

# The new Southwest Valley Community Plan: Where are we? And, where are we going?

The Community Plan for Canoga Park-West Hills-Winnetka-Woodland Hills is the City's roadmap for future development in our corner of the Southwest Valley. But the Community Plan hasn't been substantially updated since the mid-1960s, and since that time, because it hasn't been routinely updated, development in this area of the City has happened on a hodge-podge of spot-zoning approvals and random variances and exceptions that allowed building projects for both commercial and residential projects to veer into often unexpected and sometimes unexplored territory.

That "un-road-mapped" type of planning, led neighborhoods to wonder or fear "What's next?" whenever a project was announced in or even near their area. And, it was something that has happened all over Los Angeles, in virtually every community, neighborhood and district.

That's why the Mayor and City Council chose to update the zoning code and the City's General Plan (a sort-of-master plan) and all of its Community Plans so that zoning codes, planning regulations and development specifications tailored to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century could be brought into line.

That was close to five years ago. And in that time, the City's Planning Department held a series of community meetings with the areas selected to be included in the initial wave of rewriting and updating their Community Plans. In the Valley, the first regional group to be addressed was the Southwest Valley where the Canoga Park-West Hills-Winnetka-Woodland Hills Plan has already been a target for developers for decades.

## **It's back to Square One....again.**

So, where are we almost one year after those "community input meetings" were held in each of the three Community Plan areas of our region? According to the Planning Department: basically almost at square one, again.

Recently, a new team of planners updated the WHIP committee. According to City Planner Tom Glick, one of the department's new senior leaders tapped to helm the SW Valley Planning Group, the initial team assigned to study and rewrite the SW Valley Community Plans has been replaced by a new more senior team of planners, led by Blake Lamb, which was necessitated due to reassignments from the original team to other positions and the newfound difficulties associated with doing concurrently 3 plans encompassing 8 communities. Tom was probably chosen for this team due to his lengthy experience garnered over many years evaluating projects in our community and his familiarity with our community.

Glick points out that the Canoga Park-West Hills-Winnetka-Woodland Hills Plan may be one of the most difficult assignments for any City Planning group to tackle due to the disparity in the types and needs of the four communities linked together in one Plan. He states that each is distinctly different and has needs unique from the other three. Specifically, he noted that West Hills was the most “rural” of the four areas with large swatches set aside for horse-keeping and large animal zoning. Woodland Hills, while having the most substandard hillside roads in this area, also partly has the most “urbanized” and upscale areas with a number of them boasting \$2+ million dollar homes as well as having the urban core of commercial and residential buildings in Warner Center.

“In assessing the original input collected by the first team of planners, we discovered that they failed to give the community clear expectations of what is possible to include and to exclude in rewriting and updating a Community Plan,” Glick underscored. He said that a majority of people assumed that the Community Plan could simply be changed to stop all of the current development projects already filed under the requirements of the old Community Plan, and that any private land that hadn’t already been developed was fair game for the City to declare as “Open Space” and prohibit any future development on it without having to purchase those properties.

The city planners also explained that a lot of those attending the community meetings believed that existing Specific Plans like the Warner Center 2035 Plan would be terminated and thereby prevent any more development within an area that had been projected for density with large commercial and residential structures almost 40 years ago. He went on to underscore that Community Plan must include our four existing Specific Plans rather than over-ruling them, and that the Warner Center 3035 Plan was the City’s newest and most comprehensive Specific Plan that took almost a decade to research and write. He added that the City would not be dramatically changing it—even if the Plan is reviewed for “tweaking” near its 5-year anniversary. Tweaking it refers to making minor or administrative changes that don’t trigger environmental review.

“The growth in Warner Center—including expansion of traffic and density—was carefully planned and assessed when the original Environmental Impact Report (EIR) was written and then presented to the public,” Glick offered. “There were traffic studies conducted at 122 West Valley intersections, and traffic projections on every major street and Freeway in the Valley. When the studies were originally released, there were very few objections filed by residents and business owners in and around Warner Center.”

He also touched on the Publicly Accessible Open Space issue that has been raised when the owners of the Boething Treeland Nursery announced that they would be moving to Simi Valley and developing the 36 acres at the 101 Freeway and Valley Circle Boulevard.

“The Boething family owns that tract of land, not the City. Legally, they have the right to develop that land within the guidelines of the Community Plan,” Glick stated. “I know a lot of people think the City should just take over that land and turn it into a public park. But, we can’t. The owners filed their development plan under the existing Community Plan, and that Plan has a special codicil that allows them to subdivide the acreage and develop it despite the Agricultural zoning code it has operated under as a nursery.” He went on to add that the cost of purchasing

that land would be prohibitive for a City whose budget already owes tens of millions of dollars to pension funds for Fire, Police and City workers. Plus, he pointed out that California's housing crisis is causing more homeless and transients to set up tents and camps in publicly accessible open spaces. "As a public park, it would turn into a nightmare for anyone living around or even near that area—including the very powerful moneyed interests who live in the adjacent Hidden Hills."

