

Planning, Land Use and Mobility Committee



CASE REPORT (R2)

CPC-2022-8820-2C/CU/ZV/SPE-SPP-SPR

Extra Space Storage Facility
20401 Ventura Blvd.
Woodland Hills, 91364

The Applicant proposes to build a new 158,371 SF storage facility and parking on an currently empty lot located near the crest of Chalk Hill at 20401 Ventura Blvd., and overlooking the 101 Freeway. The site had previously served as a location for several different restaurants, and most recently was slated to be the site for a new luxury hotel that was approved by the City. However, the SEI Union challenged the approval in court, and the hotel developer decided against spending any more money pursuing the hotel project and put the property up for sale. The site is on the North side of Ventura Blvd., and the proposed self-storage facility is planned to rise 3 stories for storage with an additional 2 basement levels for storage and elevator access. There is also a ground floor office and a retail/commercial space along Ventura Blvd. Proposed operating hours are 7 AM – 8 PM, seven days a week.

PLUM Presentations:

- October 20, 2022 Courtesy Presentation (Publicly accessible—Zoom)
- March 2, 2023 (Publicly accessible—Zoom)
- April 20, 2023 Live, in-person (No Zoom broadcast)

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PLUM Case Leader: Martin Lipkin, martinlipkin@yahoo.com; tel: (818) 999-4340

Project Description:

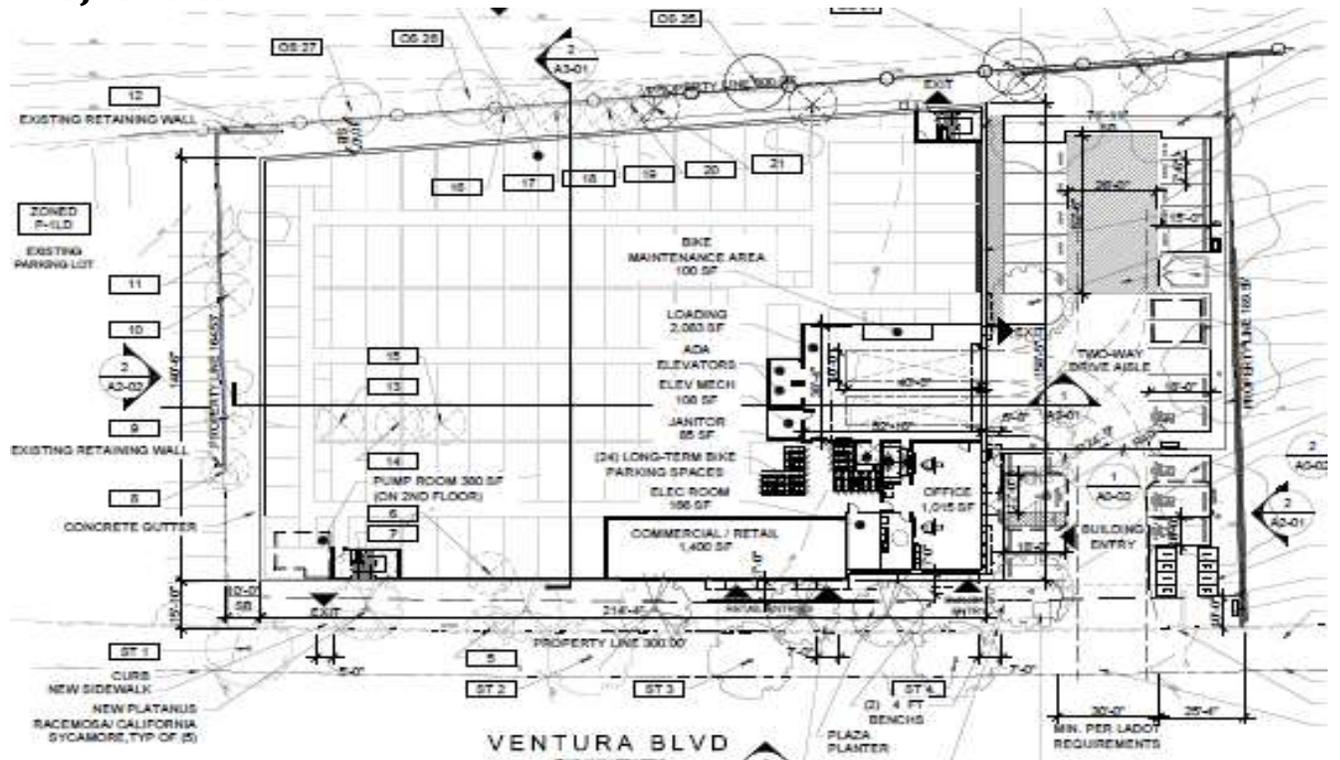
Proposal is to build a new 158,371 SF, climate-controlled storage facility and parking lot on a currently empty lot located near the crest of Chalk Hill at 20401 Ventura Blvd., overlooking the 101 Freeway. In addition to the five levels of storage, the submitted plans call for 1,015 SF for a storage office and 1,400 SF for retail/commercial space on the ground floor facing Ventura Blvd. in order to conform to the requirements of the Cahuenga Blvd./Ventura Blvd. Specific Plan. The site overlooks the East/South lanes of the 101 Freeway, and is adjacent to a Senior Living complex to the West, and an office building and parking lot to the East. They are proposing 1,373 storage units in 108,950 feet of space. No Semi-trucks will allowed for loading/unloading.

