

December 17, 2020

CHAIR AND PLANNING COMMISSIONERS

City of Long Beach California

RECOMMENDATION:

The Planning Commission Adopt Mitigated Negative Declaration MND07-20;

Approve Site Plan Review SPR20-015 to construct a three-story, 152,745-square-foot commercial building for self-storage;

Approve Standards Variance SV20-006 to allow a maximum building height up to 43'-11" where a maximum height of 28' is required;

Approve a Conditional Use Permit CUP20-010 to allow the operation of 1) a self-storage facility, 2) recreational vehicle storage lot; and 3) a car wash for exclusive use of patrons on-site; and

Approve Lot Merger LMG20-009 to combine four lots into a single 13.95-acre parcel to allow the construction and operation of the 3-story, 152,745-square-foot self-storage facility with accessory office space, car wash and recreation vehicle (R.V.) parking lot located at 3701 Pacific Place.

To Recommend the City Council find that the Adopted Mitigated Negative Declaration MND07-20 adequately analyzes the potential environmental impacts of the project, including the proposed Zone Change; and approve Zone Change (ZCHG20-004 from Light Industrial (IL) to the Commercial Storage (CS) Zoning District.

(District 8)

APPLICANT: Paul Brown for InSite Property Group
811 N. Catalina Avenue, Suite 1306
Redondo Beach, CA 90278
(Application No. 2005-08)

DISCUSSION

Background

The site is located at the north end of Pacific Place and Ambeco Road (which provide primary vehicular access into the site), at 3701 Pacific Place. Located directly to the north of the Interstate 405 Freeway and east of the Los Angeles River, it has a current zoning designation of Light Industrial (IL) and a General Plan PlaceType



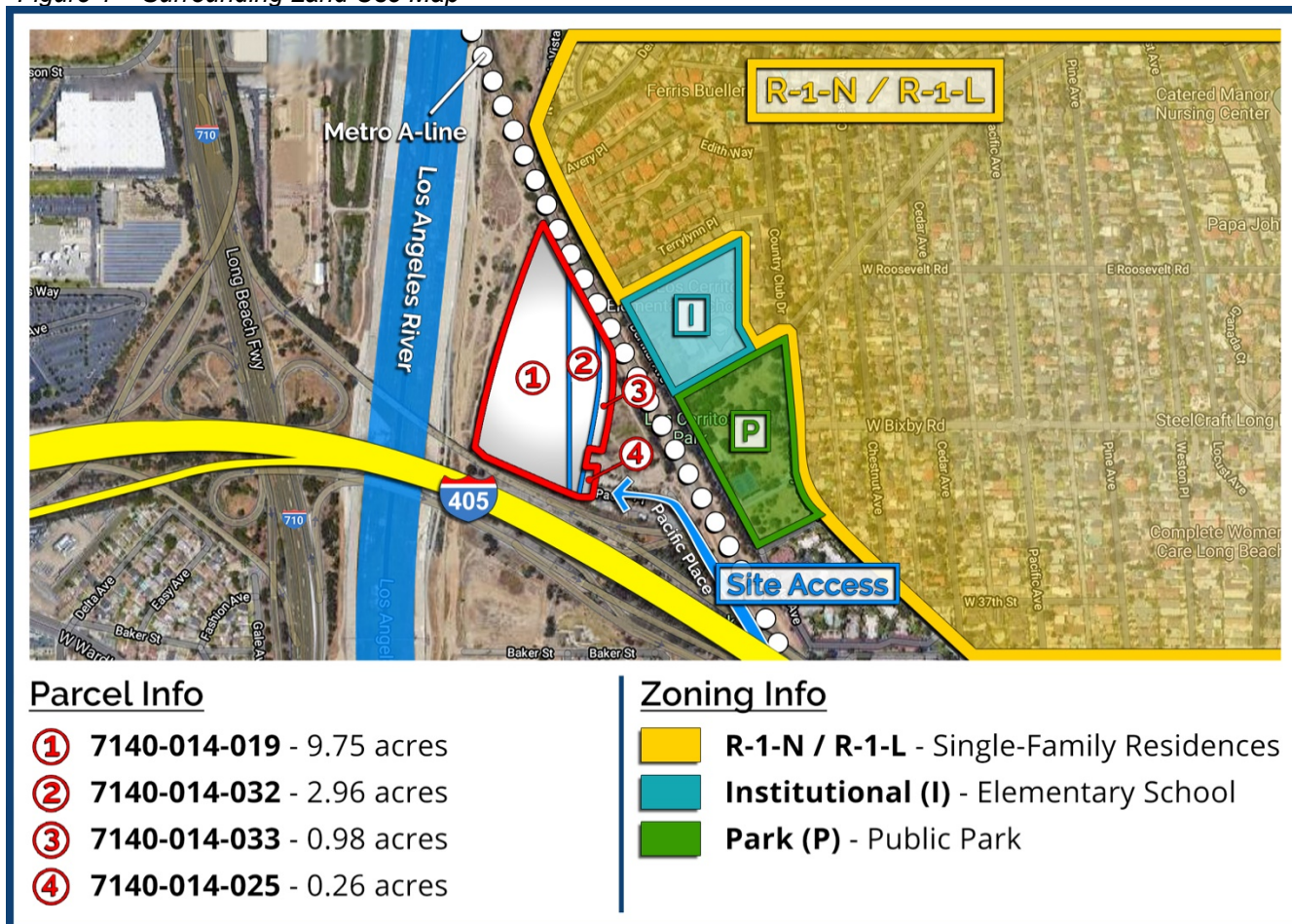
designation of Neo-Industrial (NI) (Exhibit A – Location Map). Surrounding land uses are identified in Table 1 below.

