



West Hills Neighborhood Council

*"It's our neighborhood.
Let's build a community."*

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December 22, 2017

Via U.S. Mail & Email

Scott.Schmerelson@lausd.net

Mr. Scott Schmerelson, Board Member, District 3
Los Angeles Unified School District
333 So Beaudry Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90017

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RE: LAUSD's Proposed VAPA High School at the Highlander Rd. Site

Dear Board Member Schmerelson:

One of the mandates of the Board of Directors of the West Hills Neighborhood Council (WHNC) is to safeguard the safety and interests of its stakeholders.

A large majority of stakeholders who reside in and around the 7.3-acre site of the former Highlander Rd. Elementary School, 23834 Highlander Rd. West Hills CA 91307, are and continue to be strongly opposed to the plan of LAUSD to build the Hale Charter Academy for Visual and Performing Arts (VAPA), a school for 532 high school age students, in a space that was designed for an elementary school.

At the beginning of 2017, stakeholders came to the West Hills Neighborhood Council Board with a signed petition, seeking support in opposing the building of VAPA on very basic but extremely strong grounds, of safety, traffic and feasibility issues that would endanger lives. After careful consideration and hours of discussion over several meetings the West Hills Neighborhood Council Board determined that although a VAPA was needed for the LA Unified School District, the use of the proposed site of the old Highlander Rd. Elementary School would have a negative impact on the safety and interests of the Highlander area stakeholders who are entitled to live without fear for the safety of their families. The West Hills Neighborhood Council Board voted unanimously to support and strongly maintains its resolution urging LAUSD not to build the VAPA at the Highlander site as it is unsuitable for the conditions and curriculum of a commuter performing arts high school and sent its official declaration letter to that effect on March 13, 2017 directly to LAUSD Board member Scott Schmerelson. A copy of the letter is attached as exhibit A.



Now eight months later, as there has been no response, it appears that LAUSD has disregarded this official notice from the neighborhood council, an extension of the Los Angeles City Council. Clearly this non-response is an indication that LAUSD has totally disregarded the serious traffic, safety and feasibility issues that the VAPA plan continues to present for Highlander stakeholders. The danger and damage to stakeholders in this area will be severe should this proposal be approved. The reasons are many, but we present to you only a few:

Traffic and Safety

1. The **sole** public street access to the site is Highlander, a totally residential, east/west collector street which already accommodates a minimum of 1,500 cars daily. Adding more traffic from 532 high school students plus staff and faculty will increase this traffic dilemma.
2. Six totally residential north/south streets feed into Highlander. The **sole** public street accesses two very busy and accident-prone north/south major highways which are Platt Avenue and Valley Circle Blvd. Traffic statistics show that both of those major highways carry upwards of approximately 20,000 cars per day. And most importantly, the intersection of Highlander and Valley Circle has no traffic control on Valley Circle which makes this intersection even more dangerous. A copy of the LADOT traffic study is attached as exhibit B.
3. The Streets and Transportation Committee of the West Hills Neighborhood Council has identified this area as a troubled traffic area with speeding drivers who completely ignore stop signs, including teenagers traveling that route as a shortcut to and from other high schools in the area. Proposed VAPA ingress and egress would add at least 910 vehicles daily to a street already plagued by speeding drivers.¹
4. The Draft EIR fails to present adequate drop-off/pick-up areas for students transported to school, presenting dangers to students disembarking and drivers trying to use Highlander for travel.
5. The proposed 7.3-acre VAPA has no on campus provision for student parking, leaving only two-lane Highlander (and various side streets) to absorb all student parking.
6. The combination of inadequate drop-off/pick-up zones and student parking congestion would result in gridlock and emergency vehicles would not be able to pass through such a gridlock. Mail delivery and trash pick-up on Highlander would be impacted and it would be difficult for ambulances to accommodate any emergency should one occur.

¹ In September 2015 a pedestrian was **struck and killed** by a speeding vehicle traveling eastbound on Highlander directly in front of the proposed VAPA site.

