



Motion to submit suggested amendments to the West Adams Community Plan

Agenda Item: SB040913-1
Date: 9 April 2013
Proposed By: Marjan Safinia

Full Proposal

After many years of development, the draft West Adams-Baldwin Hills-Leimert Community Plan will be reviewed by the City Planning Commission on Thursday, April 11. SORO NC has provided input throughout the process. During a joint meeting of the Land Use, Transportation, and Robertson Revitalization committees last week, several general issues with the draft were identified and a working group was formed to articulate specific recommendations. A draft of their findings is attached.

Proposed Motion

- I. That the South Robertson Neighborhoods Council strongly believes that citywide, community plans should be redrawn along Neighborhood Council boundaries as soon as practicable;
- II. To submit the attached letter to the City Planning Commission, members of the City Council Planning and Land Use Committee, and the Department of City Planning, making the following general points (see the letter for more detail):
 - a. That dividing SORO NC into four Community Plans (CPs) inhibits coordinated planning and places an undue burden on the community;
 - b. That the CP must include specific solutions for alleviating the traffic problems along the Robertson business corridor in order to achieve the goal of a pedestrian-oriented neighborhood and minimize overflow cut-through traffic in our residential areas;
 - c. That one possible solution would be to create off-street parking lots and/or structures, to restripe Robertson to create two dedicated bike lanes, four car lanes and one center turn lane;
 - d. That the Planning Department explore the idea of allowing future developers to deepen commercial properties along Robertson by incorporating existing and adjacent R2-1 lots with appropriate setbacks/screening and pushing back alleyways;
 - e. That the area on Robertson south of Cattaraugus be rezoned for high-density residential over neighborhood-oriented commercial;
 - f. That connecting the South Robertson corridor to the new Transit-Oriented District (TOD) around the Expo station should be a priority;
 - g. That National Boulevard between Venice and Robertson should be reconceived as a mixed-use pedestrian gateway to Robertson from the Expo Line, including changes to zoning, sidewalk width, and environmental improvements;

Doug Fitzsimmons
President

Brian Kite
Vice-President

Terrence Gomes
Treasurer

Beth Ryan
Secretary

**South Robertson
Neighborhoods Council**

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- h. That the TOD around the Culver City Expo station prioritize pedestrian use rather a transit/connection point;
- i. That SORO NC is in favor of limiting the density of new fast-food restaurants in our area.

Considerations

Committee review:
(highly recommended)

Votes For: 0

Against:

Amount previously allocated in Committee's working budget: \$
(applies to funding motions only)

Arguments for:

It's important that we take every opportunity to express our vision for the future of SORO

The CP goes into great detail about other areas, but does not for South Robertson. We ask that we get the same consideration.

Arguments against:

The plan has been in development for many years and is generally fairly good.

Not all of the specific points have been vetted within the community.



Los Angeles Planning Commission
200 N. Spring Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

11 April 2013

Re: Feedback West Adams-Baldwin Hills-Leimert Community Plan

Dear Commissioners:

The South Robertson Neighborhoods Council area, which serves about 45,000 residents is located directly between the burgeoning economic areas that surround it: Culver City to the south, Beverly Hills and West Hollywood to the north, and Century City to the immediate northwest. Yet despite its location, direct Freeway access to the 10, and a new Expo Line Metro Stop at Robertson and Venice, this community's commercial corridor along South Robertson remains depressed and underdeveloped. While many people pass through South Robertson on their way to and from the Freeway visiting the bustling surrounding commercial areas, very few stop within the community. In fact the local residents themselves are forced to get in their cars and drive out of the community to meet their needs.

The residents of this community have long wanted a commercial corridor along South Robertson that better reflects the rich residential communities that exist here, better serves their needs, and offers them the opportunity to live in a "complete neighborhood". The economic depression of this commercial corridor has remained unchanged for more than 20 years, and offers a significant opportunity to the City for thoughtful planning.

Fractured planning

The South Robertson Neighborhoods Council is very concerned that our community has been awkwardly split between four community plans. These are the West Adams-Baldwin Hills-Leimert plan, the West Los Angeles Plan, the Palms-Mar Vista Plan and the Wilshire Plan.

