., Microsoft Corp., which would offer high paying jobs in the City;
6. George Faults (property owner, 5975 Santa Fe Ave., Huntington Park) – Mr. Faults expressed his strong opposition to the proposed area redevelopment as it would be “impossible” to relocate his auto/truck repair business to another city. Mr. Faults stated that he did not want to leave the City as a result of a Costco project requiring his business relocation;

7. Property/business owner (name not available, 2506 54th Street, Huntington Park) came forward and stated that she did not understand the status of any potential redevelopment in the area and its possible effect on her small business; and asked if information would be provided at the present public hearing. (Mr. Gray advised the property owner that as much information would be provided, and that she could follow up with staff to obtain additional information.);
8. Vineeta Navani, (attorney, for Arnold K. Graham of Graham Vaage & Cisneros, 500 N. Brand Blvd., Glendale, CA, representing Frank Spitzer, property owner of several properties located in Huntington Park, and various additional properties owners in the City) – Ms. Navani summarized correspondence from Mr. Graham expressing the owners’ objection to the proposed Zoning Ordinance and General Plan amendments, outlining the stated reasons: i) inadequate notice to owners; ii) the proposed Zoning and General Plan amendments are intended to reduce the allowable uses of the owners’ properties, and will result in an uncompensated taking of private property; iii) the proposed Zoning and General Plan changes are not supported by the requisite environmental analyses pursuant to the CEQA; iv) deficient transportation and traffic analysis; and v) the Draft Program EIR (DPEIR) purported discussion of project alternatives is insufficient, and in conflict with recent case law. Ms. Navani requested that the public hearing be continued for 60 days to adequately inform the affected property owners, enabling them to “meaningfully participate in this governmental process;”
9. James Rosenkranz (business owner, L.A. Galvanizing Company, 2524 E. 52nd St., Huntington Park) – Mr. Rosenkranz stated that his business property is located in a heavily industrial area, which is unsuitable for residential development. Mr. Rosenkranz further stated that due to increased work volume, he would like to expand his business operation in its present location, as it would be difficult to relocate to another city due to the industrial nature of the business. Mr. Rosenkranz added that due to the uncertainty of the potential redevelopment in the area, the growth of his business operation is limited;
10. Chris Tuppen (property/business owner in the City) - Mr. Tuppen stated that a 2004 City economic development plan called for the retention of industrial uses in the City. Mr. Tuppen stated that developing residential dwellings amid industrial uses did “not make any sense,” and requested that the subject area zoning designation remain industrial and not be eliminated;
11. Lee Lewis (president, Acme Castings, Inc., 2319 Randolph St., Huntington Park) – Mr. Lewis stated that he objected to the proposed Zoning Ordinance and General Plan amendments and summarized his submitted comments as follows: i) objection to the timing/adequacy of the public hearing notice; ii) objection to Planning Commissioner consideration of the project before the finalization and certification of the EIR, as well as comments received after the public hearing and before the public comment period ends; iii) objection to the lack of a certified Final EIR, citing that the Planning Commission cannot fulfill its duty “until it is fully informed by the completion of the Final EIR;” and iv) objection to the project until the City meets with affected property owners to discuss impacts, potential eminent domain action, and consideration of traffic mitigation measures within the Specific Plan area;

12. Dr. Gomez (property owner, 2691 Randolph St., Huntington Park) – Dr. Gomez stated that there was lack of clarity and information regarding the proposed project. Dr. Gomez added that he was not anti-growth or renewal, but that property owners needed to be better informed on a regular and timely basis regarding the proposed Zoning and General Plan amendments;
13. Mike Huerta (property owner, 2475 Slauson Ave., Huntington Park) – Mr. Huerta stated that his property value would be affected if the proposed zone change would change the property use to legal non-conforming. Mr. Huerta added that the City of Huntington Park needed improvement, but without enacting any zone changes. Mr. Huerta added the establishment of a Costco would force businesses out of Huntington Park, and further added that he was against the proposed zone change; and
14. Efrain Gonzalez (business owner, 2461 E. Slauson Ave., Huntington Park) – Mr. Gonzalez stated that the City had enough commercial properties and that proposed commercial project would likely “go down” (fail).

With no one else coming forward to speak for or against Case No. 1866-ZOA/GPA, Chairman Molina declared the public hearing closed.

Mr. Gray thanked the members of the audience for their input. Mr. Gray stated that the public hearing notice issued to property owners for the consideration of the proposed Zoning Ordinance and General Plan amendments, and certification of the EIR was the start of the process and emphasized that the public noticing requirements had been met. Mr. Gray stated that the City Council would make the final decision on the proposed zone change. Mr. Gray further stated that, at their request, staff would meet with property owners to provide additional information on the Zoning Code and General Plan amendments, as well as the potential commercial development proposed within the Specific Plan area.

Mr. Gray clarified that the proposed zone change would not prohibit the continued use of existing businesses and, if the zone change were approved, those businesses would be able to continue their existing operations. Mr. Gray recognized that industrial uses provide good-paying jobs and that there might be a reasonable basis to add commercial uses rather than make the proposed zone change. Mr. Gray stated that the public input process would assist in making the final decisions on the proposed amendments.

Mr. Gray added that all comments received regarding the EIR would be addressed in the final EIR, which would ultimately be decided upon and certified by the City Council. Mr. Gray gave the following options for Planning Commission action:

- 1) Adoption of resolution recommending to the City Council the approval of the Zoning Code and General Plan amendments and certification of the EIR, and proceed with the deliberation of the Specific Plan as recommended by staff;
- 2) continuation of the public hearing to allow the Commission to further review the Specific Plan;

- 3) approval of staff's recommendation subject to modification to the Specific Plan and proposed amendments based upon comments received; and
- 4) denial of the proposed resolution recommending to the City Council the approval of the Zoning Ordinance and General Plan amendments, and certification of the EIR for the Specific Plan.

A discussion was held. The Commissioners concurred that additional time was needed for further review of the Specific Plan and recommended Zoning Ordinance and General Plan amendments. Commissioner Sanders stated that she opposed residential development in an industrial area and that she agreed that the City should be revitalized through the improvement and retention of existing industrial properties and businesses.

Mr. Gray encouraged property owners to contact City staff to obtain additional information on the process for the recommended approval of the proposed Zoning Ordinance and General Plan amendments, and EIR certification leading to a potential commercial development project in the Northwest Specific Plan area.

A motion was made by Commissioner Lopez, seconded by Commissioner Benitez, to continue the public hearing for Case No. 1866-ZOA/GPA to the Planning Commission meeting of March 5th, 2008. The motion carried as follows: Ayes: Commissioners Benitez, Sanders, Lopez, and Chairman Molina; Noes: None; Absent: Commissioner Perez.

New Business

None.

Information Items

Mr. Gray informed the Commissioners that Walgreens is in plan check; and that staff has contacted Panda Express regarding its potential establishment in the City's downtown.

Subjects Presented by the Planning Commission

None.

Adjournment

There being no further business, Chairman Molina declared the meeting adjourned at 9:02 p.m.

Chairman

ATTEST:

Secretary