

Dear Wilmont members, residents and friends,

Notwithstanding hundreds of resident emails recommending against the Activity Centers, Tier 3 on Wilshire and 1801 Wilshire Avenue, Commissioners voted at the Planning Commission meeting last Wednesday maintain the Activity Centers and Tier 3, and upzone the entire 2-acre 1801 parcel to Mixed Use Blvd. (denser & higher). The Commission did advance changes to the LUCE map (Land Use Circulation Element), keeping the 'A-lots' residential (property adjacent - usually in the rear - to commercial spaces that us often used for parking.)

LUCE amendments must be "noticed" by the Planning Commission with a Resolution of Intention (ROI) and subsequently approved by a City Council majority to become law. Council *cannot* consider a LUCE amendment that is not advanced and supported by a majority of the Planning Commission, and said amendment recommendation can be appealed before the Council. In an adroit parliamentary move, Commissioner Richard McKinnon insisted on a vote for Tier 3 and the Activity Centers, thus enabling residents to pursue an appeal.

Another neighborhood organization, Northeast Neighbors, has filed an appeal to the City Council on behalf of all neighborhoods. Planning Commissioner Jennifer Kennedy as separately filed an appeal.

Below is the Santa Monica Daily Press coverage of that meeting and an editorial that describes other LUCE Amendments that would impact Wilmont members.

Please Save the date: April 14 City Council Reviews Zoning Update and LUCE Amendments

Thanks to everyone who sent emails or went to the hearing.

Best regards,,
Laurence Eubank
Chair Wilmont,

Planning Commission supports denser development on Wilshire

BY MATTHEW HALL
Editor-in-chief

CITY HALL The fate of Wilshire Boulevard, and much of the city's future development, is now officially in the hands of the City Council following the conclusion of Wednesday night's Planning Commission meeting.

The Commission's task for the night was to review five proposed amendments to the Land Use and Circulation Element. By the end of the night (or, technically, the start of the next morning), they accepted the official land use designation for about 115 lots, accepted a new Official Districting Map, recommended denser development of Wilshire Boulevard that includes activity centers, and approved modifications to the way projects are approved when they involved a city designated landmark.

The seven-hour meeting was the last time the Commission would discuss the long-gestating Zoning Code Update and LUCE amendments, with the final discussions now moving to City Council.

The entire process has become highly political. Opponents have rallied around a few key causes, such as reducing the proposed density for Wilshire Boulevard, opposing activity centers and questioning changes to some kinds of land-use designation.

Property designated as an activity center can be developed more intensely with the approval of an area plan, development agreement and appropriate community benefits. Land around the centers, and in other parts of town, can be zoned as "Tier 3," allowing the largest size of development.

Supporters say the areas will cluster growth near transit hubs, provide walkable services for residents and create much needed housing. Opponents say the developments will worsen traffic, damage neighborhoods and destroy Santa Monica's character. Representatives of both camps spoke at the meeting.

"We can still have plenty of new affordable housing, we can still have all kinds of housing along Wilshire without Tier 3, without activity centers and with mixed-use boulevard low," resident Taffy Patton said.

Andrew Hoyer said community benefits rarely benefit the right people. "They always seem to benefit the developers, always, every single time, the community benefits are not truly community benefits," he said. "We don't really see them, we see the increase in traffic."

Resident Laura Morton said Santa Monica's transit options are not robust enough to justify the kind of development allowed under the new code. "To pretend we have the kind of transit that would make a very high, urban-like density workable and preserve the quality of the community is a specious argument," she said.

Morton said her neighborhood opposed the proposals and said reduced density could meet everyone's needs without limiting development to single-story buildings. "I hear over and over again that Tier 3 is not the answer for Wilshire Boulevard," she said, "and I find the argument is, it's either going to be mattress stores or 70 feet high. But that's specious. There is something in between ..."

Resident Michael Cahn disagreed. "I think living in a city is living not only in your neighborhood, but also in the more developed parts. If you want to live in a kind of puny suburban city, Santa Monica it is not," he said. "There's a lot of complaints about traffic in the community, I don't see it — I don't know what's wrong with me, but I just don't see it ... One reason traffic is pretty dense maybe these days in some areas is gas is pretty cheap, and cheap gas produces more traffic."

Cahn said he is a member of the Wilmont association but was unhappy with the group's public stance. "I don't feel comfortable there anymore," he said. "I want to assure you there are other voices in the neighborhood that are more relaxed about developing our neighborhood and developing our city and making the best of what is available."

Several former city officials spoke in favor of the activity centers and denser development.

"The nature of Wilshire and our other major boulevards are something of a strip of retail and other kinds of things — most of it not very inspired," said former Planning Commissioner Gwynne Pugh.

"There are occasional bright spots, but not the place a lot of people walk and

part of the reason for that quite frankly is there isn't enough density. For a block long of retail, a long block, couple of blocks, it needs something in the order of 1,500 households to generate sufficient economic activity for those places to exist. That can happen by putting two-, three-, four-story buildings within a quarter-mile radius or densifying the boulevards themselves, in which case you can now walk to these places rather than having to drive to them.

As it currently exists, almost every retail use along Wilshire is sustained because people have to drive to it.”

Staff had recommended removal of the activity centers and dropping Tier 3 from several areas. Commissioner Richard McKinnon proposed a vote on the staff recommendation and lost 5-1. A subsequent vote omitted discussion of Tier 3 and activity zones from the official recommendation, preserving their presence in the LUCE.