### **The ETA for a new Community Plan: Soon.**

The new Planning group that has been assigned to rekindle the fire under the SWV Community Plan has been hard at work. Taking on part of another planning effort that was already underway, they have brought in specialists who are working to develop Transit Oriented Centers around a number of stops on the Orange Line route, and who are studying improving bus line routes and circulator transit offerings so that people can leave their cars at home and turn to more reliable mass transit options.

In fact, the Orange Line is currently undergoing an engineering analysis to look at the necessary steps to convert it from a specialized commuter bus lane to a grade-separated light-rail-capable system—basically an above-ground subway system that would link the core of the San Fernando Valley to the existing Red Line Subway grid. Paramount for this effort is solving ways to get the rails over such key traffic arteries as Canoga Avenue, DeSoto and Winnetka so that traffic would not have to be stopped constantly to allow trains to pass. According to the Council District 3 office, initial studies and findings should be ready to release to the public for comment either late this winter or early spring next year.

The Planning Group has already stated that they plan to hold a new series of community input meetings so that community members in the four areas of the Community Plan can offer more specific information based on the legal parameters already in place. Currently, those input meeting will be scheduled for late summer or early fall, depending on when ReCode:LA has finalized its efforts for the redefinition/creation of new zoning codes.

### **Every parcel in Los Angeles gets a new Zoning Code designation under ReCode:LA.**

Maybe the single most important—and possibly the most controversial—aspect of the entire Community Plan update will be the massive change or redefinition of zoning for every piece of land within the City of LA.

Named ReCode:LA, the project was implemented by City leaders because the City's Zoning Code had not been totally rewritten since it was initially introduced in 1946. Since that time, many new sections were added leading to convoluted and contradictory requirements. This has necessitated decades of allowed variances and exceptions and permitting development by "spot zoning" resulting in an unmanageable tangle of zoning across the City. What the Planners charged with re-thinking LA's zoning faced was an assignment to make zoning logical and understandable by giving it very defined parameters and rules so that neighborhoods would know what to expect in their areas and not be harmed easily by any new building, and so that each zoning area would have a rational commonality.

What ReCode:LA has done is to create very specific zoning designations that determine if residential neighborhoods have houses where they are basically single-story or 2-story for the “flats” of LA (Hillside housing has a completely different set of zoning rules and designations), and for 2-story communities, if the entire house is 2-story or if the 2-story section is either “front-loaded” in the area facing the street/sidewalk or “back-loaded,” where the 2-story section is behind a single-story front area.

There are also special Zoning Classifications that address neighborhoods in or near regularly served transit neighborhoods, commercial area, etc.

“It is complicated to describe the entire ReCode:LA program,” stated Tom Glick. The new municipal code will yield many very specific tailored zones for each community. But when it is done, there we will have a plan that is finally simple to understand yet is very specific to each area.”

One of the major issues for redefining zoning for the Woodland Hills section is that the new ReCode:LA plan has not created a zoning code option that is particular to the existing RA (Residential Agricultural) zone that is the current basic zoning code for the Walnut Acres area.

“Planning hasn’t come up with a solution for that yet,” Glick said,” but there is some thought that we might ask the residents of currently zoned RA areas to help us define and structure a new zoning designation that keeps the benefits they enjoy under the RA zone.”

The Planner noted that under current City rules, most residences can now own certain “agricultural” animals like chickens and pigs, but most homes are limited to being in an “Equestrian Zone” if they want to keep horses. He added that the trick would be to have new zoning that keeps the minimum 17,500 sq. ft. lots and keeps houses and accessory structures far enough away so that they don’t infringe on a neighbor’s rights to keep the allowed agricultural animals.

### **It’s not easy trying to please everyone.**

One of the most daunting problems with creating or up-dating the Southwest Valley Community Plan is that there are so many differences between the four community areas legally lumped together under the same Community Plan.

What’s good for Winnetka isn’t necessarily great for West Hills. And what works in Woodland Hills could wind up being a nightmare in Canoga Park. “That’s the huge problem we’re tasked with solving,” sighed Blake Lamb, the Head Planner for the project. “We need to find solutions that can work in all four areas while still serving the specific needs of each area.

One thing that Lamb noted was that Warner Center not only has its own Specific Plan, but that the Plan also designates the specific zoning and the development requirements within the Warner Center boundaries. “On one hand that’s great, because there are already rules and requirements in place that have been specifically tailored to make all development fit the EIR requirements, as

well as meet the traffic and transportation requirements that have been already determined. But, on the other hand, we're working with the ReCode:LA team in Planning to determine if it is necessary—or even wise—to try and incorporate the Warner Center zoning rules into ReCode:LA and the Community Plan. We're still trying to sort that out," she said.

Again, another situation sure to stir some ire within the community is the fact that a number of large projects have filed for development under the existing Community Plan rules and must legally be judged by the City under those rules. Both Lamb and Glick admitted that there is sure to be a firestorm from neighbors when the revised Boething Treeland development plan is re-submitted to the City, as well as the proposed housing development on the acres surrounding the old Girard reservoir near San Feliciano and Mulholland.

