



Planning, Land Use and Mobility Committee

**Case Report: Variel Apartments,
North Village District—Warner Center
6606 Variel Ave., Canoga Park, 91303**

**Initial Presentation: 12/15/16
Second Presentation: 1/5/17
Third Presentation: 1/19/17
1st Board Presentation: 2/8/17
Supplemental Review: 2/16/17**



Case No: DIR-2016-3855-SPP-SPPA
Site Location: 6606 Variel Ave., Canoga Park, 91303
Project: Proposed project development of a 308,009 sf multi-family residential apartment building in the North Village District of Warner Center (WC2035) on the previous site of a light manufacturing facility. The Applicant proposes a single

building with 7-stories, 277 units (including 4 Work/Live units) and 309 parking spaces with two levels of parking—one ground level and 1 subterranean. The land parcel is 81,920 sf which is located within 500-feet of the Orange Line Bus Route and is adjacent to a DWP power substation.

Applicant: Evolution Strategic Partners, LLC

Representatives: Brad Rosenheim & Jessica Pakdaman
Of Rosenheim and Associates

Ad-Hoc Committee: August Steurer, WHWCNC PLUM Committee

Dennis DiBiase, Vice-President WHWCNC / PLUM Committee

Why Have A Supplemental Report :

At the Board Meeting on 2/8/2017, a Board Member brought up the issues of Variel Ave crossing the Orange Line and existing traffic problems at Variel Ave. and Vanowen St. The Board referred the case back to the Planning Land Use and Mobility for further review of the project in connection to a circulator.

Project Description:

The Applicant is seeking a Project Permit Compliance and proposes to demolish a vacant 40,182 sf light manufacturing building on a lot adjacent to a major DWP power substation in the North Village District of Warner Center. At this location, Variel fronts the project and becomes a dead-end street that ends approximately 100 yards south of the property.

The project entails construction of a 7-story, 277-unit residential building with 273 apartment units on the 2nd thru 7th floors and 4 Work/Live on the ground floor.

The Applicant is not seeking any exceptions or variances to the 2035 Warner Center Specific Plan and no incentivized uses are being proposed, nor will any development bonuses be requested.

Based on the Planning application filed by the developer, the proposed project has been designed to fully comply with the WC 2035 Plan, including parking requirements, landscaping and Publically Accessible Open Space. The project will be constructed in a single phase.



Analysis and Assessment:

Site Location:

The project is slated to be built at a location that has several unique drawbacks. A former industrial building/manufacturing site, it overlooks a large, DWP power substation with only limited existing vegetation to hide transformers and other equipment from view. Additionally, 300-feet past this location, Variel Ave. turns into a dead-end street with no access to Victory Bl.

The site does offer convenient access to the Orange Line transportation route, (approx. 4 min. walk) and faces another large apartment complex.

Adjacent properties to the north and east are industrial and will not be negatively impacted by the project. The industrial property on the north side shares the main access driveway with the proposed complex.

Requested Entitlements / Variances:

None requested.

Parking:

The project is proposing two floors of parking (one at ground level and one subterranean) with a total of 309 automotive spaces (exceeding the minimum parking requirement by 74 parking spaces. The 2035 WC plan requires 277 spaces but allows a reduction of 42 spaces for the bicycle condition. The added parking is designated for visitor parking and possibly some staff. There is some additional parking available on Variel Ave. in front of and near the project, depending on the time and day of the week.

The ground floor and subterranean parking will be accessed through an entry/exit on the north façade of the complex. In addition, there are some outdoor covered parking stalls in the rear of the building for use by residents.

Traffic Impacts:

At this location, Variel results in a dead-end street which means north bound traffic will mostly originate from the project and other apartment complexes on the street.

During daytime hours, most of the vehicular traffic should be related to the industrial/manufacturing business still located on the street, but that traffic is expected to diminish after 5:00 p.m.

Southbound traffic originates primarily from Vanowen and possibly from Eton Ave. and is expected to be heaviest during morning and evening rush hours. The addition of 277 units will probably only add minimal additional traffic when spread out over each rush hour segment.