The proposed structure has windows and “window-simulating panels” on portions of all four facades to add architectural interest and break up the massing of the structure. However, there is very little vegetation on the Freeway hillside to conceal the North-facing side of the building from residences across the 101 Freeway.



Original Perspective of East side of project looking West that was presented to the PLUM in October 2022. The Committee felt that the building architecture was “too blank” and that greater architectural detailing and features were needed.

Project Site Plan



The site plan shows the single entry/exit on Ventura for the surface parking lot leading to entry to the loading/unloading areas and elevators on the East side of the project. Facing Ventura Blvd. on the South side of the structure, are the office for the facility as well as the small commercial/retail space. There is a 2-way entry/exit to the main floor and upper basement level where most of the loading and unloading for all storage units will take place. Building height for the three stories is approx. 40-feet with 1-ft. front setback and 0-ft. rear setback.



Perspective of East side of project looking west and showing entry to parking lot, signage (2 locations,) entry to underground loading levels and architectural “window” treatments.



Close-up of South-East “Plaza” area showing sidewalk entries to storage building and commercial/retail space. Area at right is for parking lot.

The Applicant is asking for a number of variances and exception(s) from existing zoning requirements. They are asking for:

1. Zone change from P-1LD, C2-IDL, and C4-1LD to C2
2. Request to modify Specific Plan height requirement to 40-feet instead of 30-feet
3. Parking variance from required from required 48 spaces plus 6 for commercial or 5 for office to 22 spaces (34 below code), including 20% reduction for bike parking) One ADA space.
4. Compliance from existing Specific Plan
5. Exception for a Site Plan Review for projects larger than 50,000
6. FAR increase from required 1:1 to 3:1
7. CUP to allow storage facility adjacent (500') to residential zone/units
8. Variance--Relief to reduce parking from 43 to 22 automobiles.