Feasibility

1. The 7.3-acre site was an elementary school. The West Hills Neighborhood Council consulted with a career academic in the visual and performing arts, who advised that the draft EIR fails to address facility requirements for a quality VAPA, such as space for an auditorium for performances, practice rooms, dance studios, choral rooms, audio visual smart classrooms and the rooms to support the performing arts such as dressing rooms, costume storage, prop storage etc. that an outstanding performing arts curriculum will require.
2. LAUSD has proposed that this VAPA will serve the entire Northwest District of LAUSD. Demographics indicate that this area is a huge area with many thousands of potential high school students and that number will only increase with the current housing boom in the valley. Yet the site can accommodate **only 532** students.
3. The Draft EIR for LAUSD's proposed use of this site not only fails to consider the need for facilities and possible student expansion but also dismisses four other LAUSD sites available for such a VAPA. According to research by the West Hills Neighborhood Council one of these four is the Hughes Middle School, which is located on 17 acres and has existing buildings which include an auditorium.

Conclusion

Such shortsightedness for traffic and safety, such lack of feasibility regarding proper room requirements and sites, and such lack of expansion room clearly show LAUSD's planned use of the Highlander site for VAPA students is totally improper. The fact that LAUSD has never responded to the Council indicates LAUSD's **total unconcern** for the safety and interests not only of our Highlander area stakeholders but also its proposed VAPA students and their parents. The site is too small, the plan too shortsighted, and the neighborhood unsuitable for such a school, all of which present potential risks of serious accidents, which could result in serious injury or death. (*Refer to footnote #1*).

The Board of the West Hills Neighborhood Council strongly urges LAUSD to **cease and desist** its plans to build the VAPA at the Highlander site.

The total lack of concern or careful thought by the LAUSD Board members urges questioning if they are mindful of a quality education for students who have dreams and hopes to make this a better world in the arts. Voters will determine if LAUSD Board members have produced a proposal for a quality VAPA education and if they are also cognizant of the safety and interests of our communities.

The Board of the West Hills Neighborhood Council and its stakeholders will continue to protect the safety and interests not only of our stakeholders but also the projected

Mr. Scott Schmerelson, Board Member, District 3

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VAPA students and their parents by urging the LAUSD Board to abandon the Highlander site for the proposed VAPA and seek another site entirely. We are in this together and the solution can be solved by us working together,

Sincerely,

Daniel J. Brin

Charlene Rothstein

Daniel J. Brin, President/Co-Chair
West Hills Neighborhood Council

Charlene Rothstein, Vice-President/Co-Chair
West Hills Neighborhood Council

cc: George McKenna
LAUSD Board Member, District 1

cc: Monica Garcia, President
LAUSD Board Member, District 2

cc: Nick Melvoin
LAUSD Board Member District 4

cc: Ref Rodriguez
LAUSD Board Member District 5

cc: Kelly Gonez
LAUSD, Board Member District 6

cc: Richard Vladvovk, District 7
Board Member

cc: Vivian Ekchian, Acting Superintendent
LAUSD

cc: Michelle King, Superintendent
LAUSD

cc: Ankur Patel

cc: Edward Paek

cc: Teresa Akins

cc: Jefferson Crain

cc: Sharon V. Robinson

cc: Arlene Irlando

cc: Chris Torres

cc: Ruby Chavez

cc: Aixle Aman

cc: Celia Lopez

cc: Jeannie Kamm

cc: Sonia Reza

cc: Issam Dahdul

cc: Jessica Flores

cc: Pete Demetriou, CBS Radio

cc: Carlos Santana, Valley Section Editor
Los Angeles Times

cc: Metro Section Editor
Daily News

cc: highlanderpomelonw@gmail.com



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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Michelle Ritchie

Mr. Scott M. Schmerelson
Board Member, LAUSD
6651 # A Balboa Blvd.
Lake Balboa, CA 91406

March 13, 2017

Dear Scott:

At its meeting on March 2, 2017, the Board of Directors of the West Hills Neighborhood Council voted unanimously to support the following resolution:

*The West Hills Neighborhood Council supports the Highlander Road community in urging the Los Angeles Unified School District **not** to build a high school on the former site of Highlander Road Elementary School because of traffic, parking and safety concerns.*

As the voice of the West Hills community, we respectfully ask you to consider this resolution when making plans for the Highlander Road school site.