"We're also anticipating a lot of community comments if or when the Ventura Boulevard /Cahuenga Boulevard Corridor Specific Plan gets re-opened," Glick observed. A proposal to re-think that Specific Plan was proposed to the City by the four Councilmen whose Districts include portions of either Ventura Blvd. or Cahuenga Blvd. That proposal is now waiting for an evaluation of options with cost from the Planning Department before being discussed and possibly approved by the entire City Council.

Since six different areas of the City are involved and could be impacted (Woodland Hills, Tarzana, Encino, Sherman Oaks, Studio City and Hollywood), each community is already starting to weigh in on the pluses and minuses of doing anything in their community. Encino business and residential groups have dug in their heels against any increase in density or high-rise commercial buildings along Ventura in their area because of the grid-lock situation that already exists both during the day and evenings. Tarzana groups seem to feel that additional efforts to add more commercial and some apartments could be a plus for the community.

The residents of Woodland Hills are trying to weigh the benefits versus the obvious problems. Most residents seem to feel that allowing greater density and higher buildings along Ventura Blvd. will snarl traffic, obstruct views, and "urbanize" Ventura Blvd. to a point that it loses its "charm." In contrast, there are a number of people in Woodland Hills who fear that keeping portions of the Boulevard locked under the antiquated Plan will cause deterioration of the street, forcing businesses to close and opening the way for more marijuana shops and strips of huge auto dealerships like what happened to Van Nuys Boulevard when that area was allowed to fall into disrepair.

"We have a situation where keeping Ventura Boulevard vibrant and full of community resources like nice restaurants and more upscale shops gets harder to do if development gets stopped," noted August Steurer, Chair of the WHWCNC WHIP (Woodland Hills Impacts and Policies) Committee that is currently looking into this matter. "On one hand, we need those restaurants and shops to counter-balance the commercial and retail development that's happening in Warner Center. Otherwise, Ventura Boulevard dies as the Valley's main street Canoga Park-West Hills-Winnetka-Woodland Hills Plan "heart line" and current retail and commercial will abandon it. That sets up a situation where the current property owners won't pay the up-keep on their existing one and two story buildings which then, in turn, often attract the kinds of businesses that

adjacent residential areas really don't want. As an example, look what happened to Sherman Way in Reseda during the 90s when it became filled with a lot of questionable businesses.

Steurer then said, the other side of the argument is that changing the zoning might allow commercial building and apartment high-rises to flourish, causing additional traffic headaches and wiping out the views of thousands of hillside residences that line the streets above Ventura Blvd. "It's a delicate situation," said Steurer, "and it has to be watched very closely if the City decides to open up the Specific Plan. It's a matter of what's not enough and what's too much?"

### **When can the people of Woodland Hills have their say?**

Planning is under orders to have a new Southwest Valley Community Plan up and running within three years. That means that there is an accelerated schedule that has to be met if Planning wants to accomplish its mission.

"We've been hustling like crazy," Tom Glick said. "We know we're behind, and we're doing everything we can to make up for the year we've already lost. We're beginning to pencil-in potential meeting date for the community to come and give us their specific "wants" and "don't wants" for each individual area."

He quickly added that the Planning Group will try to educate everyone on what the City legally can and can't do in the Community Plan. "We don't want to raise false hopes and float any expectations that aren't legally possible to reach," he stated. "The City is not going to take private property or violate State laws. That may not be what a lot of people want to hear, but until the laws are changed, we have to follow them. But, where we can make changes that can improve the lifestyle of the community or make modifications that can help move traffic and make the streets safer for pedestrians, we're going to recommend it."

Glick added that the Planning Group would try to hold as many community input meetings as they possibly can so that stakeholders have an ample opportunity to offer their comments and suggestions. "This won't be just one time we reach out to the community on this," Glick quickly said. "WE plan to hold community assessment meetings once we actually draft our preliminary plans. We need to community to be both responsive and responsible. Saying 'No!' usually doesn't help us find good solutions. Community guidance and a willingness to find acceptable compromises in some cases is what's needed.

For updates and notifications on the status and scheduled meetings for the Southwest Valley Community Plan will be posted on the Woodland Hills-Warner Center Neighborhood Council website ([www.whcouncil.org](http://www.whcouncil.org)). Please check the calendar regularly for upcoming meetings as they become scheduled. We are doing our best to inform the community of this important process that will affect us all.

# Is Warner Center developing into a City Center “dream,” or an urbanized “nightmare?”

The Warner Center 2035 Specific Plan was a Planning milestone for the City of Los Angeles.

After eight-plus years of discussions, arguments, proposals, findings, presentations and negotiations, the 30+ group of land owners, business owners, community representatives, City officials and assorted others that made up the Citizens Action Committee (CAC) for Warner Center arrived at a new Warner Center agreement that would shepherd development and all of the associated needs and problems that go with it until the year 2035.

The Planning Department held four outreach meetings for Community input. The Woodland Hills-Warner Center Neighborhood Council held six Town Forums that drew over 2,400 interested and opinionated residents and stakeholders. And City government held four major hearings before voting to send its approval to the Mayor for signing.

It was five years ago when the Plan went through approval. And now, as the WC 2035 Plan nears its fifth anniversary, how is it going?

A lot of people might say, “Great.” An equal number might complain, “Horrible.” And a third group might weigh in with a, “Too soon to tell.”

