July 8, 2020

Ms. Sarah Hounsell  
Hearing Officer  
City of Los Angeles Department of City Planning  
Case No: CPC-2018-7165-CU  
CEQA No: ENV-2018-7166-CE  
Sarah.Hounsell@lacity.org

Dear Ms. Hounsell,

The Greater Valley Glen Council’s (“GVGC”) Planning and Land Use Committee (“PLUC” or “Committee”) held a hearing on February 19, 2020 addressing the Case No: CPC-2018-7165-CU affecting property located at 6254 N. Ranchito Avenue, Valley Glen (property in question or “PIQ”) to consider an application to approve a variance for a 6-bed Congregate Living Health Facility (“Facility”) to become an 18-bed Facility (the “Variance”). An invitation to the Representative for the Applicant was extended, without a response. Additionally, the surrounding community was invited to comment.

After an extended period of testimony from those in attendance on February 19, 2020, the Committee recommended to the General GVGC Board to support a denial of the Conditional Use Permit and the Exemption from CEQA to State CEQA Guidelines, Section 15303 (Class 3).

At its March 2, 2020 Regular Board meeting, the GVGC Board voted unanimously to uphold the Committee’s recommendation. Once again, the Applicant’s Representative was noticed of the meeting, and the community was notified as well. The Applicant’s Representative never responded to any notices by the GVGC Board. Over 20 community members were present and spoke against the project. They brought a 35-signature petition of non-support of the CUP to allow for an 18-bed Facility.

On March 9, 2020, an LA City Planning Department Hearing on this matter was presided over by Daniel Skolnick. Three GVGC Board members, including the current chair of PLUC, and approximately 50 stakeholders spoke against the Variance.

As noted at GVGC’s PLUC and Board meetings, GVGC and the community are concerned about several matters:

1) A demonstrated unwillingness of the Applicant to conduct any outreach to its neighbors. Outside of the Early Notification system notice to GVGC and a short lead-time notice to neighbors. Only the required sign was posted in an overgrown yard on the Facility site, making the notice virtually unnoticeable. The applicant did not reach out to the community with its plan to expand the property into the proposed Facility.

2) The PIQ has had a history of poor exterior maintenance with weeds in the front and side yards as high as 3-4 feet high. How could the State or County Department of Health allow the PIQ to operate a Facility where weeds that tall could create respiratory issues. i.e. what capabilities do government agencies have to monitor an expanded Facility?
3) The PIQ lies at the southeast corner of Ranchito Ave. and Sylvan Ave., both narrow secondary-residential streets. Considering the tripling in size of the PIQ, how could additional traffic resulting from increased employees and deliveries be handled without an impact on street traffic and environmental quality? The conversion to an 18-bed Congregate Living Health Facility with its necessary truck deliveries/ pick-ups, and personnel in the middle of an R Zone, single family dwelling community, will destroy the historical character and peace of the community.

4) As an 18-bed Facility, the required parking for staff, including visitors, medical attending personnel, such as doctors and ambulances, and delivery vehicles is totally incompatible with any parking that the Applicant would propose. There is just not enough space on the property to have the necessary parking without affecting the surrounding community.

5) The Applicant reportedly had been operating the 6-bed Facility and then closed the Facility approximately three years ago. We are not aware of the reasons for the closure of the Facility. The Applicant has allowed the exterior of the property to appear abandoned with excessive weed growth. The applicant’s architect submitted 3 support documents to the PLUC chair: one hand-written client thank you note with no address from 2010, a letter from a former maintenance employee, and one neighbor support letter, though there is no authentication letterhead or email send.

6) We are not able to determine if the Applicant has any larger scale management experience. We are unable to understand how the Applicant has the ability to transfer its prior experience managing a 6-bed Facility that closed operation for 3 years to managing a Facility three-times the original size while managing street traffic, environmental quality, and other issues coincident with a much denser Facility. Add to that, new health issues associated with congregate living facilities during this COVID-19 Virus situation, there is simply too much to absorb to find a way to come to support such an expansion.

At the March 9 Planning Commission hearing, after listening to over two hours of testimony as to how intrusive the project was to this quiet neighborhood where residents have lived as far back as the 1960s, the Applicant’s Design Representative who came down from Santa Barbara for the hearing, indicated that he had never visited the PIQ and now understood that the proposed project, requested by an Applicant who has been insensitive to the community over the years, would be upsetting a stable community. The Applicant’s Representative resigned from the project, and the Hearing was concluded.

Due to a technical issue with the quorum number at our March 2, 2020 Regular Board meeting, the vote to send a letter of non-support of this project was retaken at GVGC’s next Board meeting, the May 27, 2020 Virtual Special Board meeting. The Applicant and new Architect called in to advise us of new plans and answered questions from the Board. Since the number of proposed beds had not changed (18) and that the increase from a 6-bed facility to an 18-bed facility was of the greatest concern to the neighbors, we did not refer the new plans back to Committee for re-consideration. The GVGC Board confirmed its March 2 vote to send a letter of non-support.

After the May 27, 2020 Special Board meeting, two GVGC Board members received communication from Adrienne Asadoorian. She is the Planning Deputy for Councilmember Paul Krekorian (CD2), and she asked the
GVGC to offer the Applicant and new architect the opportunity to present their new plans to PLUC. Even if the GVGC Board voted not to refer the matter back to PLUC, our Committee still provides a forum for Public comment and/or a means to have the matter heard as a new item on its agenda. Our PLUC Chair offered the Applicant and new Architect such opportunity at a June 29, 2020 PLUC meeting. However, the Applicant and new Architect declined to attend or present. We were disappointed with their decision, but we took it upon ourselves to at least make the new plans/renderings submitted to us available to the public on our website gvgc.us.

As to the new plans, the Chair of GVGC’s PLUC concluded that new plans created since the March 9, 2020 Hearing have increased hardscape, thereby creating additional heat island effect with added paving, sidewalk, iron fencing and electronic gates. A beautiful 70’ evergreen shade tree is to be removed, adding a further environmental negative (photo attached). The GVGC takes a strong position to preserve all large trees in our neighborhood for their ecosystem services, which are important to mitigate pollution and prevent flooding. A significant tree should not be removed just to change landscape design.

The neighbors have seen the new plans, and their comment to us was that there has never been a gardener on site in the past 20 years, and they say they have no trust from past experience that any new landscaping would be maintained.

In summary, for the six reasons indicated above, the proposed 18-bed Facility should be located in a different type of zone. Such a Facility dramatically changes the character of the neighborhood and negatively affects safety, parking, and overall environmental quality of the neighborhood. The lack of outreach from the Applicant leaves the GVGC unable to be assured the Applicant can manage such an expanded Facility in an R zone and comply with conditions attached by the Planning Commission and other governmental authorities.

The GVGC Board opposes the approval of the Variance and issuance of the Conditional Use Permit. As well, GVGC opposes an exemption from CEQA.

Respectfully,

Mickey Jannol
President, Greater Valley Glen Council

Joanne D’Antonio
Secretary, Greater Valley Glen Council
Chair, Planning and Land Use Committee

cc:
adrienne.asadoorian@lacity.org
narek.jalladyan@lacity.org