Minutes for HHWNC’s PLUM Committee Meeting on April 4, 2019

PLUM Committee members Patty Dyer, Orrin Feldman, Oren Katz, Danielle Mead were present. There was a sufficient number of committee members present to establish a quorum.

Naomi Kobrin, HHWNC’s Area 4 chair, also was present to participate and vote with regard to the agenda item for the Walgreen’s site, which is in HHWNC’s Area 4.

Orrin Feldman called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m.

Approximately 10 additional stakeholders were present.

The draft minutes of the committee’s prior meeting held on March 7, 2019, were discussed. A motion to approve the draft meeting minutes was approved by a vote of 3 to 0.

1. 6801 West Hollywood Boulevard - is the Hollywood & Highland shopping center, which is where Walgreens Co. has a drug store. The site is located in HHWNC’s Area 4 and City Council District 13.

Michael Horgan, and Hector Perez, who both work for Walgreens Co., and Jennifer Oden, Esq., who is Walgreen’s outside counsel, represented Walgreens Co.

The Walgreens team asked the committee to support Walgreens Co.’s application to the City’s Planning Department for a conditional use permit to sell a full line of alcoholic beverages for off-site consumption at the store, which has been open since July, 2018. The store’s proposed hours of operation were 7 a.m. to 2 a.m. daily, but the proposed hours for alcohol sales were from 9 a.m. to midnight daily. No single serving items would be sold.

Ms. Oden explained that (i) this Walgreens store does not sell or fill any RXs, but just sells “front end” merchandise, and (ii) that Walgreens had purchased an ABC license from the Fresh & Easy store, which had operated a few blocks to the west, until Fresh & Easy closed down the store there, in order to use for this store’s state/ABC liquor license. Walgreens was willing to provide a security guard from 6 p.m. to 12:30 p.m., and to confine liquor sales to a small part of the store, which was mentioned as being approximately 5% of the store’s square footage.

Oren Katz spoke out strongly against permitting any alcohol sales at this site. He didn’t think it was appropriate to encourage alcohol consumption in the large public spaces at the Hollywood & Highland shopping center or in the 6-level subterranean garage below the shopping center.

LAPD SLO Ben Thompson was asked whether LAPD had an opinion or position on whether Walgreens should be allowed to sell alcohol on this particular site. SLO Thompson responded that the LAPD Hollywood Division’s position was to support the local businesses and tourism, and that it was up to the neighborhood council to weigh in as to whether it would be appropriate to have alcohol beverages sold at the shopping center for “off-site consumption”.

Others committee members expressed concern about Officer Thompson’s position. They thought that LAPD should evaluate the public safety risks of allowing people to buy alcohol for off site consumption in the shopping center and its garage.

Susan Hunter asked if the sales could begin initially with just beer and wine?

Following the discussion, the committee voted unanimously (5 to 0) to recommend to HHWNC’s Board that HHWNC oppose any conditional use permit to sell, beer, wine or any alcoholic beverages at this Walgeens’ store location in the Hollywood & Highland Shopping Center.

1. 1729 - 1741 Whitley Avenue - is the site of 6 existing apartment buildings, which have approximately 40 rent stabilized apartments. The site is in HHWNC’s Area 3 and City Council District 3.

Matthew Hayden represented Fairborz Mosfegh, who is doing business there as Whitley Apartments, LLC.

Mr. Hayden explained that the owner’s application to demolish the 6 existing apartment buildings and build a new 10 story hotel was still pending at the City’s Planning Departments, but that the owner had retained a consultant to provide enhanced relocation benefits to the existing tenants.

Several tenants were at the meeting along with a translator to facilitate the discussion.

The tenants explained that their landlord hadn’t maintained the building well, had removed heaters during cold weather, and never replaced the heaters. They also explained that the landlord had threatened them with eviction when they had asked for repairs, and also asked them to sign new leases if and when he would agree to undertake the requested repairs.

Mr. Hayden responded that, with regard to the heaters having been removed, that some of the buildings’ units weren’t allowed to have full kitchens, and that the ovens in those units had been removed. He explained that some units were permitted to have only hot plates, rather than full kitchens including ovens.

There was a discrepancy about the actual number of occupied units. The tenants said that maybe 5 or 6 units were vacant, but mr. Hayden thought that the number of vacant units might be as high as 15 units.

Following the discussion, the committee voted unanimously (4 to 0) to recommend that HHWNC’s Board reiterate its strong opposition to (i) the proposed demolition of the existing six (6) apartment buildings, (ii) the pending application seeking approval to build a new hotel on the site, and (iii) the owner’s application claiming that his proposed hotel should be exempt under CA CEQA. Further, HHWNC recommends that the City, including the City’s Housing Department, should inspect the six (6) apartment buildings and order such repairs and other maintenance as the City shall determine to be appropriate.

3. Public Comments on non-agendized items.

There were no public comments on non-agendized items.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:57 p.m.