

City of Culver City, California
Redevelopment Agency Agenda Item Report

Meeting Date: 12/17/07		Item Number: <u>A-3</u>	
AGENDA ITEM: Consideration of a Design for Development for the Westfield Mall at Fox Hills.			
Contact Person/Dept.: Sol Blumenfeld or Todd Tipton		Phone Number: (310) 253-5760	
Fiscal Impact: Yes ☐ No ☒		General Fund: Yes ☐ No ☒	
Public Hearing: ☐		Consent Item: ☐ Action Item: ☒ Attachments: ☒	
Public Notification: Master Notification List; Fox Hills Homeowner Association on December 14, 2007; Chamber of Commerce on December 14, 2007.			
Department Approval: Sol Blumenfeld 12/13/07		Executive Director Approval: Jerry Fulwood 12/13/07	
Chief Financial Officer: Jeff Muir 12/13/07			

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Culver City Redevelopment Agency (the "Agency") direct staff as deemed appropriate.

BACKGROUND:

In November 2005, Westfield obtained Planning Commission approval to construct a project that consisted of modifying the existing 1.05 million square foot mall by demolishing some 180,000 square feet of existing space and replacing it with some 446,000 square feet of new space in a multi-level configuration with rooftop parking. The new mall would have approximately 1.3 million square feet of retail space upon completion, would be supported by 4,233 parking spaces, and would implement an array of on-site and off-site access and circulation improvements.

This expansion and remodeling project (the "Project") was subject to environmental review pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act via the preparation of a Mitigated Negative Declaration ("MND") by the City in August 2005 and revised in September and November 2005. This document was duly circulated for public review and adopted by the City Planning Commission with the conclusion that the Project would not result in significant adverse environmental impacts.

In the successive two years, the mall's scale, massing and mix of uses has remained in substantial conformance with that approved by the Planning

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Commission in November 2005. At the time, several wall-mounted panel signs located on the mall's westerly, freeway-facing facades were proposed by Westfield. The project's conditions of approval required Westfield to submit a Master Sign Program ("MSP") that further described the proposed signs. Pursuant to the Culver City Municipal Code, Master Sign Programs are subject to administrative review and approval.

Westfield submitted a MSP in September 2007, which proposed the following signs in addition to the wall-mounted panel signs:

- Three vertical freeway-oriented signs each rising approximately 80 feet over the expanded mall's rooftop located along the Sepulveda Boulevard frontage; and
- Four pole-mounted, billboard-type signs located in the parking lot west of the mall building.

Because the freeway and billboard signs were not contemplated in the initial MND, a subsequent environmental analysis ("the Analysis") is necessary. The Analysis considers aesthetics, traffic safety and impacts on global climate in connection with the MSP. The global climate change portion of the Analysis will determine whether or not the proposed signs substantively increase the mall's power demand beyond what is currently consumed.

On December 3, 2007, the Agency authorized execution of an agreement with PCR Services Corporation to conduct the necessary environmental review. The agreement took into consideration potential environmental impacts such as aesthetics, light/glare, (height?), energy consumption, etc. The agreement was fully funded by Westfield.

DISCUSSION:

In 1975 when the mall was developed, a primary objective of the City was that this large new retail development serves as an attractive gateway as well as an important sales tax generator. While the mall enjoyed success for many years, it has more recently experienced a slowdown due to the loss of Robinson-May, introduction of newer and upgraded competing properties, which resulted in limited reinvestment by the owner.

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Since Westfield acquired the mall in 1998, it has sought to improve the mall's performance via a major renovation that was approved by the Planning Commission in August 2005. The City, Agency and Westfield desire that the mall redevelopment be of the highest quality design and materials, and be comprised of the best possible tenants.

In order to achieve this goal, Westfield believes it imperative that the mall's visibility be improved. To accomplish this, Westfield proposed an aggressive Master Sign Program in August 2007 consisting of:

- Vertical Signs - Three vertical signs (Signs AP-A) are proposed to be oriented primarily to the I-405 Freeway and would be located atop the expanded mall structure's western façade overlooking Sepulveda Boulevard. Each would provide two separate display panels approximately 70 to 80 feet in length and 35 feet in width facing generally opposite directions. When mounted on the mall roof the display panels of these signs would be approximately 120 feet in height from adjacent grade ;
- Façade-Mounted Signs - Four façade-mounted sign panels (Signs AP-B) would be located on the expanded mall's western façade and on the western ends of the mall's northern and southern facades. These would be oriented to both freeways as appropriate and would vary in size from 14 feet in length and 48 feet in width to 29 feet in length and 64 feet in width; and
- Pole-Mounted Signs (billboards) - Four pole-mounted signs (Signs AP-C) would be located in the parking lot north of the mall primarily addressing the SR 90 Freeway, which is elevated over the project site approximately 27 feet. Pole-mounted signs would each be as high as 60 feet above grade. Three of these latter signs would provide sign panels 14 feet in length and 48 feet in width, while a fourth is proposed in a more vertical configuration with three panels 40 feet in length and 24 feet in width.

