

Background Information – Proposed Request re West LA Commons

From the WRAC Land Use and Planning Committee (LUPC)

Sept. 11, 2023

Motion: The ____ NC/CC requests that the City support the WLASNC's request for a public park and skateboard facility as part of the West L.A. Commons project, while maintaining high-density housing and numerous affordable units. The park would serve the 2,500 tenants of the project, the 5,000 neighbors who live to the south and don't have a park (many are low-income households), and visitors from Westwood, Mar Vista, Bel Air-Beverly Crest and Brentwood who visit the Felicia Mahood Senior Center and the West L.A. Municipal Building.

APPROVED by WRAC LUPC.

Facts and background:

1. The WLASNC resolutions to request a public park and skateboard facility have passed unanimously, which demonstrate strong grass-roots support.
2. The WLASNC has proposed several options that allow for a large number of units (680-805 units), and to increase the buildings' heights along Santa Monica Blvd., in order to accommodate a park.
3. Both high amounts of housing and more public open space can be achieved in the WLASNC proposals.
4. The WLASNC has noted numerous public subsidy programs that should be fully explored and can make the project financially feasible.

Findings and justification:

1. Enhanced open space is an insufficient substitute for a real public park, and many of the project's amenities will be private and not accessible by neighbors.
2. This is the last chance to build a real public park in the neighborhood. It is public land, and Quimby funds are available from the last 20 years of non-stop development in West LA (none have been spent in West LA in the past two decades).

Impact on region: The Westside NC and Brentwood CC are located within a mile of the site, and a 3rd (Mar Vista) is located within 2 miles.

Contact: J. Ross (WLASNC & WRAC LUPC member); M. Zar (PPCC & WRAC LUPC Chair)

Background:

Previous WLASNC resolutions:

City of Los Angeles - Planning Dept., HCID

County of Los Angeles - Community Development Authority, Dept. of Regional Planning

Re: Resolution - West L.A. Commons - design revisions

City: Case # - CPC-2022-3679-DB-VCU-MCUP-SPR-HCA. ENV-2022-1357-EAF.

County: Case # - PRJ2022-000303, RPPL2022-000742.

To the City and County,

At the Jun. 29, 2022, meeting of the West Los Angeles Sawtelle N.C., the Board of Directors voted 10-0-0, to request the following design changes for the West L.A. Commons project, and authorize the Chair to submit Community Impact Statements in the future:

1. 20,000-30,000 contiguous sf of parkland (grass, playgrounds) shall be added on the south side of the site across from the existing apartments on the south side of Iowa Ave.
2. A permanent skateboarding facility (ramps, steps, pipes, tree planters) shall be added onsite.
3. The height of the apartment buildings may increase to accommodate units. The height increase should be in the buildings in the center or north of the project, away from the existing apartments on the south side of Iowa Ave.
4. The senior center may be moved and incorporated into the Municipal Building, Courthouse or other new apartment buildings.

Findings and justifications:

1. Affordable housing and moderate-income housing are needed to allow current residents to remain living in West L.A.
2. Public parks and open space are already insufficient in West L.A. for its large population, especially with numerous developments and increasing population. 926 units with 2,500+ residents are proposed for West L.A. Commons, and 8,300 residents already live in the neighborhood to the south, which has no park.
3. The courthouse plaza has a renowned legacy in the skateboarding community.

/s/ Jamie L. Keeton

Jamie L. Keeton, Chair WLASNC

cc: Jason Douglas, Gaby Markley, Council District #11 (Jason.P.Douglas@LACity.org, Gaby.Markley@LACity.org)
Fernando Morales, Zachary Gaidzik, Supervisor District #3 (FMorales@BOS.LACounty.gov, ZGaidzik@BOS.LACounty.gov)

L.A. City Planning Dept.
L.A. County Regional Planning Dept.