Table 1 – Adjacent Zoning and Land Uses

DIRECTION	ZONING	LAND USE
North	Public Right-of-way (PR) / R-1-N	Railway Tracks / Single-Family Residential
South	PR	Transition Road from I-405 Freeway to 710 Freeway / Vacant Land
East	PR / Institutional (I) / Single-Family Residential R-1-N and R-1-L) / Park (P)	“A” Line (formerly Blue Line) Light Rail Track, immediately beyond the tracks is an Elementary School, Public Park, and Single-Family Residences
West	PR	Vacant Land and Los Angeles River

The site is approximately 13.95 acres in size. Figure 1 below is a map of the project site delineated into the four distinct parcels, surrounding zoning classifications and vehicular access onto the site.

Figure 1 – Surrounding Land Use Map



The project site is currently a vacant dirt lot with patches of vegetation spread throughout (Exhibit B – Photos). The majority of the site has been vacant since 2007, when the golf driving range operation ceased (established in 1997). However, the golf-related retail shop and equipment rental continued to operate after the closure of the driving range (up to 2015). Since that time, only dilapidated fencing and netting, and support beams from an old canopy structure remain, creating an ideal location for nuisance activity such as illegal driving of off-road vehicles.

Prior to the site's operation as a golf driving range, uses at the site included an oil brine water treatment facility for on and offsite oil production activities and oil well drilling. The oil brine water treatment facility was established in the 1920s and activities included the pumping of oil brine to oil sumps (evaporation and treatment ponds), with the majority of the project site serving as a treatment sump. As a result of the treatment activities, water seepage into the subsurface below the sumps caused a sludge residue onsite. Operations for the treatment facility were discontinued in the 1950s and fill soil was imported to the site in the 1970s. The site's oil well drilling activities took place between the 1930s and 1980s, with thirteen oil wells being drilled (11 of which produced oil). All of the oil wells were abandoned between 1961 and 2014, in accordance with the California Geologic Energy Management Division (CalGEM) standards.

Project Proposal and Entitlements

The Applicant, InSite Property Group, is proposing to establish a self-storage facility with accessory uses as follows:

- A three-story, 152,745 square foot self-storage building consisting of 1,132 self-storage units, including approximately 6,200 square feet of third-floor office space;
- A 2,153-square-foot accessory car wash to service onsite vehicles only (the car wash will not be available to general public);
- A paved Recreational Vehicle (R.V.) parking lot consisting of 578 parking stalls (173 covered, 405 uncovered). Recreational Vehicles shall include motor homes, travel trailers, vans, truck campers, camping trailers, boats and off the road vehicles.

The project incorporates 44 standard parking stalls to satisfy self-storage and car wash requirements. Exhibit C – Plans, provides details of the project proposal. The Planning entitlements required for the establishment of a self-storage facility with accessory R.V. parking include a Site Plan Review, Zone Change, three Conditional Use Permits, Standards Variance, and a Lot Merger. In addition to city approvals, the project must also be approved by the California Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC), due to the significant levels of contamination on the project site resulting from the previous oil well drilling and treatment facility operations.

