

**City of Culver City, California
Agenda Item Report**

Meeting Date: 5/11/15	Item Number: A-2
AGENDA ITEM: (1) Receive a Presentation and Discuss the Proposed Vision for a “Hospitality & Entertainment District Specific Plan” Affecting Commercial Frontage Adjacent to the 405 Freeway Between the Northern and Southern City Boundaries, Including a Signage Component; and (2) Direct the City Manager as Deemed Appropriate.	
Contact Person/Dept.: Todd Tipton/CDD Sol Blumenfeld/CDD	Phone Number: (310) 253-5783 (310) 253-5702
Fiscal Impact: Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	General Fund: Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Public Hearing: <input type="checkbox"/>	Action Item: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Attachments: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Commission Action Required: Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Date: _____	
Public Notification: (E-Mail) Meetings and Agendas – City Council (05/06/15); Postcards Sent to Residents, Businesses and Owners within and Surrounding 500’ of District Boundaries; Culver City News (04/30/15 and 05/07/15). Notice Posted on City Public Notification Page on 04/24/15. All E-Mail Notification Categories - (04/24/15 and 04/30/15)	
Department Approval: Sol Blumenfeld (05/06/15)	City Attorney: Carol Schwab (by H. Baker) (05/06/15)
Chief Financial Officer Approval: Jeff Muir (05/06/15)	City Manager Approval: John Nachbar (05/06/15)
<p><u>RECOMMENDATION:</u></p> <p>Staff recommends the City Council: (1) receive a presentation and discuss the proposed vision for a “Hospitality & Entertainment District Specific Plan”, which includes a signage component (hereinafter also referred to as the “Proposed Project”), and (2) direct the City Manager as deemed appropriate.</p> <p><u>BACKGROUND:</u></p> <p><i>Recent Events</i></p> <p>On April 30, 2015, Carlyle Realty Properties IV (Carlyle) notified the City Manager that it has decided to sell its Culver City properties which include the DoubleTree Hotel, Pacifica Plaza Office Building, and the adjacent parking lot entitled for the Entrada project. Carlyle indicated that it had made significant investments in these properties and had hoped to further enhance their value with the proposed Hospitality and Entertainment District Specific Plan but that it was the opportune time to sell them. Consequently, Carlyle will not participate in further planning for the area. Carlyle had been spearheading the proposed Hospitality and Entertainment District Specific Plan, and their withdrawal could mean that there may no longer be sufficient</p>	

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non-City funding to conclude the necessary planning study and preparation of a Specific Plan.

Chronology of Project

On June 9, 2014, the City Council discussed a proposal from Carlyle regarding the creation of a Freeway-Oriented Sign District along the 405 Freeway generally located along commercially zoned property between the City's northern and southern boundaries (the "Initial Proposal"). During the meeting, the City Council directed the City Manager to examine several issues in greater detail regarding establishment of a sign district including:

- The proposed method to establish a Specific Plan for a sign district, including digital signs, and related environmental clearance;
- Goals and objectives of the Initial Proposal;
- Legal issues (including City indemnity) relating to the Initial Proposal;
- Costs and funding related to the creation of a specific plan for the Initial Proposal; and
- Public outreach methods and visioning.

On November 10, 2014, the City Council received a presentation regarding Carlyle's proposal for a "Hospitality & Entertainment District Specific Plan" (including a Sign District Component) along commercial frontage adjacent to the 405 Freeway between the northern and southern City boundaries. Components of the proposed Hospitality and Entertainment District include:

1. A specific plan that focuses on the area's unique freeway adjacent location and character with emphasis on the hospitality and entertainment industry and the area's physical and economic area improvements;
2. Creation of a new hotel-mixed use development district with "thematic signs" to create area identity and a new gateway to the City;
3. A walkable commercial district providing new workforce housing opportunities.
4. Coordination with major stakeholders to fund the project using a variety of funding tools, including infrastructure financing districts, public/private partnerships, and private reinvestment;
5. Identification of potential areas to permit signs through specific development standards;
6. Sign revenue sharing with the City to promote economic development and to provide a replacement for former Culver City Redevelopment Agency (former CCRA) funding lost as a result of the dissolution of redevelopment agencies by the State of California in 2012;
7. Funding of streetscape, bike and pedestrian amenities, street graphics, and similar improvements to help rebrand the area and create a new mixed use development neighborhood;

