

Appeal of the CEQA Categorical Exemption Granted to 7445 West Sunset Boulevard, 7441-7449 West Sunset Boulevard, 1506-1516 North Gardner Street
Filed by Julia Mason, Cheryl Holland, Michael Konik, Lincoln Williamson

Please deny the categorical exemption for this project. The site was developed in the early 20th century as part of the Red Car street car line at Gardner Junction. The buildings at the project site are designed around the trolley tracks. They are one of the last remaining traces of the beloved Red Car line, and the earliest days of Hollywood history. In fact, this neighborhood is designated on early census tracts as Streetcar Suburban.

This parcel is a historic resource, as confirmed by the letter from blue-chip preservation society Hollywood Heritage and submitted to the file, and by the letter submitted by appellant and local neighborhood organizer Cheryl Holland, neighborhood council representative.

Gardner Street Elementary School is a Title 1 school, defined as one where students live with a high concentration of poverty. Approximately 400 students attend. Most students and their families live in the immediate neighborhood and walk to school. Families residing south of Sunset use crosswalk at Gardner, which is controlled by a traffic light.

Students walking from the east and/or south directly pass the project site.

All impacts from construction noise and disturbance, particulate and air pollution, the eventual project's noise and exhaust, will directly abut the school playground, with no separation.

We know children are particularly sensitive to pollution of all types. Gardner Street Elementary School is a sensitive site and will be affected by hazardous impacts. The proposed project abuts our site with no alley or other insulation. The school playground and learning garden – virtually the only play space for children in this park-poor neighborhood and heavily used from morning into the evening – is a sensitive area that must be protected to the fullest extent of local and state environmental regulations.

This project would cause considerable disruption and hazardous impacts during demolition, construction, and use.

Currently, two driveways between the buildings and flanked by open parking spaces provide visibility and direct traffic away from the school. If this project is built, driveways will become part of the enclosed building. All trucks and vehicles will instead enter and exit through the single driveway, with visibility drastically restricted from the building, directly across the narrow sidewalk and onto the 50-foot wide Gardner Street and into the neighborhood.

The building would tower over the school.

The appropriate scale of the existing buildings, the placement of driveways, and the abundant pedestrian traffic make this site ideal for adaptive reuse.

The neighborhood council unanimously opposed this permit application.

None of our concerns have been resolved.

Currently eight venues serve alcohol within one block to the east or west. There is no urgent need for more. Mashael Majid, Planning Director for our Councilmember Nithya Raman, writes in her advisory letter to the Central Area Planning Commission dated May 10, 2021, mentions the heavy concentration of alcoholic beverage permits within 1000 feet of the school.

And, at her first visit to the site, she told us, “I had no idea it was so busy!”

The City of Los Angeles High Injury Network spotlights streets with a high concentration of traffic collisions that result in severe injuries and deaths, with an emphasis on those involving people walking and bicycling. Sunset Boulevard through our neighborhood is part of this network.

Gardner Street is a 50-foot-wide side street with a bump-out curb extension to calm traffic. One mile west of the Hollywood commercial core, the neighborhood is quiet and residential, bordered by the Sunset Square HPOZ and, to the south and west, Spaulding Square HPOZ.

Although the zoning administrator has imposed several conditions on the operations of the proposed businesses when he granted the alcoholic beverage permit, the hazardous impacts that most concern the literally hundreds of parents, families, and neighbors who have written letters, appeared at hearings, and signed our petition were not considered. Without final plans or permit applications for the project, the community cannot assess the hazardous impacts from construction noise and dust next to our playground, plus particulate pollution and exhaust from the project, as well as delivery and utility trucks and staff and customer vehicles traveling through the building to the rooftop parking and which will loom over the school playground and the apartments across Gardner to the west.

How can we request mitigations when we do not have confirmed project plans? How can we assure our students they are safe when the mitigations we did request were not provided?

As Mashael Majid wrote in her letter,

“We recognize that the Zoning Administrator tried to tailor conditions to ensure that the proposed restaurant in a commercial environment, “will be developed and operated in the manner proposed, and compatibly with the surrounding community.” It is unclear if any additional entitlements will be requested or what they will be. For this reason, a conditional use to permit the continued sale and dispensing of a full line of alcoholic beverages **may be a bit premature.** [emphasis added]

“We are mindful of substantive concerns raised by neighbors, including the Hollywood Hills West Neighborhood Council, the appellant, and stakeholders affiliated with Gardner Street Elementary School (an abutting neighbor) regarding traffic impacts, noise issues, hours of

operation, pedestrian safety, saturation of similar uses near sensitive areas (i.e. within 1000 foot radius of a residential area and an elementary school), and multiple operations selling alcohol separately under one license among others. Further, while we understand that the physical development for this location is not part of this determination, we would also like to ensure that the most robust efforts are carried out to minimize negative impacts to the school from any future redevelopment of this site.”

If, as Ms. Majid says, the granting of the permit is premature, then certainly a categorical exemption is premature.

Last week, in response to two separate accidents where students on their way to school were struck by cars, resulting in serious injuries and one tragic fatality, Los Angeles Unified School District Superintendent Alberto Carvalho tweeted: “We need... more enforcement around schools specific to... provide additional safety precautions and measures to ensure safe passages to schools.”

Neighbors and school families familiar with the site and proposed driveway on the small, fragile side street predict the same thing can and will happen here. We are beyond concerned about how drivers exiting the project driveway, with its restricted visibility, will ensure that they don’t strike pedestrians on the sidewalk. How can we ensure delivery trucks can safely enter and exit?

Gardner Street is the main route to the north for Fire Station 41, at 1439 N. Gardner. How will trucks negotiate around delivery vehicles and additional traffic?

For these and all the reasons addressed in the letters and verbal comments to the Planning and Land Use Management Committee, please deny the CEQA categorical exemption to this site so that we can engage in a necessary assessment of the hazards it poses to our community and our schoolchildren.

Thank you,

Julia Mason, Appellant

5/1/2023