Re: Resolution: West L.A. Commons - update on integrating public park and public skateboard facilities into the project

To the City,

At the Aug. 2, 2023, meeting of the West Los Angeles Sawtelle N.C., the Board of Directors voted 12-0-0, to request that CD11, SD3 and Developer update on how the NC's requested designs changes (public park with grass and playground, and permanent skateboard facility) are being integrated into the design and are being included as an Alternative in the EIR, and provide the project's financial documents to the public, and authorize the Chair to submit a Community Impact Statement:

The development can be financially feasible as designed, but with adding a public park on the south side, along Iowa Ave., for numerous reasons:

1. The 8-story buildings are almost twice as large as the previous height limits of 4-5-stories in the area, so far more density is allowed than in the past. If more units are needed, then taller buildings can be built along Santa Monica Blvd.
2. The \$35,000,000 land cost for the State/County courthouse equates to \$36,000 per unit, which is far less than market value of land in West LA. The City can increase that to \$125,000-\$150,000 and

- capture that NPV value in a lease, and still be within market value. The cost also equates to \$7,000,000 per acre, which is far less than the \$20,000,000 per acre value of land in West L.A.
3. Numerous government programs are available for subsidy to fill any funding gaps: State of California Housing and Community Development (Infill Infrastructure Grant, Affordable Housing Sustainable Communities, Veterans Housing and Homeless Program, CalHFA - mental illness), County of Los Angeles Community Development Authority, City of Los Angeles (Housing Dept., previous Prop. HHH funding, new Real Estate Transfer Tax program).
 - a. Newer private moderate-income bond programs are also available.
 4. The EIR and its technical reports and financial analyses are still in process, so an Alternative with a public park can be easily added at this time. Note that the EIR cannot consider finances, so there is no financial reason to prevent another Alternative with a public park from being included now in draft EIR.
 - a. There is no reason to wait until after the draft EIR to add this Alternative.

Findings and Justifications:

1. This is a significant and easy “opportunity” for the City and County to support more open space, and expand beyond the little required open space in the project.
2. The developers’ outreach was one-directional, and the city, county and developer did not organize a charrette about the actual project, its site planning or building design (our NC had to organize the design charrette instead, which was strongly in favor of a public park and skateboard facility).
 - a. The developers organized a limited charrette that focused only on the open space that they chose to provide, and tried to pass it off as a full design charrette with community collaboration.
 - b. The developer only allowed the community to tinker with small items like type of flowers and playground equipment.
3. The NC rejects “enhanced open space” instead of a green public park with grass and play equipment.
 - a. “Enhanced open space” is not a substitute for a real public park, and it is already required, so it is not a community benefit. Giving it a fancy name will not change our request for an actual public park.
 - b. The project proposes mainly concrete walkways, and many amenities are private for tenants only. That is insufficient for 3,000 new residents and the 5,000 residents who live south of the WLA Civic Center with no nearby park (many are low-income).
 - c. Our requests are specifically for a real public park and full skateboard facility.
4. If a public park is not built here, our neighborhood will never get another park.
 - a. This is public land, and the city and county can easily fund a park here with free land and ample Quimby fees from the past 20 years of non-stop development in our neighborhood.

Ex parte communications: None disclosed by any committee members.

Disclosures and conflicts of interest: None disclosed by any committee members.