On the “plus” side, those in favor of the original “urban satellite cities” concept that the City of LA has pursued since the 1960s would tell you that the original vision of Warner Center becoming the “downtown of the Valley” like Century City is the “downtown of the West Side,” is finally taking shape. Under the WC 2035 Plan, a host of new hotels, mixed-use residential/commercial projects and several “master planned” projects have either started construction, or are being proposed.

On the “negative” side, there is a lot of distress of making already difficult traffic and transportation woes even worse, while putting an added strain on the City’s water and power services, as well as the Police, Fire and City services. Many talk about the “loss of the rural community” that originally drew them to the Woodland Hills community.

## **What’s being built? What’s being proposed?**

As of this writing, there are five large mixed-use residential/commercial projects that are under construction. Some, like the project being built on the old Daily News site on Oxnard, are erecting their residential Phase I building and holding land vacant for a future commercial tower that is mandated in the WC 2035 Plan. A second mixed-use residential/commercial project was initially approved and then sold to a developer from China who has cleared the lot on Variel and has recently started construction.

One developer, California Home Builders is in the midst of constructing three significant residential/commercial mixed-use complexes in Warner Center. Their initial project on Variel is

# **Promenade 2035 completes its sEIR. Big questions about project still to be answered.**

One of the largest and most controversial development projects in the West Valley is getting ready for a gauntlet of questions, comments and actions from the community and the City.

Westfield's Promenade 2035--the Promenade Mall redevelopment project-- has completed its required Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Report (SEIR) that is over 2,600 pages in length (the Executive Summary is 200+ pages alone) and is open for public comment.

It is guaranteed to get plenty of comments. Because of its size. Because of its proposed "Sports Stadium." And because of the potential impacts it will have on the adjacent neighborhoods, on West Valley traffic, and on the overall lifestyle of Woodland Hills.

## **Promenade 2035 complies with the new Specific Plan—well, most of it.**

The 34-acre Promenade site plan was initially presented to the public almost two years ago. Westfield's Senior Vice President Larry Green and his staff presented the general plan for the project that was going to be built in four phases including a "Sports Entertainment Stadium or Arena" that is slated to be erected on the corner of Topanga Canyon Blvd. and Oxnard St. The question of whether it will be an event arena with a roof, or an sports stadium that is open to the sky hasn't been determined yet, and that decision may impact if the structure actually gets built, or is replaced at some future date by either a commercial or a residential structure.

Overall, the project is proposing to build 1,400 residential apartment units, two major hotels, a 24-story 470,000-square foot office tower, grocery store and retail complex in place of the existing old Promenade shopping mall. The entertainment/sports stadium or arena with 15,000 seats on the southwest corner of the property is still a TBD. In their initial filing, Westfield proposed to complete their entire project in four phases beginning in 2021 and continuing through 2033.

Also proposed for the project is a one acre "square" that Westfield envisions being used for community activities like holiday events, evening movies, and family picnics.

## **Promenade is almost an entire Warner Center District unto itself.**

The Promenade 2035 project together with Westfield's Village at Topanga encompasses the heart of a major portion of the "Downtown District" of the 2035 Warner Center Plan. The District is identified as Warner Center's primary employment and entertainment center and the overall plan was for the District to feature a mix of residential, restaurant and specialty retail uses, along with a major commercial office center that could be the work destination for many living in Warner Center. There was also the possibility of building some kind of entertainment venue, though a "Sports Complex or Stadium" was never part of the WC 2035 Plan.

In the requirements for building in the Downtown District, the WC 2035 Plan mandates that all projects must have a minimum percentage of non-residential floor area, and that no ground floor use is permitted for residential use. There is no height limit in the Downtown District where residential high-rise structures must be included in residential is included in the project to a minimum height of 100 feet. The amount of residential allowed is based on the total size of the project—a very important point if the Sports Stadium is disallowed by the City.

In order to build additional residential structures to replace the Sports Stadium, Westfield would also have to dramatically increase the amount of commercial space it plans to build for the project.

### **Something new may get added to the mix: Affordable Housing.**

Some of the initial complaints concerning the Promenade 2035 plan were that it did not contain any affordable housing that could accommodate the clerks and employees working in Westfield's two retail centers—Topanga Mall and The Village. Those complaints revolved around the argument that those employees would be forced to drive or bus into Warner Center and need adequate parking since all of the apartments are projected to be offered at “Market Rate” or higher.

However the idea of adding an “Inclusionary Housing Policy” to the WC 2035 Plan should it be reviewed after December, is now being floated around at City Hall.

With Los Angeles now in the throes of a housing shortage, the District 3 Council Office is looking at how to integrate inclusionary housing into the plan area. In a motion introduced at City Council, the Councilman calls upon the Planning Department and Housing and Community Investment Department to report on the feasibility and options for including affordability requirements in the Warner Center 2035 Plan.

He specifically requests provisions for moderate-income and workforce housing, and also wishes to see how any new incentives and requirements could work with the Affordable Housing Linkage Fee ordinance, which takes effect next month. That motion has been referred to the City Council's Planning and Land Use Management Committee, where it must receive consideration prior to a vote by the full Council before sending directives to City Planning.