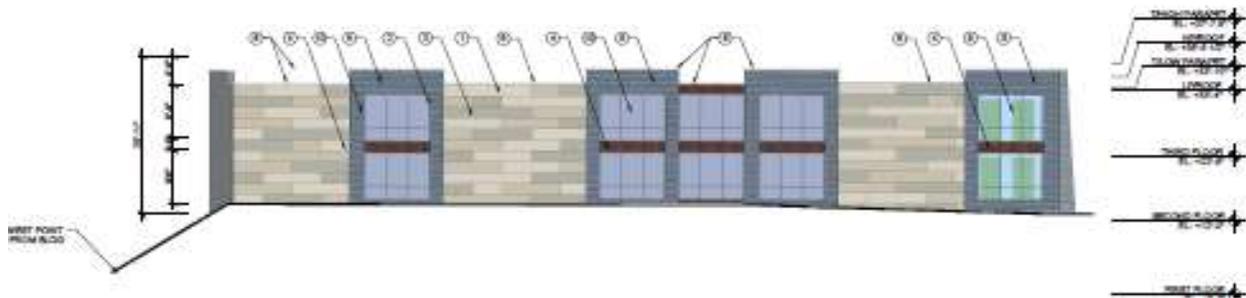


South facade of project showing new materials, building articulation, architectural “window” treatments, entry to parking lot and storage, and landscaping along Ventura Blvd.

Site History

This site on the uphill incline of Ventura Blvd. of Chalk Hill has previously been the location of a number of large steak, sushi and continental restaurants that eventually failed.

Approximately 5 years ago, the site was purchased by a developer/builder who filed plans to erect a large (7-stories) luxury hotel and restaurant at the site. After the City and the CD-3 had the plans reduced to a 5-story hotel structure and finally approved the plans, the SEIU (Service Employees International Union) filed a stop action against the developer and challenged the City’s approvals. At that point, the developer scrapped his plans and decided to sell of the property. This storage facility is the first project to be proposed there since then.



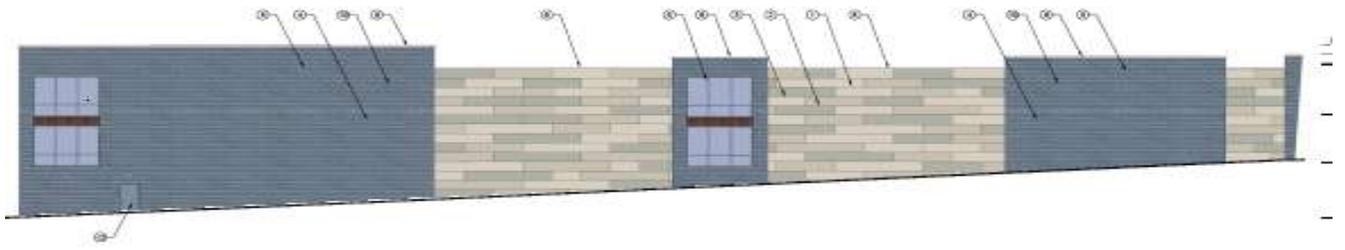
Elevation of West side of project showing actual windows and additional “faux window” treatments to enhance articulation and visual interest

Project Materials and Architecture

The Applicant and representatives held a courtesy presentation before the WHWCNC PLUM Committee (10/20/22—publically accessible Zoom meeting) and shared their initial thinking. Reaction from PLUM members was that the project would benefit from some changes in design, site use and other factors such as additional parking, more dynamic coloration and more visually interesting building materials.

This new, revised version shows some of the significant changes that have been made—especially in adding more visually-interesting cladding materials, colors and architectural details. The windows and “faux-window” areas have now been emphasized, and have been added to the previously “blank” North façade. The exterior cladding materials have now been up-graded from the original renderings shown to PLUM last October, and consist of metal siding materials in several different colorations and finishes. The dark “Lead Gray” sections are pre-finished metal panels in a raised shingle design. The dark red areas are fiber cement panels in a Cedar color. The multi-color areas are flat metal panels in a mix of three colors: Ash Grey, Zinc Grey and Old Town Grey.

The most significant improvement to the overall design was the modifications made to the North facade that runs the length of the property along the 101 Freeway, and will be seen from the residences across the freeway. While still not as architecturally interesting as the other three facades, it is a substantial step up from the blank white “wall” that was originally proposed.



