

STUDIO CITY

# Sportsmen's Lodge mixed-use project a step closer to final OK

By Linh Tat

[ltat@scng.com](mailto:ltat@scng.com)

A proposed project that would demolish the history-rich Sportsmen's Lodge hotel in Studio City and replace it with a mixed-use development next to the upscale retail center known as The Shops is one step closer to final approval.

The Los Angeles City Council's Planning and Land Use Management Committee voted 4-0, with Councilmember Imelda Padilla absent, on Tuesday to uphold a prior Planning Commission decision to allow the proposed project at 12825 Ventura Blvd., just south of the Los Angeles River, to move forward.

The Studio City Residents Association, along with Erewhon, a high-end grocery store next to the project site, and UNITE HERE Local 11, a union that represents hotel workers, are appealing the Planning Commission's decision, but the land-use committee this week voted to deny their appeals.

The full City Council is expected to take a final vote.

The developer, Midwood Investment & Development, wants to demolish the history-rich 190-room hotel — and replace it with a mixed-use development featuring approximately 46,000 square feet of commercial space and 520 apartment units, of which 78 would be set aside for very-low income tenants.

Dave Rand, attorney for Midwood, told City Council committee members that the project would bring “one of the most important and catalytic developments to this part of the San Fernando Valley.”

“For years, Ventura Boulevard has been a largely ignored yet hugely important corridor in the Valley,” he said. “With this city's unbelievably ambitious housing goals and obligations ... this site is the perfect

location to bring housing, mixed-use and river-appropriate fronted development.”

He added that the project would bring affordable housing to a part of the city that hasn't seen much of it.

Those who support the project include business groups like the Valley Industry Commerce Association and The Valley Economic Alliance, who spoke of further economic revitalization the project would bring to the area.

“Midwood’s investment of hundreds of millions of dollars into the community builds on the success of The Shops at Sportsmen’s Lodge and offers additional housing that the (San Fernando) Valley desperately needs,” Sonya Blake, president and CEO of The Valley Economic Alliance, told committee members.

But not everyone is on board with what’s been proposed.

The project, as proposed, would include multiple buildings with a maximum height of eight stories, or 94 feet, more than three times the regular height limit for that neighborhood, which is 30 feet.

The project is eligible for density bonus incentives, allowing the developer to build higher than normal and to exceed normal floor area limits set by regular zoning rules.

Rand said that under the state’s density bonus law, the extra height can only be denied if there’s an identifiable health or human safety risk.

Representatives for the Studio City Residents Association and Erewhon said during Tuesday’s committee meeting that an environmental review known as the Sustainable Communities Environmental Assessment was improperly used by city staff in considering the proposal, though they believe the project isn’t eligible for the condensed environmental review.

Amy Minter, attorney for the Studio City Residents Association, said while the association supports residential development, including affordable housing, the project must comply with the California Environmental Quality Act by adequately analyzing and mitigating potential impacts “to protect the community, environment and the adjacent L.A. River.”

“Additionally, projects must not be so far out of line from existing development standards that they prevent cohesive community development,” she said, noting that the proposed project height would reach 94 feet. That’s more than three times the typical height limit for the area, and no other building in Studio City is greater than 54 feet, she said.

In addition, Minter said the project calls for 430,000 cubic yards of dirt to be excavated. That, combined with an additional 200,000 cubic yards of excavation from the nearby Harvard–Westlake athletic facilities project that would be taking place simultaneously would have a compounded impact on local traffic, air quality and noise, she said.

In addition, in its appeals application filed with the city, Minter, on behalf of the Studio City Residents Association, wrote that at least 10 mature trees would be removed as a result of this project, in addition to 90 mature trees that were previously removed from the site. This is in addition to hundreds of mature trees planned for removal from the nearby Harvard–Westlake project.

The newer trees replacing the mature trees will take years to grow, she wrote. In addition, she wrote, the mature trees provide a place for bats to roost and foraging habitat and would adversely impact migratory and predatory birds.

Meanwhile, members of UNITE HERE Local 11 urged city officials not to allow the current hotel to be demolished, citing its historical significance to the labor movement as one of the first hotels with unionized employees.

The Sportsmen’s Lodge also represents a part of the Valley’s cultural history. The 1960s hotel is well-known for its connections to Hollywood, where legendary stars Clark Gable, Humphrey Bogart, John Wayne and Katharine Hepburn once frequented the location.