



## Planning, Land Use and Mobility Committee



### **"The District at Warner Center" Mixed Use Residential/Hotel/Commercial**

**Case Report: 6100 Canoga Avenue, Woodland Hills, CA 91367  
Downtown District, Warner Center 2035 Plan  
DIR-2020-5379-SPP-VHCA**

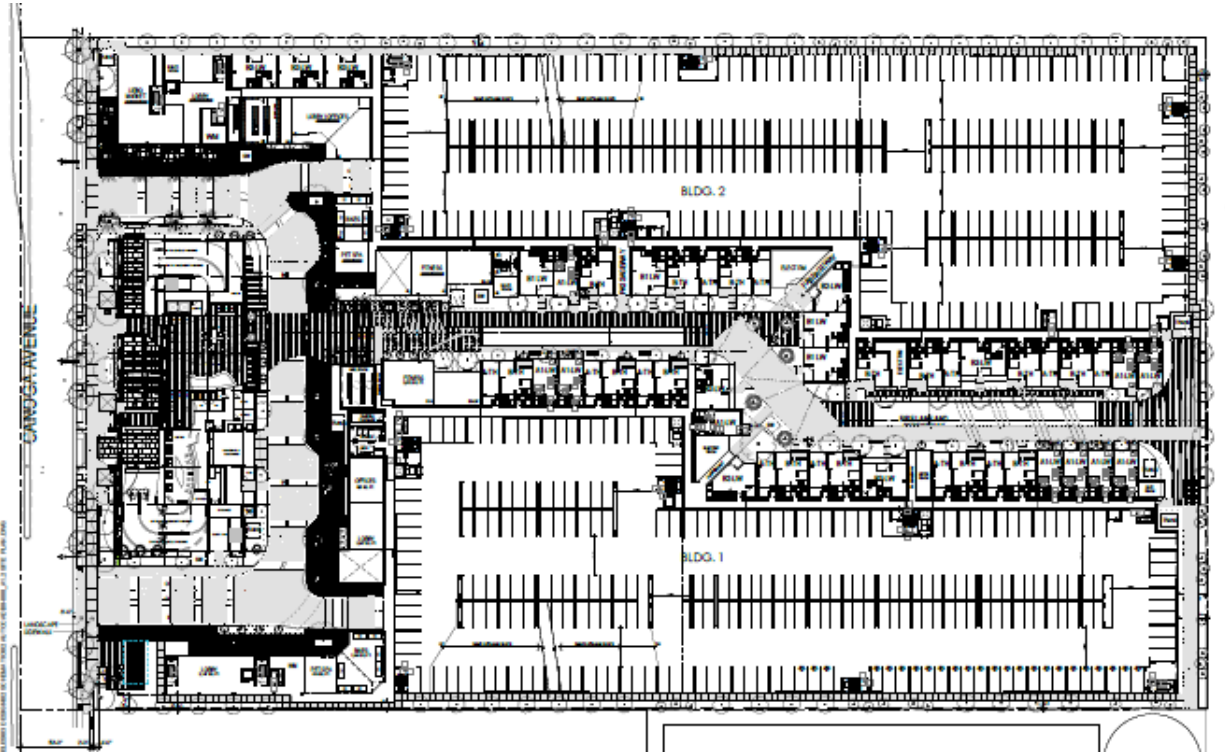
PLUM Presentations: June 4, 2020 (Courtesy presentation)  
December 3, 2020

Applicant: Geoffrey Simpson  
Kaplan Woodland Hills Property Company, LLC  
777 Post Oak Blvd., Houston, TX 77056 #850

Representative: Matt Dzurec  
Armbruster Goldsmith & Delvic LLP  
[matt@agd-landuse.com](mailto:matt@agd-landuse.com)

CEQA Consultant: Stephanie Eyestone-Jones  
Eyestone Environmental  
[s.eyestone@eyestoneeeir.com](mailto:s.eyestone@eyestoneeeir.com)

PLUM Case Leaders: Sean McCarthy, Marty Lipkin



*The project site in Downtown District of WC 2035 Specific Plan*

## **Project Summary:**

The proposed project is slated for an 8.83-acre site totaling 384,449 square feet in the Downtown District of Warner Center and will occupy the former Fry's Electronics site. They are proposing two large 7-story mixed-use/residential structures with slim 8-story "towers" fronting Canoga. There will be 880 market-rate units, including 342 Work/Live units facing the emergency access/PAOS corridor, which extend almost 90% of the entire property's depth. The third structure is a hotel that fronts Canoga Avenue and takes up approximately 75% of the site frontage. Each of the two residential buildings provides podium parking on three (3) levels.