Zone Change

The project site currently has a zoning designation of Light Industrial (IL). Pursuant to Section 21.33.080 of the Long Beach Municipal Code (LBMC), the IL zoning district prohibits the operation of self-storage facilities and parking lots as a business use. Staff has determined that the Commercial Storage (CS) zoning district is the most appropriate zone to support the establishment of the self-storage facility and R.V. parking lot (Exhibit D – Zone Change Map). LBMC Section 21.32.130 requires that certain land uses including self-storage facilities, carwashes and vehicle parking lots which are used for storage obtain approval of Conditional Use Permits, which will be

discussed further. All requests for Zone Changes in the City of Long Beach are subject to Planning Commission review and further recommendation to City Council for approval.

The 2019 General Plan's Land Use Element designates the project site as the Neo-Industrial (NI) PlaceType, which encourages the location and retention of restricted light industrial activities associated with innovative start-up businesses and creative design offices. The Land Use Element also states that this PlaceType promotes low-intensity uses adjacent to low-density residential uses. Where new developments are inserted in the NI PlaceType, office and commercial uses rather than industrial and manufacturing operations should abut residential neighbors.

Among the required findings for the approval of a Zone Change is the requirement that the proposed change is consistent with the goals, objectives and provisions of the General Plan. One of the citywide goals identified in the Land Use Element is to accommodate strategic growth and change (Goal No. 3 of the Land Use Element). Under this goal, the City aims to encourage this growth within strategic locations while preserving existing neighborhoods. The Land Use Element identifies the subject site as a target for one of the eight major areas of change that are the focus of the land use concept: "Convert targeted industrial edges and districts to Neo-Industrial uses". Even though the subject site is no longer considered an industrial edge, its history of activity consists oil well drilling and oil brine water treatment facility operation.

The proposed self-storage project is not inconsistent with the intent of the NI PlaceType, which is to provide lower-intensity uses adjacent to the low-density single-family neighborhood. A lower-density single-family neighborhood is east of the property. The NI PlaceType is generally characterized by innovative start-up businesses or creative design offices. The proposed project incorporates 6,200 square feet of office space (of which a portion will house the corporate offices for the self-storage facility) within the self-storage facility which offers an opportunity for such uses. The redevelopment of the project site is somewhat limited due to its environmental constraints (including elevated levels of petroleum hydrocarbon, arsenic, lead, perchloroethylene, trichloroethylene, benzene, methane, commercial pesticide and herbicide found in the soil, and general groundwater degradation). Physical constraints play an even larger role in the redevelopment of the site, with its unique location between the river, rail corridors, the freeway and sensitive uses of a school and residential areas. This combination of environmental and physical constraints lends itself well to a storage use, which is preferred only when other more intensive development is not appropriate. A policy change by the City Council that took effect on July 1, 2018, makes it harder to park Recreational Vehicles (RVs) on City Street and increases the need and usefulness of the proposed facility.

Strategy No. 7 of the Land Use Element is to "implement the major areas of change identified in this Land Use Plan (Map LU-20)." In particular, LU Policy 7-4 looks to encourage degraded and abandoned buildings and properties to transition to more productive uses through adaptive reuse or new development. The project site as a whole has been abandoned for several years (since 2007), contributing to the presence of a blighted vacant property that has been used for illegal activity such as the driving of off-road vehicles. As a result of the project, the blighted site and its surrounding area will undergo several upgrades including landscaping, high-quality architecture, new paving, off-site roadway improvements and a use that will increase its vitality above and beyond its current status. In sum, the proposed use is deemed to be appropriate for this site, in light of the many unique factors associated with the site, including: the environmental constraints, its isolated location, the long-standing vacancy of the site, and the limited opportunities to locate the proposed uses elsewhere in the City.

Site Plan Review

Pursuant to Section 21.25.502 of the Long Beach Municipal Code (LBMC), new commercial buildings exceeding 50,000 square feet require Planning Commission approval. On June 10, 2020, the Site Plan Review Committee reviewed and recommended that the project move forward to the Planning Commission for consideration. This review and approval was based on positive SPR findings that the proposed design is considered harmonious and consistent within itself and that it represents the most compatible use, given the previous site contamination activities that have taken place (Exhibit E – Findings).

The project site is oriented along the northeast intersection of the 405 and 710 freeways and directly to the east of the Los Angeles River. The site is only accessible from its southeastern most point, via Pacific Place which dead-ends into the project site and adjacent Caltrans maintenance station to the south. Site orientation is designed to provide maximum visibility of the new building from its entrance along Pacific Place, which will be improved in accordance with the requirements of the City of Long Beach Public Works Department. The location of the building in the southeast portion of the site will provide a visual buffer between its entrance and the remainder of the property which will consist largely of a newly paved R.V. parking lot. Some of the methods used to help mitigate the visual impacts of the substantial parking lot include in-ground landscaping (where feasible, in light of the contaminated site), potted landscaping, a carport structural system encompassing the perimeter of the site, and masonry walls that incorporate “green-screening”.

