

Greater Wilshire Neighborhood Council



Greater Wilshire Neighborhood Council Land Use Committee Meeting

September 1, 2009

Approved by the Committee
November 3, 2009

MINUTES

Call to Order

A duly noticed meeting of the Land Use Committee of the Greater Wilshire Neighborhood Council (“GWNC”) was held on Tuesday, September 1, 2009, at the Wilshire United Methodist Church, 4350 Wilshire Blvd., Committee Chair James Wolf called the meeting to order at 7:07 p.m.

Roll Call

Committee member Elizabeth Fuller called the roll. Committee members in attendance at the roll call were: Patricia Carroll, Cindy Chvatal, Elizabeth Fuller, Michael Genewick, Jane Gilman, Patricia Lombard and James Wolf. Committee members Yigal Arens and John Gresham joined the meeting later. Committee members Charles Dougherty, Rudy Gintel and Alison Hannon were absent.

Ms. Fuller stated that a quorum was present.

Land Use Committee Protocols

The Committee reviewed draft protocols for land use issues authored by GWNC board member Jane Usher. Committee member Patricia Lombard moved the committee adopt the protocols. The motion was seconded by Committee Member Cindy Chvatal. Committee member Mike Genewick suggested that the word “standards” in the document be changed to “guidelines,” and Ms. Lombard amended her motion to acknowledge the change. Ms. Chvatal seconded the amended motion. It passed unanimously.

Review of Recent Land Use Notifications

The committee members agreed to begin this review process at our next meeting.

Old Business

Wilshire-La Brea Project – Committee Member Elizabeth reported that the City Planning Commission approved all eight of the developer's entitlement requests, including the zoning changes neighbors had objected to. The next stop for the project will be the City Council PLUM Committee, but a hearing date has not been set yet.

See's Candies/132 S. Manhattan Parking Lot – Committee Member Patti Carroll reported that the Zoning Administration denied a CUP application for commercial use of the residential lot on Manhattan Place. The case will remain open for appeals for 15 days.

See's Candies Landmark Application & Renovations – Ms. Carroll reported that the landmark application has been approved. The project architect, Chris Pak, presented his plans for restoration/renovation, which include a brick façade and new windows/doors on the south face of the building. Chris Nichols, representing the LA Conservancy, expressed misgivings about historically inaccurate amounts of glass in the design. Discussion resulted in some confusion about the most current version of the proposed design and whether or not it had been vetted by the Office of Historic Resources. Ms. Carroll offered to contact Lambert Giessinger to verify his position before the upcoming GWNC Board meeting.

Mobil Station CUP -- Ms. Carroll reported that the station owners' representatives met with the St. Andrews Square Neighborhood Association in July, but did not gain support from the group. City Council District 4 has also opposed the application. There was no further news or action on this issue.

New Business

Dubai/Cordon Bleu – 4653 W. Beverly Blvd. – Ms. Carroll reported that the business is an adult karaoke club which has a long-standing restaurant-level ABC license, but no CUP. After being cited by police, the owners are applying for CUP as family restaurant that also serves alcohol. Despite neighbors' concerns that it is not a real restaurant, owners' representative Steve Kim assured the committee that the business is now operating with a new kitchen and a full menu.

City Council representative Renee Weitzer pointed out that even if that is true, the business is currently operating illegally, without a valid CUP for alcohol sales, and said that before the new application can even be considered, they must be in compliance with the law.

Deborah Willis, president of the St. Andrews Square Neighborhood Association, said her neighborhood opposes the application, mostly because of "oversaturation" of alcohol vendors in the neighborhood.

Sebastian Rhein, owner of the Dover Apartments, next door to the business, said he also opposes the application, citing the owners' unresponsiveness to numerous complaints about noise and other issues from his building's tenants.

Neighbor Rory Cunningham said a visit to the club revealed that it makes money selling full bottles of liquor, without mixers, in private rooms, and food offerings were minimal.

City Council representative Doug Mensman said that if the business wants to be a nightclub it should be applying for a nightclub license, not a restaurant license.

Committee Member Patricial Lombard moved that we recommend the GWNC oppose the CUP application. Committee Member Cindy Chvatal seconded the motion. Committee Member Yigal Arens suggested we add language to the recommendation, saying we'd reconsider our position if the business does make efforts to become a full-service restaurant. But other committee members said such language wasn't necessary, and that if such changes are made, we could reconsider our position. The vote was 8-1 (Arens) to recommend opposing the CUP application.