The content on all eleven freeway-oriented signs would consist of fixed copy and images (that is, they would not be digitally sequencing) and each would be illuminated. Each would be operable from 5:00 A.M. to daylight and from dusk to midnight. All of these signage panels will be powered with solar collectors (photovoltaic or other systems, as appropriate) made either a part of the respective signage structures or located elsewhere on the property. As a result, operation of all eleven freeway-oriented signs will be power grid and carbon neutral.

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A DFD is required in order to thoroughly analyze Westfield's proposal due to the unique nature of the mall property and the type of signs proposed. The DFD must consider:

1. Regional, local and neighborhood visibility to the mall and potential negative impacts to community character.
2. Regulate special signage that could be viewed by those traveling on the San Diego (405) and Marina (90) Freeways, and provides a major focal point along the Sepulveda Boulevard and Green valley Circle frontages.
3. Enhance a major employment center in the region, while retaining, expanding and attracting businesses that enhance the City.
4. Support the business community by attracting employees and visitors to the area that will frequent local stores, restaurants, and hotels;
5. Expand Culver City's economic base by attracting visitors to the mall.
6. Contribute to the expansion of the City's economic base through the development of underutilized property, thereby providing additional tax revenue to the City and Culver City Redevelopment Agency;
7. The proposed DFD establishes standards that assure the Master Sign Program is appropriate to the mall, that the signs are attractive, aesthetically pleasing and compatible with the mall's environment and that they do not create an adverse environmental impact (see attached environmental analysis). In regard to the signs, the DFD specifically addresses:
 - Sign type, quality and size;
 - Content
 - Architectural design;
 - Height;
 - Illumination; and
 - Prohibitions

It is noted for the Agency member's information that the DFD does not permit all items requested by Westfield in their Master Sign Program. Staff believes it important that the size and number of signs be limited in order to maintain the aesthetic character of the area.

Maximum Sign Height

The success of the mall is dependent upon its ability to attract customers. Without freeway oriented signs, the mall owners believe that they will have difficulty drawing

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the larger customer base required for high quality retail tenants and will not be able generate sufficient revenue to reduce the funding gap for the mall improvements.

The critical issue related to the proposed MSP is sign height. The signs must be tall enough to serve their purpose of commanding customer attention from the Freeway but not so tall that they intrude upon the views from surrounding residential neighborhoods. The elevation of the mall on Sepulveda Boulevard must also be considered relative to the Vertical sign height. The mall ranges from approximately 23 feet to 30 feet below the San Diego (405) Freeway from North to South. Thus, to be clearly seen from the Freeway, the signs must be elevated to the height of the Freeway.

If the goal of the Master Sign Program is to ensure sign visibility for the distance of the mall frontage, (approximately 1000') then the vertical sign height must be a minimum of 100 feet. Approximately 30' above grade is required to clear the Freeway elevation and 50' to 60' of elevation is required to provide enough height to see the signs over a 1000' foot distance. (Please see Attached DFD, Exhibit C). The actual length of the vertical signs would be 50' to 60' and mounted at the mall roof level which is approximately 40 feet in height. Consistent with the definition of freeway oriented signs and based upon the visibility criteria described in the DFD, Vertical signs should not exceed 100 feet above grade. (Currently, Westfield has proposed Vertical signs with advertising displays in excess of 120 feet above grade). The DFD must strike a compromise between meeting the goal of visibility along the Freeway and protecting views from the surrounding residential area.

According to the photo-simulations, at a reduced elevation, the Vertical signs provide sufficient visibility from the Freeways, but are also are partly visible to surrounding residential areas (Culver Crest, Westchester Bluff and surrounding neighborhoods). Signs with a height less than 100 feet above adjacent grade, however, do not provide sufficient visibility to view them along the length of the freeway mall frontage and may not achieve the goal of drawing customers through increased Freeway visibility. (Please see Photo-simulations – DFD, Exhibit C).

Limiting the height of the vertical signs to 100 feet above grade permits sufficient sign visibility along the length of the mall frontage without severely affecting surrounding areas (Culver Crest, Westchester Bluff and surrounding neighborhoods). The photo-simulations indicate that Vertical signs with a height less than 100 feet above grade do not provide sufficient visibility from the Freeway to fully meet the intent of the freeway oriented signs.

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Prohibited Pole Mounted Signs:

The four pole-mounted signs proposed to be located in the parking lot north of the mall and oriented to the SR 90 Freeway, are prohibited.

CONCLUSIONS:

Westfield has proposed a mall improvement and expansion program to help reposition it as a modern regional retail center. The DFD incorporates a Sign Program proposed by Westfield to support the mall improvements. The DFD is based upon the land use policies of the General Plan which recommend upgrading and expanding the mall to maintain economic viability while mitigating the impacts to nearby residential neighborhoods. To the extent that the Sign Program helps attract new customers and expands the customer base, it supports the mall improvement and may achieve this redevelopment objective. Many of the proposed signs are freeway oriented, and as such, require enough height to be clearly visible along Freeway mall frontage. However, the DFD must strike a compromise between meeting the goal of Freeway visibility and protecting views from surrounding residential areas.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Proposed Westfield Culver City Design for Development with related exhibits.

MOTION:

That the Culver City Redevelopment Agency:

1. Direct staff as deemed appropriate.