Elevation of North side of project overlooking 101 Freeway and showing slight height articulations, “faux window” treatment and various fascia materials.

Two perspectives of how the project will appear to drivers on the 101 from both directions have been provided by the Applicant.



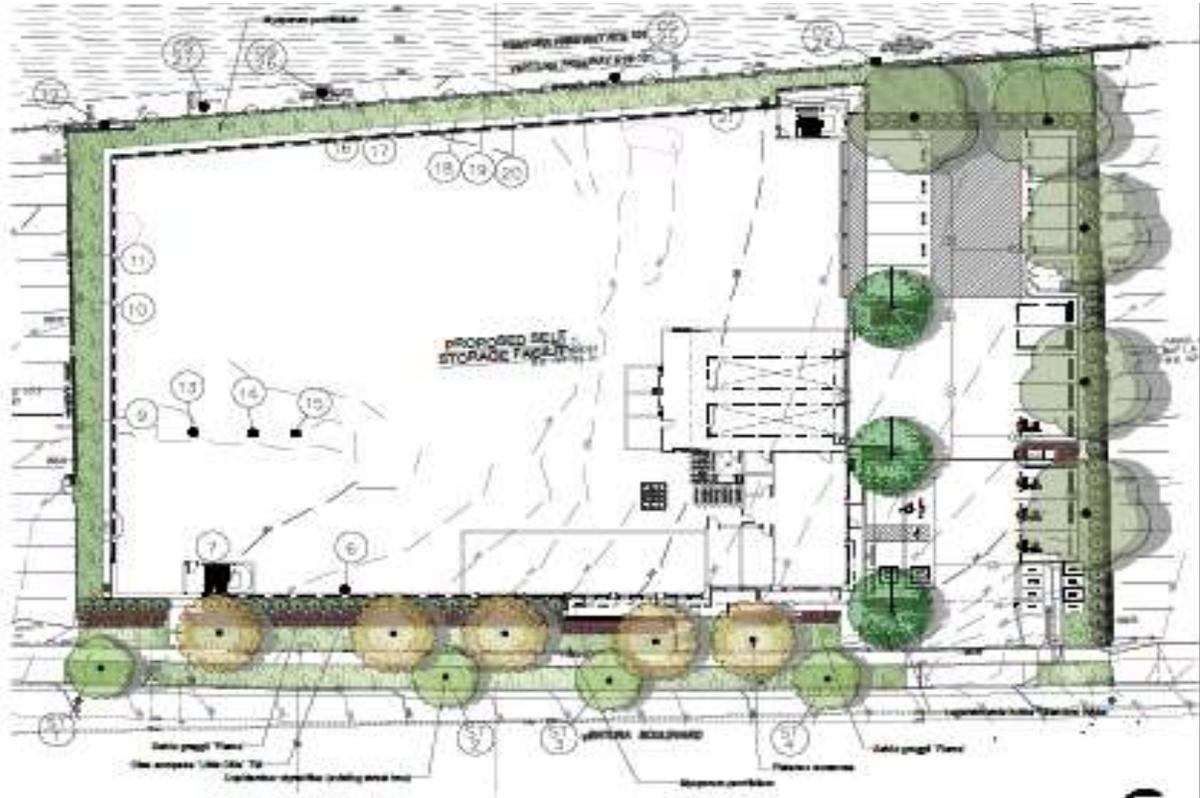
Two reality-based views (heading West (top) and East (bottom)) of the project as seen from the 101 Freeway. Landscaping is not quite as thick as indicated from these views.



Project Landscaping Plan

The provided landscaping plans for the property call for removal of 19 of 21 existing large trees—none of which are protected species. The submitted landscape plan calls for new trees on areas of the

perimeter of the site, as well as at the building entry areas. The property is within the “Campus District” which has its own distinct tree, planting and design recommendations. A total of 17 trees in 30” boxes are projected to be planted at the site. Those trees include California Sycamores, African Sumac, and White Crepe Myrtles.