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8. Design standards for locating freeway-oriented signs based upon orientation, lot size, and distance from freeway, and establishment of a signage design theme to create a unique place and integrate signs with buildings and surroundings; and,
9. Use of the signs for digital art during non-advertising periods, featuring digital artists and programming of digital art images for individual signs and collectively throughout the proposed district. Digital artwork to be coordinated among sign participants creating continuous visual displays.

Following the presentation, the City Council discussed the matter and approved an agreement with PlaceWorks, a design and planning firm, to create a “vision” for the area, which is being funded by area stakeholders. The specific tasks in the PlaceWorks agreement are:

Phase 1 – Vision Concept

- Conduct land owner interviews;
- Document existing land uses and the “urban form”;
- Prepare visual database “toolbox”;
- Prepare a preliminary vision concept;
- Prepare an Opportunity and Constraints memorandum; and
- Prepare a vision concept.

Phase 1A – Communicate Vision Concept

- Develop City presentation/outreach program; and
- Implement City presentation/outreach program.

In Phase 1A, PlaceWorks conducted the following outreach efforts:

1. Distributed a survey to guests staying in area hotels;
2. Conducted a “pop-up” open house at the Westfield Mall (intended to obtain a “snapshot” of the opinions of attendees);
3. Distributed a survey to City businesses;
4. Placed a survey on the City website; and
5. Conducted a community open house.

A description of the outreach efforts and the results of each are attached. Summarily, attendees feedback regarding pursuit of the “vision” outlined in the visioning process ranged from support of some of the plan components (excluding signage) to support of the entire proposed planning concept.

On April 27, 2015, all property/business owners located within the proposed boundary of the district, all who attended the March 19, 2015 outreach meeting, all homeowners associations and all who expressed interest via the City’s email

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notification system were notified that the proposed vision was available on the City's website for review and comment (via the survey).

DISCUSSION:

On March 30, 2015, PlaceWorks submitted a draft summary of their findings in the visioning process which was comprised of: (1) a Vision Statement; (2) a Summary of Opportunities and Constraints; (3) Land Owner Interviews; (4) Existing Area Land Use Maps; and (5) Tool Box. Staff prepared comments on the draft submittal on March 31, 2015 and indicated that the document required more detailed descriptions of the planning concepts supported by related map work. Specifically, the following areas were requested to be explored more fully:

- Greater detail in the proposed Vision Statement;
- Elaboration of the concepts for connectivity and mobility related bikeways, pedestrian paths and alternative transportation;
- Identification of the existing Opportunities and Constraints on a map;
- More detailed narrative of the Land Owner Interviews;
- More descriptive information in the Land Use Maps;
- More descriptive information of the proposed "toolbox" of solutions and recommendations; and
- More specificity on the issue of proposed "freeway adjacent signs".

PlaceWorks responded with the attached resubmittal that consists of five documents, which they indicate would require greater refinement and revision during further planning for the District, if the City Council determines to continue with this process. The "vision" is seen as the starting point for further discussion regarding land use, development standards, design, mobility, streetscape, infrastructure, arts and cultural amenities, branding, wayfinding, and a signage program.

Vision Statement – (Attachment No. 1)

PlaceWorks describes the *Hospitality and Entertainment District* as a district located in the southwest entry to Culver City from the I-405 Freeway corridor that unifies the existing disparate mix of uses into a vital, pedestrian-oriented place that is distinct and draws from downtown Culver City, Playa Vista, Howard Hughes Center, and other activity centers of Los Angeles Westside communities. The district is a destination, a place where people want to be, spend time with friends and neighbors, celebrate, and participate in events. It offers a variety of experiences for nearby residents and employees, hotel guests, and travelers along the freeway with opportunities for shopping, entertainment, dining, arts and culture, working, staying overnight, and recreation. It consists of four sub-areas, each with its own character and distinct uses. PlaceWorks describes the sub-areas as follows:

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Sub-Area A (Hotel and Hospitality)

The area southwest of Green Valley Circle and Bristol Parkway is anchored by three hotels (Doubletree, Four Points by Sheraton, and Courtyard by Marriott) which cumulatively form the “heart” of the Entertainment and Hospitality District. The addition of new hotel rooms, conference facilities, restaurants, visitor-serving retail, recreational, and similar uses provide an attractive setting serving visitors to the City and the expanding technology and creative businesses of the Westside region. Departing from the historic form of independent parcels, new buildings and facilities are constructed on and replace surface parking lots. New housing (mixed use development) may also be constructed on the expansive surface parking lots, and designed for orientation to the street and pedestrian pathway frontages, maintaining the “main street” character and walkability throughout the District. An interconnected network of public plazas and open spaces provide the physical framework on which buildings front, establishing the urban form and character of a pedestrian-oriented “main street” environment comparable to downtown Culver City. These areas accommodate outdoor seating for restaurants, places for gathering and events, and passive recreation. This internal network is integrated with area wide landscaped pedestrian pathways connecting the west and east sides of the I-405 freeway, adjoining residential neighborhoods, and retail sub-areas to the north.

Sub-Area B – The MarketPlace

The street grid and scale of buildings uses along Selmaraine Drive and Corrine Place physically distinguish it from other sub-areas of the Proposed Project area. They contribute to a comparatively small scale, walkable “village-like” character, which is particularly attractive for creating a “specialty” or “thematic” district of artisans and creative design boutiques; a public marketplace for the sale of locally-grown food; small professional and creative industry offices, etc. Its identity as a unique district and place makes it a prime destination for visitors from the community and region, as well as hotel guests. Parking is located to the rear of these buildings or in shared structures. Properties fronting onto the west side of Sepulveda Boulevard contain a mix of larger and smaller buildings, with greater heights to visually frame the eastern edge of the Village District and as a buffer with the traffic along this street.

Sub-Area C – Transit Center District

Properties along Slauson Avenue adjoining the transit center are more intensely developed with new buildings, shared parking structures, and public spaces replacing surface parking lots. A network of internal pathways and plazas extends throughout the area and connects the transit center with the Westfield Mall. As with other public spaces in the District, it is extensively landscaped and offers amenities making it attractive for walking, meeting friends, and enjoying the out of doors. New retail, restaurants and entertainment businesses complement existing

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uses and contribute to the sense as a unified place. Potentially, new recreational facilities such as an ice rink, bike concourse, or climbing wall could be developed in concert with a major sports retail facility and connected with recreational improvements below the SR-90 freeway viaduct.

Sub-Area D – Fox Hills Plaza

The Fox Hills Plaza is a pivotal location between the Proposed Project, and the Fox Hills community/business park. As such, it is envisioned as a discrete and unified place accommodating uses transitioning with and serving both, including expansion of retail and service commercial uses for adjoining residents and employees and/or development of housing. As with the other sub-districts, new buildings would replace surface parking lots and be located on a network of unifying, well-landscaped pedestrian pathways and plazas. These would extend outward from the site, connecting with the Fox Hills neighborhoods and business areas, the hotel core, and Westfield Mall.

In general, the District's mix of retail uses range from a regional mall, local-serving grocery and convenience goods, to artisan and specialty uses. Restaurants offer a variety of formal and informal dining options and cuisines. Older industrial buildings have been adaptively re-used for incubator uses induced by markets generated from nearby digital, entertainment, and creative industries. Specialty stores and small galleries and museums celebrate Culver City's history as "The Heart of Screenland." Expanded hotels provide transient housing for guests of adjoining business centers and visitors to the coast and nearby neighborhoods and their conference facilities provide space for professional and community meetings and events. Residents live within the area and can walk or bicycle to businesses, jobs, and access regional transit. These uses are integrated through streetscapes and public amenities into a cohesive and definable district with choices and variety enriching and vitalizing the district.