No low-income residential or workforce housing is proposed in the project.

The Applicant proposes to build a master-planned development in three phases: Phase 1 includes the northern residential Building #2; Phase 2 is the southern residential Building #1; Phase 3 is the hotel. The project proposes 1,157, 396 SF of total floor area with a 3.02 FAR. Permitted Downtown District FAR is 5.0:1. The parking will provide for a total of 1,573 vehicle spaces and 445 bike spaces.

The majority of the 2035 WC Plan's commercial space requirement is proposed to be met by the 8-story hotel, the 342 Live/Work units, and a small bodega-type grocery/convenience store in the ground floor Building #2 (Phase 1).

According to plans provided, the developer claims there will be 59,104 SF of Publically Accessible Open Space (2035 WC Plan requires 57,523 SF.) However, most of the PAOS consists of the EVA Lane running through the middle of the project, which may not be readily accessible to the rest of the WC community (a clear intent of the PAOS requirement of the Specific Plan.) An additional percentage of PAOS requires the public to travel up 3-floors to podium-level courtyards, making public use difficult and unlikely. The central EVA Lane/ PAOS corridor is referred to as a "woonerf"—which is a term for "a living street, originally implemented in the Netherlands which includes shared space, traffic calming devices, and low-speed limits." The applicant indicates that the "woonerf" will feature Live/Work units, seating, and other facilities.

## **Site Plan Overview:**

The proposed project covers the entire parcel from edge-to-edge with only the EVA Lane, central "woonerf," a traffic semi-circle around the hotel structure, and small plantings are fronting on Canoga Ave., and behind the hotel serving to break up the density of the project. The EVA Lane "T" at the eastern end of the property is also the major relief to the structural massing of the eastern end of the proposed project.

The development has two (2) primary vehicle entry/exit points off Canoga which will join behind the hotel structure to create a semi-circular vehicle pathway. Each residential building will have a single ingress/egress portal, causing vehicles needing to access the eastern portion(s) of the two residential/mixed-use buildings to drive almost the entire length of the podium parking lot of each structure. The hotel will have a separate third (3) driveway into the hotel's Porte Cochere which is for entering vehicles only.

The Plan does provide six (6) generous residential open spaces based atop the podium parking – three in each building—but these courtyards are podium level spaces (approximately on the roof of a 2-story building) and may not be readily accessible to the general public without signage and open access to elevators, stairs and doorways. There is also a small roof deck on each residential tower, and a Level-3 pool terrace, on the hotel.

On the plans provided to the PLUM, there are no required connectivity pathways indicated (2035 WCSP: 5.3.3.1.1) that demonstrate unencumbered pedestrian connectivity through the Project site, to the surrounding streets, and to nearby transit--including, but not limited to, new streets, current pedestrian routes, pedestrian-adapted pathways, bike facilities, and bikeways. The supplied narrative states that one (1) pathway will connect to the adjacent "Vela at Ox" development to the south. It also states that a future pedestrian connection will be initiated to the property at 6109 Variel Ave. (to the east) when that property is developed. There are no projections for connectivity access through either the north or south sides of the project site. No real pedestrian pathways appear to be planned to connect to Erwin to the north

No dog/pet relief areas or fenced-in animal run" spaces are indicated in the plans.



**Building Specifics:**

**Phase 1: Building #2—Northern Area: Mixed Use / Residential:**

- 7-stories with an 8-story high rise (150 feet at tower/67 feet at 7-story level)-- 512,476 SF floor area
- Further step-down to 5 stories facing EVA Lane/ central PAOS.
- Podium parking (3 levels—one sub.). Fronted in the interior PAOS by Live/Work units.
- There are 442 residential units, including 171 Live/Work units—24 are 2-story at ground level—and comprise 72,337 SF of commercial "work" portion.
- A small, 2,100 SF market/convenience store located on the ground floor of the tower facing Canoga with limited outdoor dining space (No front parking area indicated for market patrons.)
- Small rooftop deck.
- Three (3) enclosed courtyards (two open to the north)
- 730 total parking spaces

