August 21, 2023

Nithya Raman

Dear Councilmember Raman,

We were pleased to see in your August 14th letter that you highlighted the need to “*increase onsite open space, (and) reduce the scale..”* of the Harvard-Westlake School’s proposed project (the project). Since Los Angeles is ranked 80th in terms of public parks compared to other large cities and the LA River is an environmentally sensitive area, we agree with you that the project needs to “*Preserve onsite mature trees to the greatest extent feasible…”*

We are confident that all stakeholders, including the community at large, would support a sustainable project that focuses on the preservation and conservation of trees, and open green space. We request an environmentally sound project. And to that end, we continue to propose a sustainable hybrid plan, which meets Harvard Westlake’s stated objectives while preserving permanent open space on the property.

The 16-acre project site is a one-of-a-kind, river-adjacent forested and the lowest green space in the San Fernando Valley.   The single most important public objective is to maintain a meaningful portion of that urban forest as **permanent natural open space.**

Since the applicant needs a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) to construct the proposed project (and any similar project), the City hastremendous latitude to require an outcome that best preserves this river-adjacent oasis.   For example, the City can require that the project only include **one athletic field and eliminate the pool thereby providing permanent green space in its place.** Currently, the project includes many components that duplicate existing facilities already up and running on the school campus.  If one field and the pool was deleted from the project (it makes the most sense to remove the east west facing practice field – which produces glare and sub-optimal lighting conditions), post construction the school would still have three full sized athletic fields, two swimming pools, three gyms, and 8 tennis courts (this includes the Holmby Hills Campus).

Both the DEIR and FEIR failed to include any project alternatives that provide for a substantial concentrated and contiguous acreage of non-linear or non-river-parallel open green space and are therefore deficient.  **The City should require, for the public trust,** a project, with one less field and no pool, which would produce less significant construction impacts, less light pollution, less greenhouse gas emissions, less traffic, more wildlife habitat, and more permeable surfaces.

The elimination of proposed Field B and the pool on the northwest side of the site would preserve over 106 trees and leaves the remainder of the proposed project intact.  Such a large permanent green open space would allow for a larger natural water retention/swale system than what is proposed and would provide wildlife habitat, scenic resources, groundwater recharge, cooling, noise buffering and nature next to both the public riverfront path and the other public path that circulates through the site.  The landscape details for this natural area could mimic that the riverfront linear park, which is a component of the project.

The City (i) should also require a permanent open space deed restriction on the elimination of Field B and the pool and alternate use as a green open space area that can serve as a future greenway template and as an ecological laboratory to benefit students and the whole of the City and (ii) could also condition the applicant to deed restrict its open space across from the School’s upper campus on the west side of Coldwater Canyon Avenue, in order to help ensure the City offsets immediate and long-term greenhouse gas emissions and carbon dioxide sequestration.

This is an opportunity to take meaningful environmental action that receive support of the greater community.

Very truly yours,

Jeanne McConnell

Co-Founder Angelenos For Trees

Angelenos For Trees

Citizens for Los Angeles Wildlife (CLAW)

City of Los Angeles Community Forest Advisory Committee (CFAC)

Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER)

Save Los Angeles River Open Space (SLAROS)

Save Coldwater Canyon!

Save Weddington

Studio City Residents Association (SCRA)

Studio City Neighborhood Council (SCNC)

Sunshine Hill Residents Association

The Federation of Hillside and Canyon Associations

The River Project

Valley Village Residents Association

West Toluca Lake Residents Association

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