The South Robertson Neighborhoods Council has objected to this divided designation since the NC's inception, because this ill-conceived division of our neighborhood creates a prohibitively complex burden on the Neighborhood Council and our stakeholders, who are forced to advocate on four different fronts to realize the vision we hold for our community. This division actively impedes our efforts to create a cohesive sense of community within our boundaries.

It is the opinion of this Neighborhood Council that Community Plans should be drawn along Neighborhood Council boundaries that were specifically created to represent coherent and cohesive communities and (unlike City Council boundaries) remain consistent over time.

While we continue to oppose the splitting of our area into four community plans, we have specific comments on portions of the West Adams-Baldwin Hills-Leimert Plan that affect South Robertson.

We believe that these proposed changes better support the community's vision for its own growth, and indeed better support the goals and visions called for in the West Adams-Baldwin Hills-Leimert Plan by addressing some inconsistencies that the implementation Plan presents.

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Specific Recommendations

1. Artificial divisions create real-world problems

- a. As you will read below, the 10 Freeway exits on South Robertson create significant impacts on our community. Yet the areas around the on-ramps to the 10 Freeway east and west, fall under the Palms-Mar Vista Plan—and National abutting the Expo station is split between the two. Again, by dividing a critical single Transit Oriented District and neighborhood gateway between two community plans, it multiplies the obstacles to extending the pedestrian benefits of the Expo line to South Robertson.
- b. Figure 4-1 in the West Adams-Baldwin Hills-Leimert Plan shows that practically the entire area of the West Adams-Baldwin Hills-Leimert Plan is designated as a California State Enterprise Zone, with the exception of the South Robertson area. While the Enterprise Zone offers help with economically distressed areas, the economically distressed portion of South Robertson cannot benefit from any of these advantages to help revive the local economy. This inconsistency further reinforces the community's feeling that South Robertson does not belong within the West Adams-Baldwin Hills-Leimert Plan, given the significant differences that exist between our needs and those of the other areas covered by the Plan.

2. South Robertson's designation as a Neighborhood District is undermined by the unique transportation problems of the area—with no roadmap for solving them

- a. The West Adams-Baldwin Hills-Leimert Plan designates the South Robertson area as a Neighborhood District. We agree with this designation, and feel that it closely reflects the desire of our community. However the Plan ignores several major transportation factors that are at odds with realizing this vision. Without substantive thought as to how these transportation issues can be addressed, we fear that the West Adams-Baldwin Hills-Leimert Plan will have little impact on helping the revitalization of this long-depressed commercial corridor that does little to serve the needs of the local community.
- b. The designation of "Neighborhood District" calls for an area which is highly walkable, drawing local residents out to the commercial corridor to meet their daily needs, with a focus on sidewalk cafes and sit-down restaurants and other pedestrian oriented retail. In fact, Figure 4-3 specifically designates South Robertson as a Pedestrian Priority Street Segment. Unfortunately, the West Adams-Baldwin Hills-Leimert Plan completely ignores the heavy commuter traffic that uses South Robertson as an access point to the 10 Freeway and as a connector between the 10 Freeway and bustling areas such as Century City, Beverly Hills and West Hollywood. Major development projects that are currently under review in Century City only threaten to exacerbate this problem, depositing more and more traffic on this narrow Boulevard with narrow sidewalks, and creating a less and less desirable walking and pedestrian oriented Neighborhood retail District.
- c. Of all major roadways that feed into the 10 Freeway, Robertson Boulevard is by far the narrowest. This is further aggravated by the presence of Hamilton High School at the gateway to the Freeway, effectively blocking traffic flow to the Freeway at peak times twice a day. Robertson's roadbed is only 60-66 feet in width and the Plan's analysis rates it at F(1) to F(2) in terms of traffic level of service. None of the other three "Neighborhood District" areas in the



West Adams-Baldwin Hills-Leimert Plan Figure 3-5 have similar freeway-access traffic loads as Robertson, and many of those other areas have wider streets than Robertson. We would like to see the Plan substantively address how we can achieve the desired walkable neighborhood with these traffic impediments. We do not see any provision for this in the current draft. Rather, it completely ignores this critical issue.

