

Gorham, Thomas

From: Gorham, Thomas
Sent: June 02, 2016 12:32 PM
To: Gorham, Thomas
Subject: FW: Planning Commission Conformance Review 06/08/16
Attachments: Van Buren Tree Report - Revised.doc

From: Stephen Michael [<mailto:shm4355@aol.com>]
Sent: June 01, 2016 11:00 PM
To: Yun, Susan <susan.yun@culvercity.org>
Subject: Planning Commission Conformance Review 06/08/16

Dear Ms. Yun:

I am submitting the attached report by Pieter Severynen (arborist) for inclusion in the Agenda of the Planning Commission conformance review for the Culver Studios Parking Structure on June 8. 2016.

Please also submit my comments below to the Planning Commission along with the arborist's report:

I commissioned this report on behalf of myself and residents on Van Buren Place with concerns about the proposed new parking structure, specifically the health and survival prospects of the City parkway trees on Van Buren directly in front of the parking structure. The Culver Studios were also required to obtain a report from an arborist, copy of which I have seen.

The original plans approved on December 14, 2015 showed the underground parking levels extending all the way to the property line = sidewalk of Van Buren. Since then, there has been a change of heart on the part of the Studios and the plans have been altered to show that the underground parking levels will now be in line with the above-ground structure - i.e. with a 15ft landscaped setback from the sidewalk. This will give them a fighting chance at survival whereas the previous plan would have been a death sentence over the course of a few years for all those fine trees.

I was further informed during a recent meeting with Michael Hackman that the Fire Department has graciously found a way to modify their access to the new emergency gate so that a large Canary Island Pine at that location will be spared, which would otherwise have been removed. I would request the Planning Commission to confirm this information and alter the Plan accordingly - if this has not already been done.

I ask the Planning Commission also to take note of the thorough recommendations of the Studios' arborist as well as my arborist in regard to the protection of the trees during the construction period. Although the Plan makes clear that the Studios will be responsible for maintaining the City parkway trees (as well as the landscaped area in the setback), their arborist's report does not include discussion of the requirements for ongoing care and maintenance of the trees after construction has been completed. The Commissioners will find this information in the report prepared by Pieter Severynen.

Therefore, I would ask the Planning Commission to consider very carefully Pieter's recommendations for a minimum of 5 years - or preferably a 10-year plan to support the ongoing health of these trees. These are large trees and their root systems will extend way beyond the 15ft setback. Their root systems will have to be cut back and their health will be impacted. Regular deep watering, among other measures, will be essential to their long-term survival.

I thank the Commissioners in advance for taking all the necessary steps to protect our City parkway trees on Van Buren Place.

Stephen Michael
shm4355@aol.com

Pieter Severynen, ASLA

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT & ARBORIST

Stephen Michael
4355 McConnell Boulevard
Los Angeles, CA 90066

Dear Mr. Michael,

The following is an abbreviated tree report, based upon information available. While it is not a fully documented report, it is still based on the basic recommendations of the American Society of Consulting Arborists, of which I am a member.

Introduction and assignment. You requested me to give you a brief evaluation of the effect of the construction of the proposed Culver Studios commercial parking structure along Van Buren Place on the existing street trees fronting the property, to the extent that information is available. On May 21, 2016 I visited the area and took pictures. You told me that as a property owner along van Buren you are very concerned about the effect of construction on the existing mature street trees.

Testing and Analysis. I was not a position to do any of either. I did not go on site, nor did I do any subsurface testing for root distribution.

Observation of existing conditions. Van Buren Place is an older, Culver City, Southeasterly trending residential street with some mixed uses added. The street is punctuated by beautiful street trees, estimated to be in the 70 yr. age range. The trees along the property are Deodar Cedar, *Cedrus deodara*, and Canary Island pine, *Pinus canariensis*, a few minor other ones. In the parkway along the street fronting this commercial property I counted the following trees:

Common Name	Botanical Name	Est. Dia, at Breast Height (DBH)
Canary Island Pine	<i>Pinus canariensis</i>	28"
Canary Island Pine	<i>Pinus canariensis</i>	18"
Canary Island Pine	<i>Pinus canariensis</i>	10"
<i>Cedrus deodara</i>	Deodar Cedar	29"
<i>Cedrus deodara</i>	Deodar Cedar	6"
Loquat	<i>Eryobotrya japonica</i>	3"
Loquat	<i>Eryobotrya japonica</i>	3"

Observation of existing conditions and apparent problems.

It is proposed to replace the current 3-level parking garage with a much larger structure with six levels above ground and two below. The plans show the below ground portion of the structure to go all the way to the property line. If executed, this would deprive the street trees of most of their current root system.