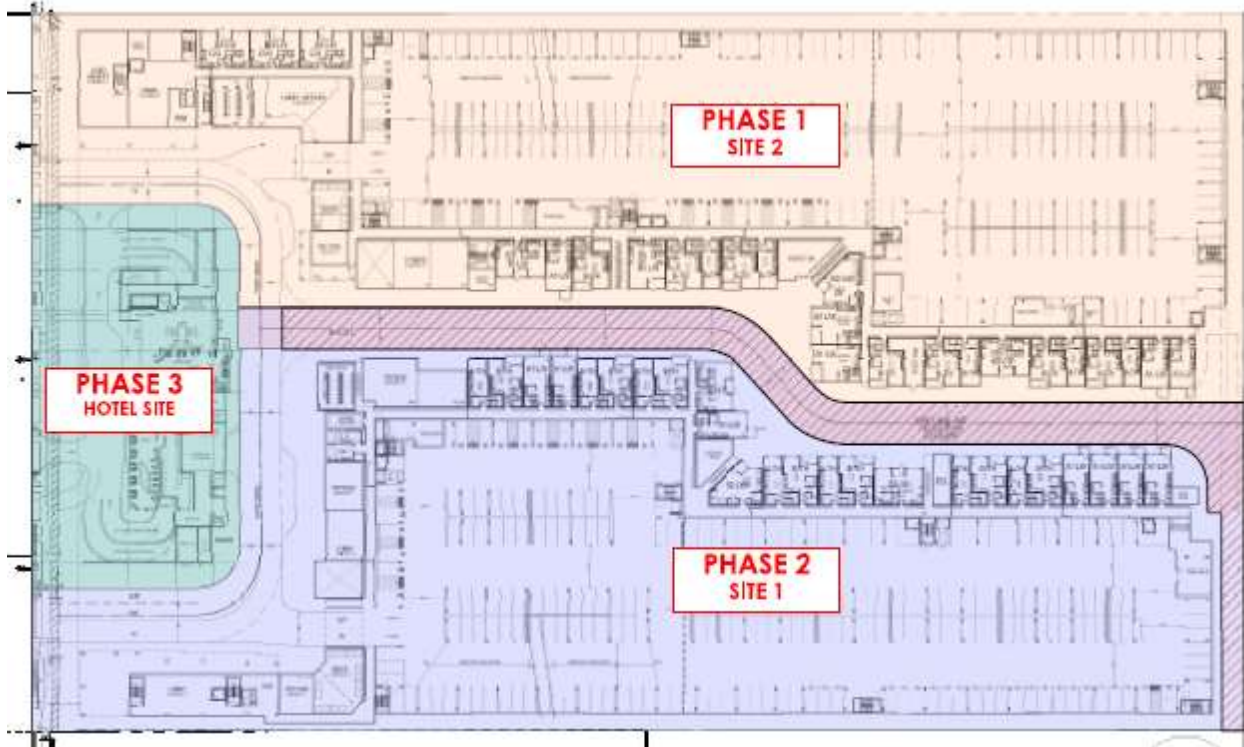
**Phase 2: Building #1: Southern Area: Live/Work / Residential:**

- An eight-story tower that with step down to 7 and 5 stories. Mixed-use, with heights of up to 136 feet.
- There are 438 residential units (171 Live/Work--24 two-story at ground level) Comprise 72,337 SF of required commercial "work" portion.

- Podium parking (3 levels—one sub.). Two interior ground levels are fronted by Live/Work units. Small rooftop deck.
- Three (3) enclosed courtyards (two open to the south)
- 721 total parking spaces
- A wooden bench seating area is in front of the tower portion of the building on Canoga Ave.

**Phasing:**

**Phase I:** Building #2; **Phase II:** Building #1; **Phase III:** Hotel.



*Structure locations within the proposed project phasing plan*

**Phase 3: Hotel**

- 12 stories, 139 feet high
- 204 guest rooms and amenity spaces
- Ground floor: lobby bar, bistro with outdoor dining and service area.
- Subterranean and level 2 parking with 122 total “valet only” parking spaces (30% have EV hookups).
- Access to PAOS through the hotels back doors
- Outdoor pool, deck, and terrace on Level-3. Additional terrace on the roof
- Porte Cochere fronts Canoga Ave.
- Single entry driveway from Canoga to front door drive-up under Porte Cochere. (Access to building parking and route for exiting traffic)

**Hotel Phase:**

The 12 story hotel (139 feet high) offers 204 guest rooms and 122 “valet-only” parking spaces.