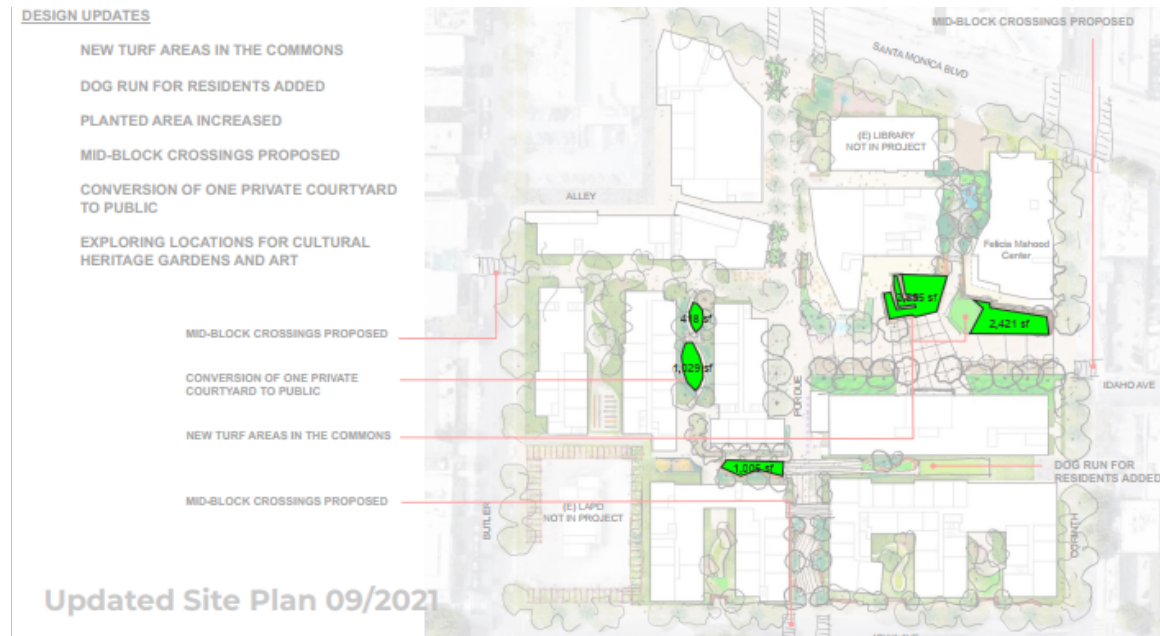
To government agencies: Only the Chair and designated Boardmembers may testify to public agencies on behalf of the West L.A. Sawtelle NC. The Board requests that the Council Office and private/non-profit entities do not testify or speculate on behalf of the NC.

/s/ Walton Chiu

Walton Chiu, Chair WLASNC

cc: Star Parsamyan, Gabriela Medina, Michael Amster, Jeff Khau, Council District #11
Zachary Gaidzik, Supervisor District #3

Proposed green space (limited for 2,000 new residents and 5,000 neighbors):



Site plan: 8 buildings of 7-8 stories (950 units) with limited green/open space



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WLASNC proposals of public parks of varying sizes, while retaining high density
800 units with 23,000-sf public park



765 units with 25,000-sf public park



MID-BLOCK CROSSINGS PROPOSED

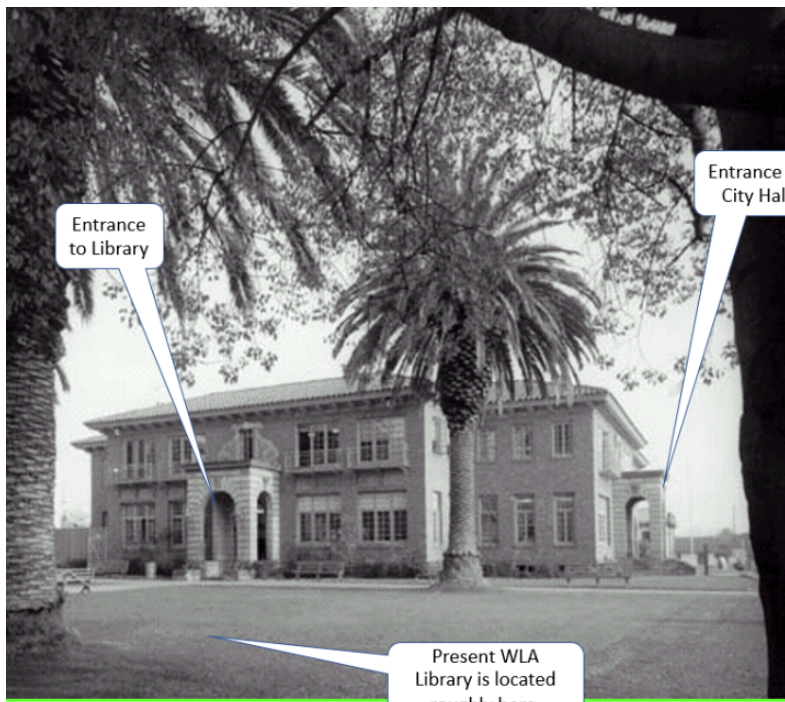


Pershing Square: All concrete and miniscule grass, pedestrian access is blocked by tall stairs and concrete planters and walls.

The design is so bad that city held a competition to re-design it to provide more green space, and more direct access from the sidewalk:



This is the old Sawtelle Library, with lots of flat, grass in front of it along the sidewalk for recreation:



WLA Library and City Hall
Purdue & Santa Monica Blvd - 1930's