Until we have reliable measures to tell us otherwise, we should assume that the proposed parking garage construction on the Culver Studios property would kill the existing large street trees, perhaps

suddenly, but more likely gradually, if it followed the garage extending to property line scenario, because of the large amount of root kill. That would be a very slow and messy process that could take years and might not even begin to show up for a few years, until the trees' reserve food supplies are gone.

Normally, trees will grow a root system that typically extends to at least 2-3 x the diameter of the crown of the tree although it can spread as far as 10x that diameter. With street trees at Van Buren in the 50-60' height range and an estimated 40' width range (all measurements estimated), this would normally mean an at least 80-120' rooting circle around the tree. Given that the street at 5' away from the tree trunks in this case forms an effective blockade to root expansion on that side, almost all the supporting roots that the existing street trees have developed are on the property side of the trees for a distance of as much as 115' off the trunk, if we estimated 3x the crown width, still 75' if we gave them only enough for 2x diameter, and still almost 40' if we considered only the property side half of a root crown, which would be credit for only half as much as they would get in a totally unencumbered setting. But a proposed parking structure extending underground to the property line would remove almost all of the available root space, and leave only 15' below planter and sidewalk for total root width. This is not sufficient for survival of the trees. This report will consider minimum planter volume under theoretical circumstances in a moment. But first, please realize that here we are dealing with real, older trees, that grew up with a lot of space; we are not starting with a clean slate, where young trees may be able to adjust to less than excellent conditions. To suddenly cut their available roots and rooting space by as much as 2/3 is more than almost all mature trees can take.

On the other hand, if the studios respect the 15' setback from property line for the underground parking levels, and take additional lifetime steps to safeguard the street trees, then the trees would stand a reasonable chance of long time survival.

I did not go on the Culver Studio property and measure the extent of root systems, but it should be obvious to the even the non-technical observer that a huge amount of existing root system is proposed to be removed. Removal of 50+% of root system is considered to be the cut-off point at which survival of trees becomes problematic or unlikely, with the tree becoming more sensitive and touchy to disturbance, the older it gets. Again, most of these are not young trees, although they could still live for many decades past the century mark. It should also be clear, that while all distances being discussed here are estimated, the unobstructed space closest to the tree trunk is the most important to root development and tree health, with a space @ 15 or 20' away from the trunk, much more important than at 30 or 40' away. If for example, **any** on site development on the studio property stayed at least 15' away from the property line, then the tree roots would have 10' planter space, plus 5 under sidewalk space plus 15' unobstructed property space, (assuming the roots had not been disturbed in that space) for a total of 30'. This is not generous, but it would give the trees a fighting chance at survival.

As to minimum soil volume needs for trees, there are some tables available that might suggest smaller soil needs than what they receive here, (assuming ideal circumstances). But these tables must be used with great caution, because of the many variables involved. James Urban, in 'Up by Roots', for example, cites a soil volume table, wherein a 24-inch DBH tree needs almost 1600 cubic feet of soil to do well. He hastens to add that high levels of maintenance are assumed, that only the top inches or feet of the soil in the plant area may be countable, not several feet down, and that

compaction and poor drainage will reduce this depth. He suggests using the worst assumptions. And again, a new planting situation is completely different from one where trees have grown up with a set of decades old values that will be subject to sudden change.

Problem creating actions. Apart from its aggravating effect on nearby residents, the proposed construction/development could harm or may kill the street trees. Development will or may entail the following, which is not an exhaustive list:

Soil compaction, at the surface and below. Moving objects compact the soil below. Moving pickup trucks exert as much pressure as the foot prints of walking people: 25 psi (pounds per square inch), which is actually even more than imparted by construction equipment. Repeated walking and driving over the root area compacts the top layer of soil, making movement of water, oxygen and carbon dioxide in and out of the soil difficult or impossible. The combined effect is loss of root space as well as of actual roots. At some point roots stop growing in the affected area.

This ‘inadvertent’ compaction area may be enlarged here by the ‘foundation adjacent compaction area’. Typically areas under future foundations plus the adjacent area (for ease of construction) are compacted to the maximum compaction recommended by engineers, (85-95%) which is far too high a compaction for any tree roots to be able to penetrate. As a result growth stops.

Foul soil. Construction generates waste. Construction workers often dump their construction waste products on the site soil: cement washings from the wheelbarrow, leftover paint, spilled gas or oil, etc. These products can poison local plant life, including tree roots for years, sometimes decades to come.