Supplemental information:

A Board Member has observed that many apartments have been built recently in the North Village such that has become difficult to leave at the intersection of Variel Ave and Vanowen St. Traffic is also backing up at the DeSoto/Kittridge intersection from the Orange Line during peak traffic. Additionally, the Canoga Park Neighborhood Council is currently in the process of evaluating 2 apartment projects on Vanowen in the River District. Having increased access and egress via signalized gates across the Orange Line would be beneficial to the North Village District.

The Warner Center 2035 Plan has a traffic/transportation mitigation (ID TRS-1) that requires the connection of Variel Ave across the Orange Line along with the construction of a bridge across the Los Angeles River to connect Warner Center and the North Village District with the rest of Canoga Park. Appendix C, page 28-29, states. “For the system-wide and intersection and arterial mitigation measures (TRS-1 and TR-1—TR-94), the City shall require individual projects developed within the WCSP area to pay an appropriate fee to offset their share of transportation impacts through the implementation for the following transportation capacity and operational improvements:” followed by “TRS-1: Implement the Variel Avenue Corridor Improvement to complete the two disconnects between Victory Boulevard and the L.A. River. The system improvement includes construction of a new at-grade crossing of the Metro Orange Line Busway along Variel Avenue (including signalization); construction of a new 4-lane bridge crossing the Los Angeles River (replacing the current pedestrian bridge in the same location), and: widening of Variel Avenue to a 4-lane cross-section between Victory Boulevard and Bassett Street.”

Based on the fee schedule in its Appendix D (adjusted to construction costs inflation), the Warner Center 2035 Plan collects “Mobility Fees” from all projects based on factors such as the projected trips, floor area, & uses. These fees are placed into a trust fund that can only be used for improvements related to Warner Center development. Some

of the improvements are located outside of Warner Center to mitigate problems anticipated to stem from Warner Center growth. Some of the fees are intended for streetscape improvements. Some are intended for development of a circulator transit system to serve Warner Center. A portion of the fees are for construction and purchases of transit vehicle equipment in the expectation that Metro will operate the circulator and cover those costs and some equipment costs. The plan does not specify the type of transit for the circulator. Consultants for the plan expected a bus system to start out but a streetcar system has been shown more than once to attract higher quality of development compared to bus lines due to the permanence of streetcar routes and the transitory nature of bus routes.

Metro will soon be informing the committee regarding their plans for a circulator in Warner Center that is part of the recent sales tax measure passed by voters. Online information shows two options for the circulator route. Neither option includes the North Village, College District or the Park District. Metro's circulator is apparently not necessarily related to the Warner Center plan. To improve performance of the line Metro needs to cut the interior route through Warner Center and to prepare for the transition to light rail which cannot circulate through Warner Center. The focus of Metro's circulator routes is on the business districts of Warner Center.

The specific plan intends for the circulator to serve as much of Warner Center districts as possible (including the residential) to qualify all areas as transit oriented districts. To accomplish this, along the intended route, Activity Nodes (shown on Plan Map 10) were established along the route where circulator stops were anticipated. These Activity Nodes are expected to be supported by the required Active Street Frontages (also shown on Plan Map 10) between them. There is an Activity Node required at the Variel/Kittridge intersection to the north of the project and at the Variel/Orange Line/Victory intersection to the south. The Variel/Vanowen intersection is also a required Activity Node and Vanowen has Active Street Frontages required on both sides. Clearly, the plan intends there to be a circulator available to the North Village and the River District in the future.

Another part of the plan was the creation of an entity to oversee Warner Center development and push improvement projects funded by the plan because in the past city departments were lax in moving projects along. Unfortunately, the city did not follow through on the creation of the entity in the time specified. The plan went into effect in 2013 but the process was started in 2015 and still not worked out. This entity will eventually work with city departments and the council office to prioritize projects.

Currently, the Department of Transportation calculates what fees are to be paid and assigns improvements to development projects based on the expected fees and funds available. Developers have the option of making the improvements themselves or paying the fees. We are not aware that DOT currently considers the Variel/Orange Line crossing to be a priority. Unless DOT assigns the crossing to be developed by this project, it will remain a future project until DOT makes it a priority.

Building Design:

The overall project has a post-modern transitional design highlighted by industrial use materials, staggered windows and color accents on the front façade and along two courtyard “bridges.”

There are balconies for most units and some feature direct access to garden terraces.