The most significant features are a Porte Cochere fronting Canoga Ave. with a single entry-only for cars. Vehicles exiting from parking and dropping off passengers will leave the property using the north driveway circle onto Canoga Ave.



*Front (west) façade of the hotel showing porte-cochere*

The hotel structure appears to be the most architecturally "dramatic" of the three structures proposed in the master-planned project site. However, it has an overall design that seems to be of a building rooted in the mid-1960. The bottom three floors contain most of the architectural embellishments like larger windows and aluminum fascia panels. The third floor has an open area for the pool and deck area. The second floor is a parking floor.

There is also a roof terrace on the 12<sup>th</sup> floor that also features suites along a set-back facing Canoga (western view). The dark gray vertical elevator shaft is the most dominant visual element on the face of the hotel.

The hotel building's back has relatively few architectural details, and both the north and south sides are virtually blank. There is a concern that this hotel's current design (due to its critical location at the heart of Warner Center) will fail to meet the City's Urban Design Guidelines.

At the June 2020 presentation (see below), there was a question raised whether Warner Center needs another hotel since there are two major existing hotels and several others (3) are being built or have received approval in Warner Center. The developer stated that the hotel could become a site for another use, although none was specified at the time.



*Rear (east) façade of the hotel showing truck bay and back pedestrian doorway.*



*Renderings of the hotel including the east façade and several views of the front porte-cochere*

## **Adherence to the Warner Center Specific Plan:**

At first glance, the submitted project plan appears to meet most of the legally required aspects of the WC 2035 Specific Plans for the Downtown District from a technical perspective. However, the applicant has not sufficiently addressed the Specific Plan's intentions, particularly a lack of balance of live/work/play, which is a crucial part of the Plan.

Paramount among these issues is the allocation of the majority of PAOS to the central Fire access/EVA lane and hammer-head that, based on submitted plans, will not be readily accessible to the general public. The two towers and hotel building fronting Canoga create a visual and psychological "barrier" to accessing the PAOS for other Warner Center residents and visitors.

Second, most of the required "commercial/work" space is being filled by the hotel and by an over-preponderance of Live/Work units throughout the complex. The hotel does not appear to be a major source of employment for Warner Center—especially in the Downtown District which was intended to be a "jobs rich area." And, as demonstrated by previously built projects under the WC 2035 Plan, most L/W units are not serving as sites for businesses, but rather are serving a mostly residential purpose with only a fraction of the space used as a meaningful workspace.

There is also a significant issue with the proposed pedestrian "connectivity" through the master-planned project. The submitted plans indicate that the project would only offer connections to the south with a proposed linkage through the Vela at Ox, and another future connection site to a site on Variel. There is also mention in the materials of connecting the central PAOS and EVA hammerhead to the eastern boundary and adjacent property. There are no provisions for providing pedestrian connectivity through the project to the north, and to additional properties fronting Erwin, defeating the 2035 WC Plan's prime goals of breaking up the large city blocks into more walkable ones. As stated in the WC 2035 Plan, "the intent of Section 5.3.3.3 is to establish procedures for Master Planned Projects to ensure that the pedestrian and walkability goals of the Plan are preserved and enhanced."

Additionally, the proposed project does not address the critical needs for both workforce housing units and Affordable housing units-- both of which are discussed in section 5.3.5 of the 2035 Plan. Those two housing options are not required by the 2035 Plan but, "...which should be considered by the City, as guidance rather than as requirements, in approving, at the City's full discretion, any development agreement (according to California Government Code Section 65864 et seq.) proposed in conjunction with a Project." This is important because there is a preponderance of Market-Rate units either built, approved, or proposed in Warner Center yet only one master-planned project with designated residential spaces for these two housing types. Additionally, tge CD-3, the City Planning Commissiion and the City Council PLUM have become strong advocates for the inclusion of a realistic amount of this type of housing in any projects that come before them.