Vodvil Restaurant – 5722 W. Melrose – Owner Josh Saltman said that he is in early discussions for a new concept restaurant at this site, which would feature hosted games and karaoke for an upscale clientele, targeting special occasions. (A website for the project can be found at <http://www.clubvodvil.com>) Mr. Saltman said he's just seeking input at this point, and is unsure whether or not he'd need to apply for a new liquor license and/or CUP for this use. Ms. Weitzer said he would need to apply for a CUB (to serve alcohol) and a CUX (for live entertainment). In response to further questions from the committee, Mr. Mensman added that CUX permits do include specific restrictions for a business' operation.

Cell Phone Tower – 535 S. Gramercy – T-Mobile is seeking to put new cell phone towers (disguised as chimneys) and equipment cabinets on the roof of a landmarked apartment building. According to representative Jin Park, the goal is to increase coverage and call volume capacity in the surrounding area. Alternate locations on Wilshire Blvd. were considered but rejected because of "shadow" issues from other buildings.

Several neighbors present opposed the application based on the historic status of the building and public coverage maps from T-Mobile, which show complete coverage in area.

Committee Chair Jim Wolf asked Mr. Park to explore moving the proposed equipment toward the center of building (or putting equipment cabinets inside the building) to minimize visible changes in the roofline.

Committee Member John Gresham moved that we recommend opposing the application as presented. Committee Member Mike Genewick seconded the motion. Committee Member Patricial Carroll proposed amending the motion to state that we will not approve any structure on a landmarked residential building, but there were no seconds for the amendment, and Committee Member John Gresham noted that the original motion would require that any changes in plans be reviewed by the committee at a future meeting.

Chairman Wolf noted that we may want to develop a standing policy regarding cell towers on historic buildings and/or in residential areas.

The motion passed unanimously.

Pawn Shop – 5174 W. Melrose – An existing fireplace mantel business at this location has applied for a CUP to turn part of the space into a pawn shop. The Zoning Administration has already heard the application case, but the file may still be open for comment. City Council representative Renee Weitzer said that even though the hearing has been held, we could still report our position to the Zoning Administration. After some discussion about concerns such as parking, increased traffic, increased business hours, etc, Mr. Wolf agreed to draft a list of recommendations for the business (e.g. no sales of firearms or ammunition, etc.), which would also include a list of specific concerns.

Increase in City Fees for Land Use Appeals – According to Ms. Weitzer, the City has already passed the fee increases, which boost fees for individuals from \$50 to \$150 for most land use appeals. (This includes anyone within standard notification distance from a project, including neighborhood associations. Fees for appeals by people outside the notification area will now be \$500. Appeal fees for applicants are now 85% of the original filing fee.) Since the changes already in effect, it is too late to weigh in on the vote, but we can still pass the fee information on to our stakeholders.

Revisions to Cultural Heritage Ordinance – Stakeholder Rory Cunningham reported that the Cultural Heritage Commission, at its July 10 hearing, continued discussion of the proposed changes until Sept. 10. Downtown business owners have been arguing that interiors shouldn't be covered in the historic designation of buildings. But the new draft ordinance proposes that interiors be included if the CHC deems them important enough to be designated. Other changes in proposed draft include a \$500 landmark application fee for non-owners (it used to be free for owners or non-owners, and would still be free for owners). Owners would also now be notified of applications, and a stay of demolition would be declared while an application is considered.

Committee Member Elizabeth Fuller moved that we support the proposed ordinance, but only if and to the extent that existing protections for the interiors are retained.

Committee Member John Gresham seconded the motion. After some discussion about the complete contents of the proposed ordinance, however, and whether or not we want to support it in full, Ms. Fuller withdrew her motion.

Committee Member Yigal Arens moved that we recommend supporting the retention of protections for building interiors, as currently stated in the draft ordinance. The motion passed by a vote of 6-1 (Genewick) in favor.

Yavneh Hebrew Academy Ruling – Mr. Wolf reported that the appeal under consideration claimed that the original hearing examiner had overstepped his boundaries

in allowing a secondary use of the property which was not outlined in the original CUP. Ms. Weitzer reported, however, that the appeal was denied, which brings the issue to a close.

AT&T Above-Ground Facility – Lucerne & Clinton – City Council representative Doug Mensman explained that this electronics cabinet is one of 5,000 going in around the city, and Mr. Wolf explained that the equipment cannot be buried under ground. Committee Member Patti Carroll said neighbors had initially been concerned until they learned more about the equipment...but now they agree that it seems to be a non-issue.

Committee Member Comments & Reports

There were no additional comments or reports

Public Comments

There were no additional public comments

Announcements & Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 10:37 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth Fuller
Committee Member