The practice of mandating affordable housing in new developments had been made illegal across the state in 2009, after a landmark court decision involving the City of Los Angeles and developer Geoff Palmer, who successfully fought the inclusionary housing provisions of the City West specific plan.

This was rendered moot in January 2018 with the enactment of Assembly Bill 1505, a legislative response to the Palmer decision which allows cities and counties to reinstitute inclusionary housing requirements.

Now the question is, will it become a requirement for all future housing slated for Warner Center—including any additional residential apartments at the Promenade 2035 site?

### **Other important questions that need to be answered about the Promenade 2035 plan.**

The issue of providing Affordable Housing wasn't the only one on the minds of community members who sat through six different Westfield presentations on various aspects of the Promenade redevelopment plan. A question of "balance" was also brought to light.

The original concept behind the WC2035 Plan was for the area to provide a live-work-entertainment hub where people could live a majority of their day and fulfill their needs in one concentrated geographic area without adding to the traffic congestion on the 101 Freeway or major West Valley thoroughfares.

However, many pointed out that by front-loading the building process with a majority of residential projects and leaving the majority of commercial office space to "catch up" in the final phase, causes the project to throw the live-work concept out of balance and negatively impacts the community for a significant portion of the redevelopment process. They pointed out that initial residents of the Promenade 2035 will be forced to use 101 Freeway or major thoroughfares during peak commute times, intensifying traffic situation of the West Valley. They also noted that businesses in the Warner Center area will be deprived of a potential customer base due to them commuting away from Warner Center during business hours.

Their point was that the failure to build both residential and commercial office space at the same time does not serve to attract major corporate tenants since it eliminates the option of transferring into Warner Center and having residential space available for existing employees. That is a key question that the SEIR may need to answer.

### **Will Residential bring more families? Is there room for kids at Promenade 2035?**

There have also been questions about the residential mix that Westfield is proposing, noting that few if any of the proposed residential structures and facilities are designed to attract families with children.

While the submitted Promenade redevelopment plan does provide a large central park area for the project and several smaller "parklets," none of the proposed spaces within the Promenade 2035 project is specifically designed or designated for use by small children. A number of stakeholders at the Westfield presentations pointed out that a vibrant "city center" requires a diverse spectrum of its population to come from different socio-economic strata and lifestyles.

Many said the Promenade plan does not create a truly family friendly environment that will attract younger families with children. By failing to make the Promenade project more attractive to single or even dual-parent families, they contend that the "Downtown" area of Warner Center will fail to provide the layered mix of ages and incomes that is important to sustain a vibrant urban core.

### **Another question central to the project: Central Square?**

While a majority of the public who have viewed the Promenade 2035 plan have expressed a lot of positive remarks about including a “Central Square” park in the heart of the project.

They point out that if the park is open to the public, then people will be required to access paid parking in order to use the park. That would create a problem for a general public that frequently shuns parking fees. They noted that those people will probably search out available parking on side streets and in nearby neighborhoods where they won't have to pay even a modest sum for parking. That in turn creates a significant parking issue in those nearby areas—one that Westfield has not yet addressed.

Some of the concerns also state that using the subterranean parking makes it difficult for families to transport and use things like trikes, baby carriages and other play equipment where they might have to use stairs or ramps.

More questions regarding the central park area: Will residents be given “preference” for park uses? Who controls daily park activity? Will the park be accessible at late night hours?

### **The huge question for everyone is the Sports Stadium**

Of course, the one issue that is sure to be the biggest concern about the Promenade 2035 proposal is the inclusion of the Sports and Entertainment Stadium or Even Arena on one of the busiest corners in the West Valley.

Most everyone who attended the Westfield presentations expressed concern or even anger over the proposal to put in a 15,000 seat site for sports, events or whatever could be booked there. With the roof, the Stadium could become a traffic and lifestyle nightmare for anyone living near the site or planning to access Warner Center shopping. Many were concerned with the type of events that could be booked with Hip-Hop and Hard Rock being two of the most vilified types of entertainment events. All were unanimous in their concerns that a full event would over-tax the abilities of the LA Traffic Department to handle all of the younger drivers invading the area, and they have no faith that the beleaguered 101 Freeway or Topanga Canyon Blvd. would be able to accommodate all the additional cars.

An open stadium proposal generated even more negative comments since noise, lighting and possibly smoke would be free to enter the atmosphere of old adjacent communities as well as impact any people living in the proposed new residential structures next to the site.

The Promenade 2035 Plan will still have to undergo arduous scrutiny before it moves forward with both the community and the City Council focusing all of their energies on making sure it fits into the community as it was originally envisioned.

For updates and notifications on the status and scheduled meetings for the Promenade 2035 project will be posted on the Woodland Hills-Warner Center Neighborhood Council website ([www.whcouncil.org](http://www.whcouncil.org)). Please check the calendar regularly for upcoming meetings as they become scheduled. We are doing our best to inform the community of this important process that will affect us all.

out of the ground and will house the first grocery store to serve Warner Center residents. It will also have restaurants and retail like dry cleaners and other services that will fill the needs to residents. A second mixed-use project is going up across from the Village on Topanga Canyon Blvd. It too will have locally-serving retail establishments as well as restaurants and rentable work spaces. Their third mixed-use project will replace an old 2-story industrial building with an architecturally dramatic, 7-story building with over 350 residential units and retail establishments.