## **Project Architectural Design and Massing:**

As previously noted, the overall architectural design is highly conservative, somewhat dated and relatively uninspired for both the residential units and the hotel. The overall visual impact of the

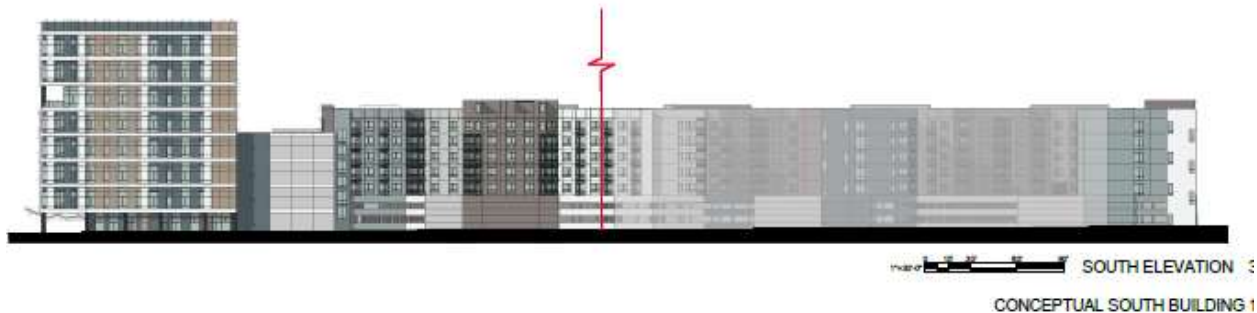


project must be carefully considered because it will be one of the most visible in Warner Center.

A careful re-study of the project massing should be considered since the project's master plan appears to have been created to maximize residential housing and little else at the expense of other critical attributes on the almost 8.8-acre site.

The two "tower" elements—along with the 12 story hotel—facing Canoga Ave creates a massive "wall," and elicits a fortress impression. It does not provide any real visual interest for pedestrians, motorists or the Warner Center community, and makes the entire project almost foreboding. Plans show it will be almost entirely surrounded by 6-foot walls.

The architects have attempted to visually reduce some of the massing by stepping down portions of both the north and south residential buildings. The height difference between the 7-story and 5-story parts goes almost unnoticed due to the narrow separation space provided by the central PAOS and the project's overall blocky design. The result is a sense that this is an overwhelmingly massive project for the site--an almost citidel-like project designed to separate it from, rather than connecting it to, the rest of Warner Center.



### **Courtesy Presentation at 6/4/20 PLUM:**

*The following persons made presentation: Jerry Davis, Matt Dzurec, Michael Heinrich, Mike Kaplan, Paul Maksy, Geoffrey Simpson. (Notes are taken from the PLUM minutes approved on 6/18/20.)*

Named The District at Warner Center, the Kaplan Companies is the owner/developer of the proposed project.

Located in the Downtown District of the 2035 WC Specific Plan. The developer states he believes this is a significant project for Warner Center: centrally located, intended to connect the community and transform Canoga Avenue. The site covers 9 acres but the project covers 8.76 acres. The project is a Master Planned project currently designed to have two residential buildings; 1 hotel and 66,000 sq. ft. of PAOS.

Building 1 will have 439 units including 28 in a 6-story building with an 8-story high rise; there will be 721 parking spaces. Building 2 will have 443 units including 28 in a 6-story building with an 8-story high rise; there will be 726 total parking spaces in the two residential buildings.

The Hotel--Building 3-- will be a 204 key, 12-story hotel with 93 parking spaces which are all valet. The FAR will be 3.19:1. Mid-rise building heights will be 79'7". The high rise portion of building height will be 141'0". The hotel building height will be 141'9".

PLUM Committee member comments:

- 1.) Issues with the proposed traffic signal;
- 2.) PAOS: lack of actual useable space and public accessibility;
- 3.) Proposed market-rate pricing --is there already a declining need for more in WC?
- 4.) The proximity of the project to existing buildings surrounding the site--connectivity;
- 5.) Possible alternate uses of the hotel site in conjunction with concern that there are too many hotels in or planned for Warner Center;
- 6.) Lack of carefully-planned and needed commercial space;
- 7.) Need to match grades of adjacent properties and to match driveway entry into the Anthem Blue Cross property;
- 8.) The proposed orientation of the buildings to the open space(s);
- 9.) Lack of architectural variety in the overall design of the project--especially a need to make the buildings look more iconic;
- 10.) Sightlines into the center of the property;
- 11.) Greater activation of grounds;
- 12.) Lack of affordable or workforce housing that meets State codes and standards;
- 13.) Nighttime lighting of the site;
- 14.) How does the project add to the community's overall needs and become a useable space for the local community?