Tree damage. Branches of the trees overhang the property, and roots of the trees are probably all over the property. Careless construction often results in damage to the tree in the form of branches and/or roots broken or cut off by untrained workers. Construction may result in soil compaction of existing soil, or fresh soil being brought in atop of the old one. It will result in significant, perhaps fatal loss of existing roots and other harming actions. Cutting off branches or roots at the wrong place or with less than sharp tools are examples of harming actions.

Lack of light. If the new building is large enough and tall enough, it will block some of the light and sunshine previously available to the tree, with potential thinning and dieback of affected branches. The potential damage cited is cumulative. The effects often do not show up for one or more years after construction is finished, because the tree bears a large food reservoir in its trunk, which will be exhausted first. The older a tree when nearby construction happens, the harder a time it has dealing with resulting damages, even if the tree otherwise still has a long life ahead.

Mitigation measures. It should be obvious from the list of problems above that it is far easier to prevent problems than to try and correct them, even if correction were possible. It is also smart policy to prevent harm to trees, rather than incur costly liability for avoidable actions.

Stay away as far as possible from the trees. It would be best for the health of the trees to allow no construction activity of any kind within the dripline of the trees, which is the vertical projection of the end of the branches to the ground. Remember that the closer any activity approaches the trunk of the tree, the greater the potential damage. For that reason, a 15’ above and below ground setback on the Culver Studios property, wherein no construction activity would take place, would probably constitute a tree survival and health action. Develop building and construction plans with these concepts in mind: do not allow a subsurface intrusion into the 15’ setback line. Erect construction/tree safety fences. Do not let construction activities take place in the setback portion.

Avoid direct damage to the trees. At the 15ft setback point where the 30 ft deep excavation will begin, care must be taken not to rip and tear tree roots with mechanical equipment. At this point roots must be cut clean with sharp equipment such as chainsaws.

Do not foul the air, water and soil. Instruct all construction personnel that strict tree protection rules are in effect and post notices on site to that effect. Do not allow dumping of any construction fluid except clean water. Do not allow exhaust of hot air or gases directed towards the trees.

Develop landscape plans for the setback area that enhance the tree roots, and do not introduce elements of major competition to the trees. The proposed bamboo planting plan should be reviewed by the neighborhood for minimum impact on trees.

Develop a long term landscape maintenance plan for the existing trees. A 6 month or 1 year term is meaningless. Damage may not show up for years afterwards. A term of at least 5 years should be considered, 10 years is even more realistic, with the studios guaranteeing maintenance during that period. This plan must include deep watering on a monthly basis.

Cooperation between the parties in the development of the building and subsequent construction plans will go a long way towards elimination of any potential conflicts. If requested I will be glad to participate in meetings, plan review, construction site visit, or other activities that will result in the ultimate goal of all parties: the long term preservation in a healthy condition of this beautiful tree lined street. Please call me if you need additional information.

Sincerely,

Pieter Severynen,
Landscape Architect and Consulting Arborist

January 26, 2016

The Culver City Planning Commission
c/o Mr. Thomas Gorham
Culver City Government
9770 Culver Boulevard,
Culver City, CA

Re: Public Hearing on 12/14/15 – Culver Studios project – New Parking Structure

Dear Mr. Gorham:

As the owner at 4081 and 4083 Van Buren, I was one of those who spoke at the 12/14/15 Council Meeting about the impact of such a large-scale project on our neighborhood of mostly small family homes, including an elementary school. At that meeting, the new owners of the Culver Studios site verbally agreed to make some additional modifications to their current development plan in order to address neighborhood concerns.

On the 4000 block we are mainly concerned about the new six-level 1,400-car parking structure –59'6" ft high - which, in addition to parking for private cars, will be used by many diesel trucks and other large vehicles as a production vehicle staging area. Since this large building will be in operation 24/7, residents will have no respite from noise, fumes, and bright lighting. The visual impact of a massive industrial type of building so out of scale with our quiet little neighborhood cannot be denied. All of these impacts constitute a major threat to the health and quality of life of residents, and to the value of our homes.

Mitigation re the new parking structure has been offered in regard to:

1. **Fumes: installing exhaust/ventilation systems** to eliminate fumes emanating from diesel trucks using the proposed large vehicle staging area (in the basement and ground level of the parking structure), including a requirement for trucks not to idle their engines;
2. **Screening** of the parking levels via plantings and aluminum vertical panels;
3. **LED lighting** designed to eliminate light spillage from the parking structure;
4. **Setbacks and stepbacks** of the structure to make it appear less massive;
5. **Noise reduction** – not clear what is proposed here other than a few signs asking people to be considerate (no honking, etc)
6. **Landscaping** of 18' area between sidewalk and the parking structure, including benches.