While the vast majority of the apartments being proposed for Warner Center will be Market Rate apartments, developers have also set their sights of building for a large senior population in Warner Center. Two major senior and assisted-living projects are slated to go up within Warner Center plus a large 7-story medical building on Oxnard that will have doctors and treatment centers in close proximity to the senior residences.

### **Major developments in Warner Center will bring big changes to Woodland Hills.**

Of course, there are three huge question marks in everyone's mind when talking about development in Warner Center: What's going on with the Promenade? What are the rumors about the sale of the Rocketdyne property? And exactly what—and how big—will that development be at the corner of Burbank and DeSoto?

The Westfield Promenade 2035 project has completed its Supplemental Environmental Impact Report (SEIR) and the City is reviewing it. (See accompanying story on the Promenade 2035 Project.)

The 47-acre Rocketdyne site on Victory and Owensmouth in Warner Center is under secret sales negotiations and possibly even in escrow with the Canadian owner/developer of the Mall of America in Minneapolis—the largest shopping mall in America. Edmonton-based Triple Five Group is the development and finance organization who has built and operates numerous major mixed-use development projects around the world. No plans or other information about the possible purchase has been released at this time. While there was a general master plan for the site circulating in publications, no plans were ever approved by the city. A new developer can start over with new plans.

The 24+ acre site at the corner of Burbank Blvd. and DeSoto Ave. in Warner Center that is currently known as the Warner Center Business Park is being planned for major redevelopment under the 2035 Warner Center Specific Plan, and will be transformed into a new master commercial/retail and residential center over the next 15 years. Temporarily named the Adler Project, the proposed plan will be one of the largest and most transformative developments in Warner Center.

The Adler project will replace the 12 low-rise office structures with 10 new high rise buildings that will be phased in over the next decade, and include office towers, apartments, condos, hotel and retail space.

The project was initially presented to the public at a Special Neighborhood Council PLUM meeting on March 29. The PLUM Committee is currently scheduling a series of additional

hearings to discuss various aspects of the proposed project. “Because this is a “conforming project” which meets the requirements and guidelines of the WC2035 Plan without asking for an exception or variance, an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) is not legally required,” noted PLUM co-Chair Don Patterson. “We’d like to work with the developer and the architects and site designers to see if we can help make the project a better fit with the community.

The plan calls for over 1.45 million square feet of office, retail and restaurant space, 1,029 residential units, 228 hotel rooms, and other community amenities. The WC 2035 Plan calls for a minimum of 15% of the project land to be open space that does not include parking lots, roads and driveways. Two 15-story commercial buildings are proposed, along with a 24-story tower along Burbank Blvd.

“At our original hearing, we heard the major issues that concern the community, like increased traffic, possible shadowing from tall buildings and potential problems of delaying emergency access to Kaiser Hospital,” Patterson continued. “We’d like to see if there are some ways to lessen the potential impacts of a development this large, and add some more “positives” for the community. We know that they can already legally build this “by right,” since the project is faithful to the WC 2035 Plan. But we hope that if everyone approaches this from a positive point-of-view and not a Nimby stance, that we can help resolve a number of the issues that were brought up at the first PLUM hearing.”

### **Dream? Nightmare? Or part of a city’s continuing evolution?**

When the WC 2035 Plan was written, it contained a clause that allowed it to be “reviewed and tweaked” after the first five years. The fifth anniversary comes on Christmas next December, and a lot of people have marked the day so that they can offer a host of opinions, suggestions, demands and even the occasional plaudit.

But, what’s the reality of making significant changes to the WC 2035 Plan if the City does decide to tweak it?

CD-3 Councilman Bob Blumenfield has addressed the possibilities and probabilities of evaluating the progress of the Plan early next year. In several public meetings he has addressed a number a comments from people who voiced a desire to either “freeze” the current Plan and all future development activity, or to completely rewrite the Plan.

He was quoted as saying that IF the Plan gets reviewed, it will “only be done to make necessary tweaks to things that either aren’t working or that could work better.” He dismissed any possibility of freezing the Plan or completely rewriting it, noting that it took the community and the City almost a decade to arrive at the Plan and that the economic, traffic, density, mobility and housing studies conducted by the various City departments and expert consultants anticipated much of the changes necessary to make Warner Center the “Urban Center of the Valley.”

Check out our website, [www.whcouncil.org](http://www.whcouncil.org), periodically to keep informed about projects under review by our Planning, Land Use and Mobility (PLUM) Committee. We routinely post all committee meetings a minimum of 72-hours in advance. Most committees meet at least once a

month on a regular schedule. The PLUM Committee generally meets on the first and third Thursday of each month. The Committee consists of Board Members and non-member stakeholders who have shown a dedicated interest in city planning with a good knowledge of our community. Stakeholders are welcome to apply to fill vacant positions when needed.