## **Overall Case Report Project Assessment:**

The PLUM Case Leaders for this project have tried to analyze and evaluate the most significant issues, possible solutions and overall community/WC benefits arising as a result of this major master planned proposal for the Warner Center Downtown District. Many of the major issues were briefly brought up at the courtesy presentation to PLUM on 6/4/20, but have not been addressed or solved in the submitted plans.

A number of the key issues with this proposal have already been touched on in this report:

- The lack of incorporation of Workforce and Affordable housing into this project which is becoming a significant issue for the CD-3, the City Planning Commission and the Planning Department.
- The overall massing of the project—its overwhelming presence on site. No true break- up of the residential buildings (especially the N/S axis).
- Lack of architectural variety or distinction in overall design of the project--especially a need to make the buildings look more iconic.
- Creation of PAOS that does not appear to be readily accessible to the Warner Center community, and which would require special access through the buildings to reach any PAOS "provided" in the podium courtyards.
- PAOS is extremely linear—no large open green spaces for uses like soccer, children's play areas, etc. Greater activation of grounds needed.
- A lack of inviting PAOS features like fountains, child play areas, etc. Overall, this project is not designed to be a family-friendly plan which excludes a critical element of the population moving to the West Valley.
- PAOS appears to be under-planted with varieties of shade producing trees.(Heat, moisture and air quality concern)
- Severe connectivity issues—especially to the north and south adjoining projects.
- No direct access for residents or PAOS users between Building #1 and Building #2..

There are a number of additional issues that have been detected by the Case Leaders, including:

- There is no convenient parking for shoppers' cars accessing the market in the North building tower.
- Drivers entering the podium parking are required to drive the entire length of the building lot to reach the L/W and residential units on the far eastern side.
- There is an absolute need to match the grade levels of adjacent properties.
- Possible alternate uses of the hotel site (in conjunction with concern that there are too many hotels planned for Warner Center.)
- There is a lack of inviting "green space(s) and plantings" along Canoga Ave. frontage.
- Solar panels for electric have not been addressed.
- ADA access and conveniences for all facilities is not indicated.
- Need to match the north driveway entry/egress with Anthem property driveway across Canoga so that traffic light maximizes functions.
- Proposed orientation of the buildings to the open space(s)—possibly set at angles instead of squared--to open space through project and reduce massing impressions.
- There is a lack of animal relief areas / gated dog runs indicated in plans
- Lack of community/project-serving services like shoe repair, dry cleaners, etc.
- Traffic issues, including a traffic semi-circle, forcing vehicles that may miss a turn into a garage, to exit onto Canoga north-bound, turn south at some point, and then turn north again to re-enter the project.
- Issues with proposed traffic signal for north exit from property. Tie-ups with exiting traffic from hotel parking and drop-offs.

- Will there be screening on the open areas of the parking structures to screen parked cars/traffic from view of neighboring projects?
- Is there sufficient parking space for visitors to the hotel (not just guests) and where will the hotel staff park? How many hotel employees are expected at maximum times?
- Where will signage for L/W spaces be located? How can people accessing those "work" units easily identify those spaces?
- What is the proposal to fulfill the public art requirement(s) for a master planned project?

A key question for PLUM Committee discussion is how does the project add to the overall needs of the Warner Center Community, and what changes can help it become more useable space for both the community and the City?

The Case Leaders for this project believe there are a great many questions that need to be answered, and potential problems that need to be solved, before the PLUM Committee renders an opinion and WHWCNC Board considers this case offers a recommendation for approval. Much will depend on the willingness of the developer to work with the community and reassess significant parts of the project design, and needs for families and individuals moving into Warner Center.

### **Questions/ Issues to be Discussed at PLUM:**

The major issues noted above are all topics and possible questions that will need to be asked, discussed and hopefully resolved at PLUM meetings.

---

### **PLUM MOTION**

**(TBD—No PLUM Motion will be proposed until after the initial project presentation.)**