- d. Figure 4-4 of the Plan designates South Robertson to have bicycle lanes, yet the existing roadway can barely support the current load of cars. The bicycle lane designation, while very desirable to our vision for this community, is at odds with the findings of the TIMP that indicate Robertson is ill-prepared to sustain this use.
- e. These transportation issues create challenges that are *unique* to the South Robertson area within the areas covered by the West Adams-Baldwin Hills-Leimert Plan, yet we do not see the Plan adequately addressing any of these unique issues, all of which stand as obstacles to a shared vision for the area that the Plan and the community desire: a true Neighborhood District.

3. Specific opportunity areas on the South Robertson corridor

- a. In Figure 4-1, South Robertson is designated as a Secondary Highway, yet it does not meet the ROW standard of being 90 feet in width and consisting of two lanes in each direction with left turn lanes at signalized intersections. Two valuable traffic lanes are taken up for street parking, and there is little opportunity to include bike lanes as the Plan prescribes. We see an opportunity to rethink Robertson to have two lanes of traffic in each direction, a center turn lane between them and a bike lane in each direction, but it would require us to make many of the changes outlined below.
- b. While observation may suggest that there is currently plenty of available street parking along South Robertson, we feel this is misleading. Current retail on Robertson only minimally serves the surrounding communities' needs, with a high proliferation of alley-only businesses and retail spaces that are underused or empty. If Robertson Boulevard were to sustain the types of sit-down restaurants and thriving retail that the Plan envisions, the LAMC would require significantly more parking than is currently available. Furthermore, street parking exacerbates traffic problems on Robertson, since valuable roadway is taken up for parking. Policy M12-2 of the Plan specifies a vision for a Park-Once strategy and we share this vision as a viable option for South Robertson to help realize the vision for a pedestrian-oriented viable Neighborhood District that also draws people from around the larger community. If the City could help build a parking structure, centralized on Robertson between the Cadillac and Cattaraugus, it would stimulate economic revitalization, encourage a Park-Once and walk approach and alleviate some of the traffic burdens along the Boulevard.
- c. The West Adams-Baldwin Hills-Leimert Plan is not calibrated to account for the existing shallow-depth commercial lots on South Robertson. These small and shallow lots continue to impede the growth of a flourishing community-oriented retail corridor since they provide very limited space for many retail uses. Many of the available retail spaces have languished empty for years, with the limited footprint providing little value to prospective retail tenants or developers. As a result, very few new businesses are attracted to the corridor and the economic depression continues. We note that the first lots behind the alleys to the east and west of South Robertson are zoned R2-1. There may be an opportunity to rethink zoning for these lots so that they could be



incorporated into new commercial developments in the C-4 zone lots that face onto Robertson Boulevard on the east and west. This would allow the commercial lots to be deepened, attracting many more viable businesses, and offer an opportunity to take required parking for these developments off Robertson completely, either through a Park-Once structure or by providing prospective developers with a wider footprint to incentivize the viability of expansion in the area, including providing off-street parking for their customers. This change would involve moving the alleys back and creating appropriate setbacks with the R1 properties, however this “big idea” could provide the opportunity to realize the vision for a South Robertson Boulevard that sustains Freeway access traffic, while still allowing deeper commercial lots, and wider sidewalks with green walls to separate pedestrians from traffic to encourage pedestrian use. Of course, any such zoning change would have to be carefully considered by the community, but this sort of rethinking may serve as the key to unlock the long-time depression of this corridor and spark an opportunity for revitalization. An example of this kind of zoning currently exists the lots north of Cadillac on the east side of Robertson. The lot on the north of Cattaraugus to the west side of Robertson would also have to be considered as part of such a change.

- d. On the portion of South Robertson that runs south of Cattaraugus (excluding Hamilton High School), we envision an opportunity for high density residential over neighborhood-oriented commercial exceeding the current 3-story limit. This area is currently designated as RD2-1. With its direct access to major transportation including the Freeways and Expo Line, as well as close proximity to Hamilton High School, this could be an ideal location for high density mixed use that could connect the Robertson corridor with the TOD area surrounding the Expo Metro.
- e. We wish to note that one existing building in Plan area exceeds the 3-story height limit for South Robertson Blvd. This building is located at 3000 S. Robertson. If changes occurred to the ownership/sale/use of this building after adoption of the Plan, provisions would have to be made to except this building.
- f. We note that the Plan calls for a rethinking of school sites to better partner with the community for other uses. We are very excited about this since Hamilton High School anchors our commercial corridor. With ample parking and significant frontage onto Robertson, this would be an ideal site for a Farmer’s Market, or evening and weekend parking possibilities for businesses. The Plan mentions LAUSD partnerships; has LAUSD actually committed to working more closely with neighborhoods?