# **New elections for Neighborhood Council next spring mean new opportunities for you to help improve Woodland Hills.**

Starting later this year, “Help Wanted” signs will start getting posted by the Woodland Hills-Warner Center Neighborhood Council in an effort to get stakeholders to enter elections for a number of Representative seats that will be coming open in the February, 2019 Neighborhood Council Elections.

While the City of LA has not set a firm Election Day yet, the stakeholders in Woodland Hills are being invited to come to WHWCNC meetings and to attend public Council’s Committee meetings, to see if they have an interest in either running for an open seat, or filing to join a Committee they might be interested in joining. Serving on a committee does not require being a Board Member. The springtime Election will be for the three Representatives and one Alternate position in each of the WHWCNC Districts 1, 3, 5 and 7. (See map on page X for District boundaries)

Each of those WHWCNC Districts has a Residential Representative, a Business Representative and a Community-based Organization (CBO) Representative. The winners of the election will fill those posts, while the person who received the highest vote total but did not win his or her respective election, will be offered the Alternate post with the ability to sit on the Board when one of the three elected Representatives cannot attend.

“There are a lot of very important things happening in Warner Center and throughout the entire Woodland Hills Community,” stated WHWCNC President Joyce Fletcher. “Some of the currently elected Board members may decide not to run again. Some may not qualify, because they no longer work or own a business in that respective area, or may have decided to join a religious or service organization not based in their area. The point is, “there’s always going to be a lot of work for the Woodland Hills Neighborhood Council to do in the upcoming year,” she continued, “and we’re going to need dedicated, enthusiastic and knowledgeable volunteers to help get things done.”

When the City created the Neighborhood Council system, it was envisioned that the NCs would serve as advisory groups to City Departments and each District’s City Councilperson. Today, the NCs still fill that role. But with neighborhoods seeking a greater voice into how their communities are governed and how their homes and businesses are impacted by City decisions, today’s Neighborhood Councils are charged with providing other elected officials with more detailed data, greater stakeholder insights and possible solutions to their community’s most pressing issues.

“In most cases, you don’t need a lot of experience,” Fletcher emphasized. “But you do need a lot of enthusiasm and dedication. So, if you have the desire, I urge you to become involved in your

community. If you're looking for rewarding challenges, there are many interesting and fun opportunities available to you—even if you don't wind up getting the most votes.”

The Council President noted that it is important that people who decide to be candidates understand that they're not running for a position where all that's expected of you is either “thumbs-up” or “thumbs-down.” “There is real, roll up your sleeves work and long hours required to take care of the business and prepare to be able to offer sound advice when you become a member. Members end up knowing more than they ever wanted to know about the City.

Everyone on the Board is required to be an active member of at least one standing Council Committee, and you might be asked to join two or three, depending on any special talents or knowledge you might have.“ She added that several Committees meet two evenings a month and on some—like the Planning, Land Use and Mobility (PLUM) Committee—you'll be expected to write and present comprehensive Case Reports for projects that come before it.

“Through our 10 standing committees, we examine and recommend action to positively impact development, education, transportation, public safety, the environment and much more. If you are concerned about changes in your neighborhood, join in and make your voice heard,” Fletcher said. She also pointed out that Neighborhood Councils do not have any direct power to either green-light or stop an action that is going through the City's established channels like a request that has been filed with Planning, or actions taken by LAPD, for instance. But she underscored that the decisions the Neighborhood Council and its Committees come to, are presented to the District-3 Councilman, his staff and to various City agencies, so that they can have a clearer idea of how the community assesses a particular request or action before it goes into effect.

If you have an interest in running for an open Neighborhood Council seat in the upcoming springtime elections being conducted by the City Clerk, you should be aware of some of the basic requirements necessary to be considered for that position and to appear on the ballot.

As the Residential Stakeholder Representative, you must either live in or own residentially-zoned property in that District. Renters are eligible, as are homeowners who lease out a dwelling, but may live in another part of the City. When you register to become a candidate, the City Clerk staff in charge of the election will review your status and you will have to show proof of your residency or ownership.

As the Business Stakeholder Representative, you can either own a registered business that is located in that specific District you wish to represent, or you are eligible to run as the Business Representative if you work for a business physically located in that District. Proof of the actual business location or that you are gainfully employed there will be required by the City. If you are self-employed and working out of your residence, a City business license will probably be required.

Running for a Community-based Organization seat (CBO) will require you to have proof that you are a member of that organization (Church, service organization, etc.) that is based in that District. You don't have to live in Woodland Hills to become a CBO Stakeholder Representative,

but the organization must be located here and it must be accepted as a legitimate and legal entity by the City of Los Angeles.

Of course there are many more details but they will be made available by the City before the sign-up period begins, and they will be posted on the Council's website once the City releases them. Once elected, as an elected official, you will be required to complete short courses on ethics and board budget spending requirements.

There is also one more WHWCNC Representative Seat that will be opening in 2019—for a Student Representative. The Board Seat was only created at the beginning of 2018 so that High School students could gain real insight into how the Council works, and for that student to have a chance to share the perspective of someone who is affected by many City events, but has no real platform to express the views of that generation. The Student Representative is selected from applications submitted by students attending Woodland Hills-based schools, by the WHWCNC Governance Committee and a presentation to the entire WH Council Board.

