



April 20, 2011

Ms. Nuno-O'Donnell
Department of City Planning
6262 Van Nuys Boulevard, Suite 351
Van Nuys, CA 91404.

RE: Westfield Topanga Project
ENV-2007-3393-EIR

Dear Ms. Nuno-O'Donnell,

Please accept the following comments regarding the Westfield project planned for Warner Center in Woodland Hills, CA. Save Oak Savanna is a grassroots community advocacy group keenly interested in the land use and the future of Warner Center development. We have worked within our community for the past 6 years and have actively stayed involved in land use issues.

THE "VILLAGE" FEELING IS GONE

The project as currently presented, with the 450 foot long Costco wall backing up onto Victory, does not actively welcome people. This is a prestigious corner deserving of more than an ordinary big box store with 20 gas pumps. The Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) should include at least one viable Alternative that shows some creativity and lives up to calling this project "The Village".

Members of Save Oak Savanna participated in workshops and seminars where community members actively planned for the future development of Warner Center. Contrary to what the developer promotes to the public, this down-sized project does not represent community input. In elevations only, the developer has highlighted their vision for a striking row of retail shops along Topanga. In another elevation only, they have re-designed the 450 foot long wall to appear less dull but this falls short of a Village feeling. Where are the inviting storefronts along Victory and Owensmouth? The (FEIR) should include a design that complies with the Owensmouth Parkway Design objectives, including establishing streets that encourage pedestrian use and promote pedestrian serving activities.

FROM UBIQUITOUSNESS TO UNIQUENESS

The developer has eschewed the idea of a community forum for good reason. Woodland Hills is fortunate to have several community activist groups who rally against poorly planned development.

The consensus of these groups and the greater community is that a standard Costco is not the right type of project for the prestigious corner of Victory and Owensmouth.

Research shows that Costco and Westfield have completed several projects together with more creative design and greater acceptance by the community. Alternatives have not been explored that would satisfy the community and make a great project. The FEIR should include a discussion of better design for this project. We're taking a stand against bland.

The Costco Docklands, in Melbourne, Australia is tagged as "Award worthy" in an article titled: "From Ubiquitousness to Uniqueness". It is an example of what can be done to respond to the call for design savvy and a refusal to accept mediocrity. Located near a rejuvenated wharf and entertainment district, it was completed in 9 months. When Costco tried to build their standard shed, they failed to make it through the permit process twice. The Docklands required "quality, contemporary architecture" and the box didn't meet the design requirements. It was approved only after the standard shed concept was re-designed to be architecturally interesting and unique to fit the location. Costco Docklands is a one of a kind design but it set precedent for design concepts that should be considered for Warner Center:

- Public forecourt to bring customers from the parking lot to the front of the store, creating a public place that connects Costco to the rest of the project and creates space to place public art
- Cantilever roof (or other visual/functional design) over the entrance for architectural impact and to provide weather protection for customers
- Landscaping and/or building design that camouflages the loading dock to avoid the look of a box and asphalt.
- Underground parking (or a better solution than 1 huge structure that towers over other buildings).

The Docklands project was built using all standard warehouse materials. Yet, the shapes and forms created for visual impact used traditional constructions techniques, steel profiles and cladding materials that were all standard. The FEIR should include an Alternative that the community can embrace as a true "village" with interesting features, as mentioned above.

WRONG LOCATION FOR A GAS STATION

Building a gas station at this prime corner conflicts with the Draft Commercial Guidelines. Many of these guidelines are ignored and should be factored into the FEIR when real Alternatives are finally presented for the community's consideration. Drive through elements, like the huge gas station, should be placed away from the primary site corner.

ROAD WIDENING AS MITIGATION MEASURE

As identified by City Planning in the campaign "Do Real Planning", widening roads adjacent to project is one of the most ineffective and overused mitigation measures. This is supposed to appease the introduction of more people. Instead, the result undermines walkability goals and the local community is left to cope with more passenger car congestion. The FEIR should include a balanced discussion explaining the advantages and disadvantages of widening Topanga and Victory, specifically related to pedestrian and bicycle usage and the problem with losing sidewalk, parkway and berm areas .

In conclusion, we request that the FEIR demonstrate to the community that this developer is willing to truly engage the community and not just pay lip service. The developer should overcome the conventional attitude about big box retailing. Warner Center's Costco does not have to symbolize a massive shed with a sea of concrete or asphalt and a massive structure for parking.

Thank you,

Dave Breliant
President
Save Oak Savanna