We agree that the current design and mitigation proposals from Culver Studios were poorly thought out in terms of their effects in our neighborhood. Following discussions with other residents on Van Buren I am writing to share our questions and comments on the proposed mitigation measures as well as a few ideas for consideration by you and the Planning Commission.

FUMES:

1. Trucks to be confined to enclosed areas of the parking structure and also required to shut off their emissions (rather than just idling):

Is this to be done via an "honor program" and what is the likelihood that vehicles would respect this arrangement? If not, how would this be enforced?

2. Air Filtering and Monitoring inside the building: What kind of filtering would be installed? Where would filtered air exit the building? Would air quality standards be set by Culver City, the County, or the State, and how would they be monitored and enforced? Do the owners of the Culver Studios accept responsibility for installing, maintaining, and monitoring the equipment to ensure its compliance with agreed air quality standards? Are you aware of any existing model for a parking structure of similar size and type currently in operation that has succeeded in mitigating the harmful effects of fumes from diesel trucks and other large vehicles? If such a model exists, can you identify where and what it is? If not, can we be assured that you and the Planning Department will have access to the expertise and resources to deal with the required innovations?

LIGHTING and NOISE:

Plans show a visual barrier using vertical metal screens and climbing plants along the side facing Van Buren. The impressionistic design I saw at the meeting showed the building entirely covered in greenery – though I know of no plants capable of climbing to this height. If planters were on each level, perhaps containing vines that would grow downwards, that might work a little better. Light would still emanate and the screening would do nothing to reduce vehicle noise.

Lighting:

The suggestion by the Culver Studios architects that there would be no spillover of lighting from their huge structure into the neighborhood defies commonsense. According to the lighting diagrams we won't be affected by bright lights in our eyes. However, because the proposed decorative screen is not solid and there can be no screening at the rooftop, the whole monolith will glow.

Regarding rooftop lighting, the plans I have seen are not clear about the height of the lighting standards. The current plan depicts some tall stanchions and huge umbrella patterns of light shining onto the parking area.

The plan mentions motion sensors. Will there be times at night when lights will come on only if there is activity? Would these sensors operate on all levels and the roof as well?

Noise:

The screening proposals do nothing to reduce noise, particularly of trucks accelerating and backing-up warning signals, car alarms, etc. at all hours of the day and night. Anyone familiar with the operations of the film business understands what this would be like.

The plans don't say much about the **Van Buren emergency gate** at Level 1. Will this be soundproof? If it is not, this will greatly increase noise emitted into the neighborhood.

SCALE:

The scale at ground level is way too much, and the building itself, with its industrial appearance, has been designed without regard for its visual impact on the immediate neighborhood. It would be similar in size and appearance to the existing Sony parking structure on Overland (a wide, busy street with many commercial buildings, unlike Van Buren).

Mitigation proposals:

Additional setbacks along the length of the upper levels of the parking structure have already been discussed with the Planning Commission. These would greatly improve the overall appearance of the building and its scale in relation to residences on the street. It would also mitigate the shadow cast on several properties by such a massive building. However, the plans in Attachment 8 do not show any upper level setbacks along the side facing Van Buren. Is this matter still under consideration?

Features at ground level (between the sidewalk and the parking structure):

Can you confirm that the ground level setback from the sidewalk is now 18'?

The developers have proposed a landscaped area between the sidewalk and the parking structure to create a park-like appearance complete with park benches. This would require regular maintenance – mostly trash pick-up. Who would be encouraged to hang out here, and how would this enhance the quality of life – and safety - of residents on Van Buren or the children attending the local school, whose playground is across from the structure? Residents are very concerned about homeless people already occupying the benches near the Arclight movie theater only a block or two away. We don't want benches!

Suggestion:

An alternative that would reduce the visual impact of the structure at ground level, would be to have an **8'-10' pedestrian scale wall along the sidewalk** (as there is now) so that one relates to that scale rather than to the tall structure behind it. The goal is to minimize the impact from street level as you go by, and having a lower wall in the foreground will help with this. Ivy could easily be trained to grow on it, and if it was set back a little from the sidewalk, there could be some plants along its base. A wall would also enhance the sense of living in a safe neighborhood and remove the need for maintenance of proposed landscaping and trash pick-up.

PARKWAY TREES:

In reading through Attachment 8 (p.112), I came across something that was not readily apparent, namely that the plans show below-grade parking extending all the way to the sidewalk of Van Buren. Excavating this below-grade parking would damage the root systems of the very large City trees in the parkway, making them unstable and dangerous,

and would probably lead to their demise. Have the City's arborist and the City Engineer been consulted about this?