There are two major interior courtyards totaling just over 8,100 sf, several “sky decks,” along with four Work/Live units which open onto a ground-level plaza which provides 9,500 sf of Publically Accessible Open Space plus there is an additional 2,788 sf of PAOS along the southern portion of the subject property. The total is the exact minimum PAOS requirement of 15% of the site area after dedications.

The ground floor design also contains a public café, a reception center and a business center.

The building design features a variegated roof profile and “courtyard bridges” that allow 3-story openings in the south façade to allow additional light and air into the two central courtyards.



The 2035 WC Plan allows a Floor Area Ratio of 4.5:1 in the North Village District, and this project is proposing an overall FAR of 3.76:1— thus conforming to the Specific Plan guidelines. There are no use restrictions on any project by floor area within the North Village District.

There is significant building articulation on all four elevations as required by the Design Guidelines of the Specific Plan, and the roofline also features significant

articulation. An effort has been made to conceal the neighboring DWP power substation by use of a walkway and greenery areas.

Project Architecture Materials:

The developer has proposed using glass, board form concrete, concrete, white horizontal siding, cement and plaster detailing in white and grey, and special color accent treatments to highlight several architectural details.

The ground floor commercial area will use floor-to-ceiling front glass windows for the 2-story atrium, and the Work/Live units will have a slightly different front glass treatment.



Landscaping & Exterior Lighting:

A landscaping plan and plant palette were submitted by the developer and generally adhere to the landscaping criteria contained in the WC2035 Plan.

The two interior courtyards will have natural grass areas and be watered by an irrigation system. Additionally, sky decks will have planted beds and containers that will also be watered by an irrigation system. The developer is also proposing planting beds along the southern border with the DWP power sub-station to conceal the transformers and industrial equipment.

The entry plaza will feature the tree specimens required by the Specific Plan and will have planting areas near the 2-story atrium and the Work/Live units.

A lighting plan is designed to enhance the project exterior and shielded to reduce glare. All lighting will be contained within the property boundaries.

Signage:

The developer has submitted a proposal to include identification and other signage that conforms to the WC 2035 Sign District requirements. As of the presentation, there were no signs requiring Project Permit Compliance or a Planning Director's sign-off.

PLUM Committee Concerns:

At the initial PLUM presentation, the Committee was generally satisfied that the project met the required 2035 WC Plan requirements, and was an appropriate project for a less than desirable North Village District site.

Questions centered on the project's parking and the availability for "excess" parking, access to the interior parking, impacts of the proximity to the DWP transformers, accessibility to the Orange Line and architectural details.

At the first presentation, the applicant was requested to give further attention to publicly accessible open spaces that allow for future integration with pathways on adjacent properties. The applicant has provided for pedestrian/bicycle access around the entire perimeter.

In general, the PLUM Committee expressed positive comments about the architecture, the front ground floor atrium and Work/Live spaces and the sky decks. Also singled out for positive comments were the building's articulation (both facades and roofline) and the bridges across the open courtyard openings.

However, during the initial hearing, there was significant discussion about the architecture of the southern façade. Several Committee members felt that the staggered pattern of the windows was too overwhelming and repetitive, and requested that the architect attempt to make the southern façade more visually interesting by adding some architectural elements to break up the expanse. There was also some concern that the façade was over the 250-ft. 2035 WC Plan requirement for having a prominent articulation. The developer and architect agreed and a second project presentation was scheduled.

During the January 5th second presentation, the developer presented a new southern façade for the project that featured a reconfiguration of the windows and the addition of four large "tower" elements in a contrasting white stucco to the overall grey of the façade. The new elevation also eliminated many of the staggered windows and gave less emphasis to the bridges crossing the courtyard areas.

Most PLUM members felt the southern façade revamp was too "heavy" and stated that they preferred the original submission to the new design. After discussion, the developer and architect agreed to combine elements of both resulting in a façade shown on page 4 that was favored by the PLUM Committee on January 19th.

Additional comments dealt with the highlight color (presented: bright green) that was mainly around the front window extensions and the developer agreed to re-think the detailing and colorations. The end result is 2 variations will be in the application with one or the other chosen at time of construction as to what works best. There was also

some discussion on building materials and the architect will study suggestions and present a recommendation.