The Crepe Myrtles and African Sumac are positioned in the entry/parking area. The Sycamores will shade the front façade facing Ventura Blvd. to the South, while 4 Liquid Amber trees will serve as the Street Trees along the parkway between the street and the sidewalk.

A very low groundcover—Trailing Myoporum--is the only landscaping slated to be planted for the West façade, as well as the North side of the building overlooking the 101 Freeway.

PLUM Case Analysis for 4/20/23

After their presentation and discussion of 3/2/23, the PLUM Committee and stakeholders had a generally favorable reaction to the design and materials changes that the Applicant included in their second design presentation. Over all, the textured metal “shingle” panels and cedar-colored highlights received unanimous support.

Reconsidering the north-facing façade overlooking the 101 Freeway to make more architecturally interesting also received a large measure of support.

However, there were still a few important questions and concerns that were raised by both the PLUM Committee members and community stakeholders:

- There was concern from a stakeholder and two PLUM members about the view of the project from across the freeway. They questioned if they could see a perspective from across the freeway that more accurately showed the view that homeowners there would have. They also asked if a row of trees or high-growing shrubs be planted along the north property border in case CalTrans removed or reduced any of the existing trees/shrubs on that side of the 101 in the future.
- There were several questions about the height (40' proposed but 30' mandated in the Ventura/Cahuenga Specific Plan). The Applicant is requesting to modify the Specific Plan requirement. The Applicant stated that have made a request to Planning that would put the building height “on parity with the other buildings on the hill.”
- There were a number of comments and questions about the “required” bicycle parking the SP requires along the Boulevard. Most of the comments challenged the need for as much bicycle parking that has been included since almost no renters or users of storage locker would be carrying large amounts of items or large furnishings on a bicycle. They questioned if the excess bicycle parking space at the front of the structure could be better used for additional retail/commercial space and help add more potential for activating Ventura Blvd. and fulfilling one of the key goals of the Specific Plan. The Applicant has stated that they are trying to work with the City Planner to see what options there are to reduce bicycle parking and either enlarge the proposed retail/commercial space, or add a second retail/commercial space.

The PLUM Committee recognizes that the planned “retail/commercial” space in the structure is only approx. 7’ in depth with an 8’ ceiling height, so its usefulness to most prospective public-serving tenants would be limited to very few users. It has been noted that this is not a “pedestrian-friendly” section of Ventura due to the steep incline, and it is unlikely that a store or food service occupant would be able to generate a sustainable business at this location. But, a commercial services type business could be ideal.

One other major observation came out of the previous discussions. While the applicant has stated that research underscores the need for more off-site storage facilities in the West Valley, members of the PLUM commented that this location seems like a poor choice, given that there is an attempted “renaissance” to try and bring this section of Ventura Blvd. back to life with more affordable residential units, restaurants and services. The majority of the PLUM seemed to feel that the use of this site for a huge storage facility is in direct opposition to any future efforts to rejuvenate this area for residential or small businesses, again making it a “dead zone.”

Parking for overflow vehicles might be an issue on Ventura Blvd. While there is 2-hour street parking available from 6AM to 8 PM, most days that parking is already filled with Taft student cars, visitors to nearby businesses and other vehicles.

Issues for PLUM Committee Consideration.

The PLUM Committee needs to consider and discuss a number of important issues concerning this project:

1. Is this the type of facility that the Cahuenga Blvd. /Ventura Blvd. Specific Plan was designed to include in this area?
2. Can/should rooftop solar panels be added to the large flat surface of the structure? While the City would have to make certain allowances, the facility will utilize significant amounts of energy for cooling and for lighting. Utilizing solar power could help take stress off the grid and lower power bills that the locker owners would be billed for.
3. There are a significant number of variances and exceptions from the Specific Plan that are being asked for. Are all of these changes warranted? Wanted?
4. If bike parking (both long and short-term don't really make sense for a building with this kind of use, why not ask Planning for a variance/exception for that?
5. Is fire access adequate for a storage facility that is adjacent to a large senior living retirement home?
6. Can the small retail/commercial space in the plans be enlarged so that the space can realistically be used to attract and house a tenant who can serve customers from the large apartment complex across Ventura and from nearby area businesses?
7. Will you have car-charging units for cars/vans that need to plug in?
8. Can/should the landscaping plan include/mandate a row of large deciduous trees (like Liquid Amber) or high-growing shrubs like Carolina Cherry Laurel or Photinia be planted along the north property boundary to shield the building from homes across the Freeway

PLUM Motion with Conditions:

Case CPC-2022-8820-2C/CU/ZV (SPE-SPP-SPR)

Concerning Planning Application CPC-2022-8820-2C/CU/ZV (SPE-SPP-SPR), having held three public meetings (live and virtual) to build a 158,371 SF storage facility and parking lot on a vacant lot located near the crest of Chalk Hill at 20401 Ventura Blvd and in the Cahuenga Blvd./Ventura Blvd. Specific Plan, featuring five levels of storage containing 1,373 storage units and 1,400 SF space for retail/commercial use on the ground floor facing Ventura Blvd., the WHWCNC Planning, Land Use and Mobility Committee hereby finds that:

WHEREAS, the Applicant has submitted plans that with several exceptions and variances substantially conform to the requirements of the Cahuenga Blvd. /Ventura Blvd. Specific Plan; and

WHEREAS, Zone change from P-1LD, C2-IDL, and C4-1LD to C2 appears to be warranted at this location; and

WHEREAS, a requested FAR increase from required 1:1 to 3:1, and the request to modify Specific Plan height requirement to 40-feet instead of 30-feet to match other structures on the hill also appear to be warranted; and

WHEREAS, a CUP request to allow storage facility adjacent (500') to residential zone/units will not substantially impact the senior living complex next door; and

WHEREAS, a requested Variance for relief or Specific Plan required parking be reduced from 43 to 22 automobiles because of limited use of automobiles at this facility appears reasonable; and

WHEREAS, the project Applicant has acknowledged and accepted the conditions of the Neighborhood Council and agreed to include them on a project summary page in revised project plan submittal;

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 for the proposed project at 20401 Ventura Blvd, Woodland Hills, CA 91367, and recommends that the Board of the Woodland Hills-Warner Center Neighborhood Council adopt this motion of the committee as its own in SUPPORT of the requested actions as stated contingent upon adoption by the Applicant of the following conditions:

Conditions

- 1.) All plans presented on April 20, 2023 at the PLUM Meeting of the Woodland Hills – Warner Center Neighborhood Council (WHWCNC) PLUM Committee shall be dated as such and re-submitted to Planning as an (updated) project application submittal.
- 2.) The applicant will not submit any significant, further updated plans or building or site plan changes without first presenting them to the WHWCNC for support.
- 3.) Additionally, all conditions herein shall be printed on one of the Project Summary pages as a commitment to, and acceptance of these conditions.
- 4.) The Applicant will place a project sign on the project under construction which is clearly visible to the street showing a rendering of the proposed/approved project building, plus specifics as to the size, ownership and contact information.
- 5.) A row of tall-growing deciduous trees (minimum 24” boxes) or high-growing shrubs such as Carolina Cherry Laurel shall be planted along the northern boundary overlooking the 101 Freeway to shield the structure from viewing by residents across the Freeway.
- 6.) Rooftop solar panels shall be added to the large flat surface of the structure to help take stress off the grid and lower power bills that the locker owners would be billed for.
- 7.)
- 8.)

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 and Council District 3 Councilmember Bob Blumenfield of the PLUM Committee’s findings, determinations and its subsequent supporting recommendation to APPROVE this application as presented to the full Council on May 10, 2023.

PLUM Motion:
Second:

VOTE: Aye Nay Abstain