4. Connecting the South Robertson corridor to the TOD area around the Expo Line Metro Station

- a. The West Adams-Baldwin Hills-Leimert Plan addresses the huge economic opportunities for redevelopment around the Expo Metro stop at Robertson/Venice in a Transit Oriented Development zone (TOD), however the Plan does little to offer a realizable vision for connecting this TOD to the neighboring South Robertson community. The Plan notes the Venice/National gateway to Culver City, but is silent on how the TOD can serve as a gateway to *Los Angeles*, specifically with neighboring South Robertson. We feel this is major failing and a missed opportunity. In fact, the Plan only covers one side of National Boulevard as it runs beneath the 10 Freeway, connecting South Robertson to Venice and the Metro area TOD.



Again, the short-sighted division of a TOD and gateway into multiple community plans makes strategizing and improvement more difficult.

5. Rethink the hybrid industrial designation of the North side of National Boulevard between Venice and Robertson

- a. National Boulevard between Venice and Robertson Boulevards should be reconceived as a mixed-use residential and pedestrian gateway that bridges the TOD to the communities of South Robertson. This street already serves heavy pedestrian traffic from the students of Hamilton High School who use the corridor to connect to the transit opportunities along Venice. The Metro stop only increases this pedestrian use, offering an opportunity to draw the wider commuter community to connect through to South Robertson.
- b. In fact, figure 4-3 designates this National connection as a Pedestrian Priority Street segment in recognition of this opportunity, yet the conflicting Industrial designation is counterintuitive to that use. The current industrial use coupled with the Freeway underpass makes this street feel very unwelcoming to Pedestrian foot traffic.
- c. Among improvements that should be considered here are wider sidewalks, landscaping and other buffers to vehicular traffic lanes, good lighting, trash receptacles that are regularly serviced, elimination of parking under the 10 Freeway (ridding the community of frequent abandoned and oversize vehicles that park here), reduction of the vehicular lane on the north side of National, as well as benches and signage.
- d. The Plan should connect the two Pedestrian Priority Street segments of National and South Robertson outlined in figure 4-3 into one cohesive Pedestrian Priority Street segment which connect at National and Robertson. Currently, these two closely neighboring Pedestrian Priority Streets do not cohesively connect.
- e. We feel there is opportunity for a vision that focuses this section of National Boulevard as the *pedestrian* oriented gateway from the Venice/Robertson Metro stop through to South Robertson (and the communities to the North), while refocusing the La Cienega/Jefferson Metro stop as a *transit/connection* point for those who will be connecting to ground transportation from the Metro, feeding up to Century City and Beverly Hills. This would allow La Cienega, which is better equipped to deal with increased ground transit to serve that purpose, and refocus the Robertson corridor, less well equipped to carry more traffic, to focus on a pedestrian use, with possible inclusion of a local DASH.

6. Fast food exemption for CD10

- a. Like many other communities covered by the West Adams-Baldwin Hills-Leimert Plan, we are very concerned about limiting the density of new uses of fast food restaurants that offer poor nutritional choices to surrounding communities. Our stakeholders within Council District 10 are already inundated with fast-food and convenience food options in close proximity to each other along La Cienega, Venice, Pico and Robertson Boulevards, and deserve better choices in a vision for their community's future.

We appreciate the effort that has gone into the Draft Community Plan and the Department's efforts at outreach. We hope that with the changes and



recommendations outlined above, we can create a Community Plan will spark renewed economic development and make our area the pedestrian-oriented community we all want.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions about this comment letter.

Sincerely,

First and Last Name
South Robertson Neighborhoods Council

cc. Council Presiden Herb Wesson
Council Member Paul Koretz
Council Member Bernard Parks
Los Angeles City Council Planning and Land Use Management Committee

DRAFT