The committee applauded the cooperation of the architects to make numerous improvements to the façades and elevations of the structure.

Overall, the members of the PLUM Committee seemed to feel that the project was in conformance with the Specific Plan and would be a beneficial addition to the neighborhood and community at this location.

Supplemental commentary:

In regards to the Board's request to review the necessity of the circulator and the Variel/Orange Line crossing, the proposed project has no obligation to mitigate any traffic impacts other than to pay the necessary Mobility Fees. Only in the case of the Department of Transportation's direction to make the improvements, will the developer have to work on it. This would be complicated by the need to get Metro to cooperate and possibly fund their portion of the improvements to the Orange Line. Without the cooperation of Metro, the Variel/Orange Line crossing cannot be implemented.

The Variel Apartments project does not prohibit the implementation of a circulator through the North Village District in the future or the development of the Variel/Orange Line crossing. A circulator would use the public right of way on this part of Variel Ave.

It will be the obligation of the Woodland Hills – Warner Center Neighborhood Council to convince the Council Office and City Council to collaborate with Metro on implementing this improvement if the Board feels it is a necessary consequence of this project. The responsibility lies with the plan and the City to fund the City's portion of the improvements to be shared with Metro.

It will also be the Neighborhood Council's obligation to persuade Metro to follow the circulator route intended by the Plan.

Revised PLUM Motion:

As pertaining to Case DIR-2016-3855-SPP, having held four public hearings for the application filed by Evolution Strategic Partners, LLC to build a 7-story, approximately 308,009 sf residential building at 6606 Variel Ave., Canoga Park, CA 91303, the Planning, Land Use and Mobility Committee hereby finds that:

WHEREAS, the Applicant has designed and submitted a proposed residential project that substantially complies with the applicable regulations, findings, standards, and provisions of the Warner Center 2035 Plan; and,

WHEREAS, the Applicant will pay the Mobility Fees as specified in the Warner Center 2035 Plan and make any street improvements required by the Bureau of Engineering and the Department of Transportation; and,

WHEREAS, no incentivized uses and bonuses are applied for; and,

WHEREAS, the project meets the required front yard setbacks; and,

WHEREAS, while WC 2035 does not specify active frontage for the affected portion of Variel, the project has 4 work/live units, when the WC 2035 Plan does not require any non-residential component in the North Village district; and,

WHEREAS, the Applicant has presented parking and landscaping plans that conform to the WC2035 Plan; and,

WHEREAS, the Applicant provides for pedestrian/bicycle mobility around the entire perimeter; and,

WHEREAS, the project's location is in the RIO "outer core" complying with requirements of the Los Angeles River Improvement Overlay District (RIO);

THEREFORE, IT IS HEREBY RESOLVED that the Planning, Land Use and Mobility Committee, for the findings and conditions stated herein, finds that the submitted application and plans from Evolution Strategic Partners, LLC for Variel Apartments at 6606 Variel Ave., receive the support of the Board of the Woodland Hills-Warner Center Neighborhood Council for the requested actions contingent upon the following conditions:

Conditions

- 1.) All current and future property owner(s) accept responsibility to provide Publicly Accessible Open Space and agree to make reasonable accommodations (including grade adjustments) on the south side of the project to facilitate the integration of pedestrian access between the project and the adjacent property to the east (should the property to the east be redeveloped).
- 2.) All private exterior living unit balcony guardrails visible to the public shall be constructed with perforated metal panels or frosted/opaque glass panels.
- 3.) All plans presented on March 8, 2017 at the Board Meeting of the Woodland Hills – Warner Center Neighborhood Council (WHWCNC) shall be dated as such and re-submitted to Planning as an (updated) project application submittal.
- 4.) The applicant will not submit any further updated plans without presenting them to the WHWCNC for support.
- 5.) Additionally, all conditions shall be printed on one of the Project Summary pages as a commitment to and acceptance of these conditions.

The Planning, Land Use and Mobility Committee recommends that the Board of the Woodland Hills-Warner Center Neighborhood Council advise the City of Los Angeles Planning Department, the City Planning Commission and Council District 3 Councilmember Bob Blumenfield of its findings, and its subsequent supporting recommendation to approve this application as presented on February 8th, 2017.

11 Ayes, 0 Nays, 0 Abstentions