Sincerely,

Dan Brin
President and Co-Chair

Charlene Rothstein
Vice President and Co-Chair



P.O. Box 4670, West Hills, CA 91308-4670
mail@westhillsnc.org • www.westhillsnc.org



CITY OF LOS ANGELES
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

May 1, 2015

TRAFFIC
CONTROL
REPORT

12- West Valley- #39319
Highlander Rd & Valley Circle Bl

Traffic Signal

DETERMINATIONS:

1. That a new traffic signal, along with appropriate signs, red curb, and pavement markings, be authorized for installation at the intersection of Highlander Road and Valley Circle Boulevard. (LAMC 80.08, 80.08.2, 80.37 and 80.55)
2. That the authority for the existing stop sign control for eastbound and westbound Highlander Road be rescinded at the time the traffic signal becomes operational (LAMC 80.07.1);
3. That the traffic signal installation recommended by the Department of Transportation be added to a list of non-funded, but approved projects, since no funding can be identified at this time to pay for this project.

DISCUSSION:

The Department of Transportation has received several requests from Mr. Wayne Sippel, on behalf of himself and his neighbors who live in the neighborhoods off of Highlander Road, near Valley Circle Boulevard. This intersection used to be controlled by an all-way stop control, but a few years ago it was changed to just partial stop sign control for Highlander Road. He feels that cars are traveling faster than before, making it difficult to exit from Highlander Road onto Valley Circle Boulevard, or to walk across the street, and that the two-way left-turn lanes on Valley Circle are confusing. He would like to have a traffic signal here.

In response to his letter to the General Manager of the Department of Transportation, an on-site field meeting was held in November 2014 with DOT staff, Mr. Sippel, and about 50 of his neighbors. During the meeting, case after case was made for the need for a traffic signal at this intersection, based on pedestrian safety, restricted driver visibility with oncoming traffic on Valley Circle Boulevard, recent crashes at this intersection, and to provide traffic relief from the proposed school coming to the neighborhood. Although the DOT had studied this intersection for a traffic signal in the past, a new signal study was promised due to the significant concerns raised by the community at this meeting.

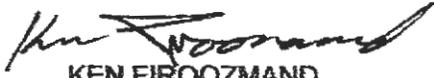
Valley Circle Boulevard is designated as a "Major Highway" in the Community Plan of the City's General Plan, and carries almost 20,000 vehicles per day. Highlander Road is designated as a "Local Street" west of Valley Circle Boulevard, and as a "Collector Street" east of Valley Circle Boulevard, and carries almost 1,500 vehicles per day. There are residential neighborhoods off of both sides of Valley Circle Boulevard, with Highlander Road as the main roadway in and out of the communities. The posted speed limit on Valley Circle Boulevard is 45 miles per hour.

The traffic signal study included a review of the Police Department's records of reported traffic collisions from July 31, 2010 to July 31, 2013, a manual traffic count, an automatic 24-hour count, a review of the striping plan, and field investigations of the existing traffic control devices, traffic flow,

and visibility conditions at this intersection. The manual count showed hourly volumes for four different hours on Highlander Road of over 60 vehicles per hour, combined with volumes on Valley Boulevard of at least 1,323 vehicles per hour for the same hours. Also, the peak hour volume on Highlander Road is 77 vehicles per hour, with 1,750 vehicles per hour on Valley Circle Boulevard during the same hour (5 PM to 6 PM). As a result, the MUTCD "Four Hour Vehicular Volume" and "Peak Hour" criteria for traffic signal control are both met.

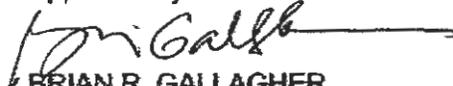
The installation of the traffic signal, as described in the Determination, will provide for the orderly movement of all roadway users at this location and is therefore recommended.

Recommended by:



KEN FIROOZMAND
Transportation Engineer
West Valley District

Approved by:



BRIAN R. GALLAGHER
Senior Transportation Engineer
Valley District Operations Division

BRG:brg
TCR signal HighlanderValleyCircle15

C: Councilmember Mitchell Englander, 12th District, Attn: Brian Oh
Mr. Wayne Sippel, email: sipstoy@mac.com /
LADOT Pedestrian Program, Attn: Pauline Chan
LADOT District Research & Support, Attn: Nader Asmar
LADOT Signal Design
LADOT Signal Timing