So, if you have decided to dip your toe into political waters and you have the time, energy and commitment to represent the thousands of people who live, work and carry out services in your District, be sure to check the Woodland Hills-Warner Center Neighborhood Council website for the official registration dates and requirements. And, if you get elected, get ready to roll your sleeves up and work to make Woodland Hills an even better community than it is today.

For updates and notifications on the forthcoming election or to attend scheduled board and committee meetings check the Woodland Hills-Warner Center Neighborhood Council website ([www.whcouncil.org](http://www.whcouncil.org)) weekly. Please check the calendar regularly for upcoming meetings as they become scheduled. We are doing our best to inform the community of issues that will affect us all.

# **Santa Susanna Field Laboratory Cleanup has become a messy battle for removing toxic debris.**

In the years since Boeing bought the Rocketdyne Company and began shutting down their rocket engine research and testing labs hidden near the crest of the Santa Susanna Hills, there has been an ever-escalating fight between a half dozen County and State environmental agencies and elected officials, NASA, homeowners and public groups and coalitions, land owners and Boeing.

The disputes are numerous and far-ranging, but to boil it down to its most elemental argument, will it be a decision to institute a basic cleanup plan (called a Suburban Residential Standard—a level clean enough to live on) for the site and let Mother Nature slowly restore it as it becomes a protected wilderness area, or to perform a huge cleanup campaign (called Background Level Standard—as if the facility never operated or even existed) by removing virtually the top three feet of possibly contaminated soil, rocks, and vegetation of the entire 8-acre site and transport what's removed by using thousands of dump trucks driving through areas like Woodland Hills.

Trying to resolve this battle is California's Department of Toxic Substances who issued its Draft Environmental Impact Report in December, and is now evaluating thousands of letters, new input and other documents arguing many of the initial findings.

## **Cleaning the SSFL could make Woodland Hills environmentally “dirty.”**

The reason this cleanup decision is so crucial to Woodland Hills residents is that any potentially hazardous natural waste that gets removed could be hauled down Valley Circle Boulevard or down Topanga Canyon Boulevard as the hauling vehicles head for the closest entry to the 101 Freeway on their way to a disposal area in the deserts of California and Arizona. As previously reported in a WHWCNC Newsletter in 2014, hundreds of thousands of giant dumpster toting trucks carrying soil contaminated with chemical waste, industrial pollutants and even radioactive waste could be the next road hazards that Woodland Hills residents and businesses potentially face over a minimum 10-year span if the proposed plans aren't modified in the next few months.

Based on the two proposed haul routes, those hundreds of thousands of trucks carting the contaminants and debris would drive through neighborhoods and past schools, parks, and senior with the possibility of spilling debris whenever a truck hit a pothole, or when a strong wind lifted the canvas covering the removed soil. The trucks would pass directly in front El Camino Real Charter High School if they took Valley Circle to the 101 Freeway, or pass directly in front of Canoga Park High School and Warner Center's shopping zone if they drove down Topanga Canyon Boulevard.

“We're watching this situation very carefully,” emphasized Karen DiBiase, Chair of the Woodland Hills Neighborhood Council's Environmental Committee. “Over the past five years,

the WHWCNC has filed a number of letters, protests and suggestions with all of government agencies and corporations involved in this cleanup project. We've made it very clear that any solution that has the potential to leave remnants of the soil, the debris or structures from the SSFL site on the streets or in the air of Woodland Hills is not a solution at all."

DiBiase went on to underscore that removing a problem from one area and then possibly scattering parts of that problem into other, more distant areas only serves to potentially contaminate communities that are pristine at the moment. "It is much safer—and saner—to address and solve this problem on the site that is impacted. The Environmental Committee has carefully weighed the many options presented, assessed the plusses and minuses of each Cleanup proposal and made a recommendation to all of the government entities who are responsible for finding the best solution," DiBiase continued.

### **WHWCNC Environmental Committee has experts evaluating the proposals.**

She went on to add, "Remember, we have had several people working on the WHWCNC Environmental Committee, who were former scientists at the Santa Susanna Field Lab. Those experts have given our members some extraordinary insight into the realities of this situation, and we have come to the firm belief that the best solution for the entire West Valley is to clean it up to the Suburban Residential Standard level and then make the property part of the Santa Monica Mountain Conservatory lands with a designation as a wildlife wilderness property."

By doing that, DiBiase explained, after the majority of all the contaminants get removed, no one would be disturbing any soil or hiking through the site. Basically, it would allow Mother Nature to use its amazing recuperative powers to naturally restore the land and handle any of the contaminated debris that might be left behind. "Nature has done a lot of incredible things, once man was removed from the equation," She pointed out. "If given the opportunity, nature's own recuperative powers will show everyone that it was the right choice to solve the SSFL fiasco."

For updates and notifications on future developments regarding SSFL and the schedule of the Environmental Committee meetings check the Woodland Hills-Warner Center Neighborhood Council website ([www.whcouncil.org](http://www.whcouncil.org)) weekly. Please check the calendar regularly for upcoming meetings of all committees as they become scheduled. We are doing our best to inform the community of important issues that may affect our community.