The "bricks and mortar" of buildings are complemented with a robust network of plazas, parklets, and greenways. These are attractive places for people to walk, sit, read, converse with their friends, appreciate nature, dine in outdoor restaurants, participate in recreational activities and community events, and enjoy music and concerts. They incorporate public art and amenities, are landscaped with native and drought-tolerant species, and designed to filter toxics and pollutants from storm water runoff from paved surfaces into the drainage system and groundwater basin. Buildings are located, oriented, and designed to relate to these public spaces to foster the sense of "pedestrian-friendliness" and shared community activity, rather than earlier norms for turning inward. Parking is clustered and located in structures with ground level retail uses, replacing vast seas of surface asphalt parking lots and also fostering pedestrian interest and activity.

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Landscaped sidewalks and pedestrian paths connect the District with surrounding residential neighborhoods, facilitating access by walking in an attractive and safe environment. These are integrated with a network of bikeways connecting to Culver City's downtown, activity centers, and neighborhoods and regional paths including the Ballona Creek trail, which provides access for residents and hotel guests to the coast. All paths connect with the District's transportation center enabling residents, employees, and visitors to use transit to access destinations throughout the City and greater region.

Arts and design are important elements distinguishing the District, through well-designed buildings, public art, and signage. They employ iconic design elements and idioms reflecting Culver City's history. Freeway ramps and bridges and roadways at the edges of the District are treated with color, graphics, and lighting signaling arrival into a special place. A network of well-designed and consistent way-finding signage incorporates a district-identifying logo and provides directions and information guiding drivers, pedestrians, and bicyclists to key destinations including the Westfield Mall, hotels, transportation center, and mixed-use villages. Business and advertising signage is proposed to be located on and integrated with the architectural fenestration of building elevations, using a common vocabulary of design features and placement to achieve a visual sense of consistency throughout the District. The use of the signs for digital art in addition to advertising is suggested as another way to integrate the signage into the fabric of the proposed District.

Opportunities and Constraints – (Attachment No. 2)

Development in the proposed Hospitality and Entertainment District would be impacted by a number of key opportunities and constraints, some of which include:

Opportunities -

- The immediate area is home to a number of residents who would be the primary users of new businesses and additional services within walking distance of where they live.
- There is a growing sub regional market for creative office and associated amenities.
- The local and regional bicycle infrastructure is something that could be linked to through this area connecting existing bike lanes and trails with one another.
- Southern gateway to Culver City would benefit from additional landscaping, public art, and lighting.

Constraints -

- The area is automobile dominated with large parking lots and small sidewalks that limit walkability.
- The lack of available and/or adequate financing to cover costs of improvements, including loss of traditional revenue sources.
- Sidewalks are mostly narrow, lack streetscape amenities, and inhibit connectivity.

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- This part of Culver City lacks identity and is not clearly related to the adjacent Fox Hills neighborhood.

Land Owner Interviews – (Attachment No. 3)

PlaceWorks conducted a series of general discussions with some of the large and small land owners within the project area since early December 2014. The hotel land owners indicated that they would like to explore expanding their facilities to incorporate additional uses like housing; they would like to explore providing freeway oriented signage as an additional source of revenue and as a way to fund improvements to the area; and, they would like to explore the creation of a specific plan to identify those uses and amenities that would work best for the area.

Land Use Maps – (Attachment No. 4)

PlaceWorks reviewed various data sources and surveyed the area to prepare land use maps that document existing land uses and would be used to inform and convey information related to the other tasks.

Visual Database “Tool Box” – (Attachment No. 5)

The Visual Database Toolbox summarizes and assesses the quality of existing streets and streetscapes in the Proposed Project planning area and identifies a range of possible improvements to achieve consistency with the proposed Vision Statement. PlaceWorks indicates that the possible improvements are an initial point of departure for ideas that have not been vetted or analyzed and require further study to determine their costs, feasibility, and community acceptability.

Analysis of Submittal

Staff believes the PlaceWorks submittal provides many good conceptual ideas for the area, but that the document requires additional information in the following areas:

- The City Council has asked for more information about the proposed sign program. No detail or discussion has been provided in the document regarding the size and number of freeway adjacent signs and the mechanism for locating them. There is no information provided in the document regarding proposed advertising rates, expected gross receipts, percent of City receipts and the method of payments or revenue sharing. PlaceWorks proposes that the specific details of the sign design, number, locations and revenue sharing would be identified through additional discussions with the community and Staff, if the City Council determines to continue with this process.