However, the commission did vote to reclassify so called “A” lots back to residential.

The lots had been changed to a commercial designation, much to the disdain of many neighbors.

City Council will discuss the proposed amendments at a future meeting. If any resident files an appeal of the Planning Commission decision, the council will be able to revisit the activity center discussion.

If not, they will be limited to discussion of the amendments forwarded to them by the commission.

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Planning Commission sticks it to residents — again

By [Bill Bauer](#) on March 23, 2015 in [My Write](#)

The Planning Commission's meeting last Wednesday provided more evidence of how out of sync commissioners are with the community. The occasion was the crafting of final recommendations for changes required in the zoning and building code updates so they're in harmony with the 2010 Land Use and Circulation Element (LUCE) before forwarding them to City Council for the final word.

The good news is the politically appointed commission recommended that the majority of the 115 "A" lot parcels on the LUCE and "official districting" maps that were mysteriously changed from "residential" to "commercial" should change back to "residential."

Then came the bad news — lots of it. The commission voted to oppose everything that residents wanted. Wilmont, the Northeast neighborhood and Mid-City neighbors all got the shaft.

The commission voted to keep Tier 3 developments — high-density, mixed-use residential/commercial buildings with four to six floors — proposed for Wilshire and Santa Monica boulevards. They also voted for the much-despised, traffic-generating shopping centers ("activity centers") on Wilshire. Neighborhood activists vowed to appeal the decision so that it'll have to be considered by City Council when it deliberates on code changes next month.

Controversy swirled around a huge property adjacent to the residential neighborhood at 1801 Wilshire Blvd. The rear surface parking was changed from low-rise, residential (R2) land use to high-density mixed-use boulevard (MUB). Outraged neighbors have vowed to fight like a banshee to return 1801 Wilshire to R2.

Typical of the controversy were suggested code changes to permit a 6-foot height bonus, or an extra floor, in renovated buildings that were either a historical resource or a "structure of merit" in R2-zoned, low-scale, multi-family neighborhoods that were formerly R3-zoned, medium-scale multi-family neighborhoods.

I know, it's a lot of wordy minutiae, but in a neighborhood such as Wilshire-Montana with a slew of historic properties, adding an extra floor to those buildings (when renovated) cuts off sunshine and air for neighbors, and invites conversions from apartment buildings to hotels and medical offices. It commercializes the neighborhood.

The historical preservation lobby also nabbed a ruling that allows a developer to build to higher and denser Tier 3 heights without a development agreement. No public review? Are they kidding? These aren't benign, harmless ways to save historical buildings. It permits developers to build five- and six-floor buildings next to one- and two-story homes.

Here's the deal: Under the new Zoning Ordinance, developers are gifted with construction incentives and bonuses for historical preservation, affordable housing, child care, "sustainable" construction and unspecified community benefits. This means every new mixed-use and commercial project in the city will likely be bigger, denser and wider than the district zoning supposedly allows.

What is most frightening is that commissioners Jason Parry, Jim Ries, Amy Anderson and Gerda Newbold think that the deeply flawed and well-manipulated LUCE was created by and for residents and we like it. As with the zoning code updating process, the creation of the LUCE was compromised by politics, back room deals, special interests and favoritism. Resident input was ignored or conveniently left out by commissioners and planning staff alike.

Throughout the zoning update process, developers and commissioners have said that opposition to LUCE and placement of high-density housing on transit-rich, main thoroughfares is based on fear. If that means opposition to LUCE and some zoning update recommendations is based on fear of more traffic congestion, more parking problems, more pollution, more demands for resources such as water, more air and water pollution and a distinct downgrade in quality of life — I'd say, "Yaahh!"

Commissioner Ries emailed me last week and commented on my column criticizing him and other commissioners for proposing an extra 6 feet of height (or an extra floor) for new construction on Montana Avenue and Main Street — which ultimately was dropped by the commission. "Why is it acceptable to incentivize affordable housing in Neighborhood Commercial areas along Pico, but not other Neighborhood Commercial districts? If it is good/acceptable for Pico, it should be good for other areas. If it is not good/acceptable for other Neighborhood Commercial districts, than it should be excluded from all Neighborhood Commercial Districts ... " he wrote.

My response was, "Not all neighborhoods are the same. 'One size fits all' is bad planning ... " But, we all know that the majority of planning commissioners care more about advancing their own ideals and vision for Santa Monica than representing and carrying out the residents' vision for the community.

Why incentivize extra height and density along Pico Boulevard if adjacent neighbors aren't willing to give up lower heights and density zoning for additional housing? It doesn't make any sense. As with members of City Council, this bunch is obsessed with its own social engineering agenda and the rest of us get screwed over and over as a result.

"Jennifer Kennedy and Richard McKinnon fought valiantly against Tier 3, the Wilshire Activity Centers and up-zoning 1801 Wilshire, but they had no chance with this pro-height and density commission," said Taffy Patton, chair of the Residents Coalition.

Thanks to Kennedy and McKinnon, who've been leading the fight to support

resident recommendations. However, what was McKinnon thinking when he opened a can of worms by suggesting up-zoning Santa Monica Catholic Church property from low-scale R2 zoning to denser, higher R3 zoning? Saint Monica is in the middle of a low-scale residential neighborhood.