These mature trees offer the best screening of all and are irreplaceable in our lifetimes. Replacement of each mature tree by two small (24" box) trees as called for in the Plan could not begin to compensate for their loss.

NOTIFICATION OF MEETINGS:

Since this project has involved so many residents, we would appreciate being notified in advance when the Planning Commission or the Council have this on their agenda.

The future of our neighborhood rests in the hands of our Culver City government. Residents must trust that you and the Planning Department will be fully supported by the Council in negotiations over the details of the final plan. Our questions and comments above are intended to be helpful to this process in which you and your colleagues are now actively engaged. Our desire is to work collaboratively with City Hall and the Culver Studios so as to resolve all these issues in a timely, fair, and effective manner.

In this connection, I believe you will find it helpful to contact some of our local residents with particular expertise who have contributed in very thoughtful ways to this letter.

Please find attached the names of neighbors who share my concerns. We would all appreciate your consideration and response to the issues raised in this letter.



Stephen Michael

Mailing Address: 4355 McConnell Blvd., Los Angeles 90066

e-mail: shm4355@aol.com Tel (H): (310) 397-6406

cc: The Mayor and City Councilors

Att. List of Concerned Neighbors (pp1-3)

N.B. Please note that I have also addressed these comments to Mr. Sol Blumenfeld, Director of Community Development

Neighbors who share concerns about the new Van Buren parking structure:

Name	Address on Van Buren	(Ph and/or e-mail)
Joe Eddy	4004	323-717-7550 jeddy@hotmail.com
Leslie Burke	4008-1/2	310-625-3235 leslieburkeimages@gmail.com
Tamara Suiza	4014 Unit B	310-625-3235 Tamara12porter@gmail.com
Andrew Janko	4016 Unit A	ajanko@gmail.com
Tatijana Janko	4016 Unit A	ajanko@gmail.com
Viswanath Urala	4016 Unit B	213-399-1874 v.urala@gmail.com
Christina Granados	4031	granadoschristi@gmail.com
Shirley Collins	4031	310-945-8463
Mariano Andre	4041-1/2	310-871-5315 mariano@frazko.net
Nichole Girard	4041-1/2	310-871-5315 nichole@synkotic.com
Samantha Williams	4043	310-210-4254
Kyle Williams	4045	310-498-4959 kylewilliams424@gmail.com
Leslie Thomsen	4047	310-837-1227
Patricia O'Brien	4047-1/2	310-383-0618
Lee Freehling	4061	310-837-4022 leefreehling@sbcglobal.net
Paul Cooley	4061	310-837-4022
Geoff Smith	4062 Unit B	310-838-5850
Grace Nakamura	4062 UnitC	310-482-7023 gnakamura28@yahoo.com

Neighbors who share concerns about the new Van Buren Parking Structure, page 2

Name	Address on Van Buren	(Ph and/or e-mail)
Louis N. Lopez	4065	310-838-7748
Jan Skorstad	4069	310-871-4908 jskorstad@mac.com
Miguel Rodriguez	4070	310-836-6284
Evelyn Rodriguez	4070	310-836-6284
Christine Haenen	4071	310-291-4362 haenen@sbcglobal.net
Matthew Schulert	4073	517-256-8019 Matthew.roderick@gmail.com
David Armendariz	4074	562-805-0072 Jahmie29@yahoo.com
Jamie Armendariz	4074	562-805-0072
Genevieve Webster	4075	dearyorick42@yahoo.com
Dorothy Curry	4075	310-614-4228
April Fitzsimmons	4075	310-880-0911
Richard Armendariz	4076	310-838-5866
Pat Armendariz	4076	310-838-5866
Evelyn Quinn	4080	310-839-8647
Billy McMillin	4081	bilnymcmillin@me.com
Ann Rosencrans	4081	annrosencrans@me.com
Matt Ashley	4083	541-231-5857 mattsashley@yahoo.com
Emma Ashley	4083	503-704-0241 emma.ashley20@gmail.com
Richard Olander	4085-4087	310-425-8030 RAOARCH@aol.com
Joseph Walsh	4087	310-425-8030

Neighbors who share concerns about the new Van Buren parking structure, page 3

Name	Address on Van Buren	(Ph and/or e-mail)
Terry Towery	4090	<u>Tltowery@aol.com</u>
Danna Bissing	4090	<u>Dbissing@sbcglobal.net</u>
Michael Kaufman	4091	<u>e2mick@yahoo.com</u>
Mayita Dinos	4091	310-628-6050 <u>mdgarden@ca.rr.com</u>