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- The Problem and Opportunities section could provide more detail on how the existing transit center could be activated as a multi-modal asset for transit.

- There is reference to branding for the area through use of signage (gateways, wayfinding and advertising) but there is little conceptual discussion of what that could look like or how it would create a distinct area identity. The document simply indicates the intent is to use digital illuminated signs to “create vibrancy that makes the District a unique place” but does not indicate how that would occur.

- There is no detail provided on how the District proposed improvements would be funded.

- There is little detail provided on how the freeway adjacent signs would be designed to incorporate art (though the idea is referenced).

- The document references “incubator uses” related to creative industries that would occupy adaptively reused buildings but does not provide detail on how that would occur.

Signage Component

Carlyle’s proposal incorporates a signage component, which includes business and advertising freeway adjacent signs for the purpose of funding improvements in the District. The withdrawal of Carlyle from the planning effort may eliminate the sign component in the Plan. In the event signs would be included in any proposed Plan, a complete legal analysis would be necessary to ensure all legal aspects related to the signage are considered.

Next Steps and Options

The tasks in Phase 1 and Phase 1A have been completed and the proposed vision is now being presented to the City Council for consideration. If the City Council determines to continue with the process for the proposed vision, the next step would be to identify future plan funding and then initiate an agreement with PlaceWorks for Phase 2, revising the agreement as necessary to reflect the changed circumstances. (See attached Scope of Work and budget).

PlaceWorks intended to use the proposed vision as a starting point when preparing a Draft Specific Plan for the City’s review and comment in collaboration with the business stakeholders. This Draft Specific Plan was also to be a starting point for further community discussions about the types of use, development standards,

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design guidelines, mobility, streetscape, and infrastructure improvements, arts and cultural amenities and types and locations of branding, wayfinding, and signage that would guide further development throughout Phase 2 of the planning process.

The Specific Plan process was proposed to include an economic analysis, transportation analysis (completed by Fehr & Peers) and California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Compliance, Public Engagement and Outreach, Public Hearings and the preparation of a Final Draft Specific Plan for consideration by the City Council. The Scope of Work for Phase 2 is attached.

Given the changed circumstances, the City Council may wish to consider production of a less ambitious planning document that identifies potential land uses and circulation improvements, but does not include a full transportation analysis and economic development study. The plan would help inform decision making about prospective development projects in the area and help influence development by providing a more detailed planning framework than just zoning alone.

FISCAL ANALYSIS:

The PlaceWorks contract cost for the visioning phase was \$62,883. The City's cost during this phase was estimated to be approximately \$13,640 (this amount does not include legal costs which were anticipated to be incurred during Phase 2, if the City Council were to determine to continue with the process). The funds for the visioning phase (Phase 1 and 1A) of the Proposed Project were advanced from area stakeholders (including Carlyle). If the City Council determines that it wants to continue beyond the visioning phase, it will be necessary to identify further sources of funding.

PlaceWorks total estimated cost to prepare a Hospitality & Entertainment District Specific Plan (including a sign district component) and related environmental documentation is approximately \$539,264. The Proposed Project was expected to require approximately eight months from commencement through completion, including plan preparation, environmental analysis, and public hearings.

The total estimated City cost for staff time (including outside legal costs) to complete the Proposed Project plan is approximately \$350,000. If a less comprehensive document is recommended by City Council, staff will need to prepare a detailed work scope and obtain proposals from qualified firms to prepare the Plan. At that time, staff would also prepare an updated estimation of City costs.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Proposed Vision Statement

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2. Opportunities and Constraints Map and Narrative
3. Land Owner Interviews
4. Land Use Maps
5. Visual Database Tool Box
6. Results of outreach efforts
7. Phase 2 Scope of Work and budget
8. Carlyle Realty Properties IV Correspondence

MOTION

That the City Council:

1. Receive a presentation and discuss the proposed vision for a “Hospitality & Entertainment District” (which includes a sign district component), and
2. Direct the City Manager as deemed appropriate.