While the proposed self-storage building consists of large facades that are common with industrial tilt-up buildings, the architecture effectively minimizes scale with the incorporation of a contemporary design that breaks up large expanses of blank walls. The use of building forms that offset and contrast in color and material helps to enhance the visual quality of the structure. The Applicant has incorporated high-quality materials and features that are typically not associated with self-storage facilities. High-quality materials and features include formliner concrete siding with different patterns and etched imagery, polycarbonate panels, dual-pane glazing with blackened steel storefront system, art walls with murals, and swisspearl panels (Exhibit F – Renderings). Staff believes that the proposed building architecture, landscaping, paved parking, public right-of-way improvements and general site upgrades will significantly enhance the project site which has been characterized by significant visual blight for several years.

The Urban Design Element of the General Plan also sets forth several goals aimed at improving blighted properties in Long Beach. Strategy No. 15 within the Urban Design Element correlates to the proposed project as it is meant to “consider vacant parcels as infill opportunities.” Specifically, Policy UD 15-2 aims to “promote infill projects that support the designated PlaceType and be appropriate in their use, scale, compactness of development, and design character with adjacent sites and nearby existing development.” The proposed project is considered to be an appropriate use that fits the scale of the site itself and the scale of its immediate surroundings along the two major freeways and the Los Angeles River.

Strategy No. 14 of the Urban Design Element specifies that “building types and forms should contribute to the PlaceType they are sited within and should address potential conflicts between neighboring PlaceTypes by implementing buffering measures and thoughtful design patterns.” Policy UD 14-3 sets out to “allow new development projects to respond to their particular context and experiment with alternative development patterns while complementing their PlaceTypes.” The unique architectural style of the proposed building provides relief from its facades that are 251 linear feet in length and as previously mentioned, the Applicant has included several architectural forms and features to help break up the massing of the large, continuous facades.

As the building will be located close to the site's entrance, ground-level views into the property are expected to be visually appealing. The proposed project is consistent with LU Policy 7-4, Policy UD 15-2 and Policy UD 14-3.

Standards Variance

Pursuant to Section 21.21.201 of the LBMC, Standards Variances are subject to the review and determination of the City of Long Beach Zoning Administrator. However, for the purpose of consolidating the proposed project, staff defers the Standards Variance request for Planning Commission consideration. The Applicant is requesting variance relief for the height of the proposed building. The project site is located in the IL zoning district. However, the project includes a Zone Change request to the CS (Commercial Storage) district, to allow the operation of the proposed self-storage facility and R.V. parking lot. The maximum height allowed within the CS district is 28'-0". The Applicant is proposing a building height of 43'-11" to its highest point, with the majority of the building's parapet line will be at 38'-4" in height. Portion of the building that have heights of 42'-10" and 43'-11" are to accommodate architectural features which are meant to provide an aesthetic change in the roof plane. While the CS zoning district allows a maximum building height of 28'-0", the Land Use Element of the General Plan allows a maximum building height of 40'-0". As the majority of the proposed building height is set to 38'-4" (with the exterior polycarbonate panels reaching 42'-10" and 43'-11"), it is consistent with the 40-foot height allowance set forth in the General Plan.

Standards Variance approval can be granted when the project site is physically unique compared to other sites in the same zone, and that uniqueness causes a hardship upon the property. The physical uniqueness of the project site relates to its location and levels of contamination based on previous activities. Regarding its location, the site is naturally separated from sensitive uses since it is surrounded by the two freeways, Los Angeles River and light rail tracks. Due to the heavy contamination on the site, it is limited in the type of development and active uses that are appropriate, creating a hardship. Although the project site is significant in its overall size, it is an irregular shape and has limited street frontage and access, which poses a substantial challenge for the development of the site. Based on the distinct facts of the subject project and property, hardship exists in that there are limited viable uses on the site given its environmental contamination and the restrictive height limit of the CS zoning will further impeded development of an otherwise appropriate use of the site. Moreover, no substantial adverse effects to the surrounding community is expected as a result of granting the height variance. The proposed large-scale, self-storage and RV parking uses are among the most viable uses for the site, in a location where they are anticipated to have the least amount of impact to surrounding uses. While the CS zoning district was deemed to be the most appropriate zone to ensure the site is safeguarded from inappropriate more intense, industrial uses given its adjacencies and its constraints in terms of accessibility, the height limit of the CS zone presents additional constraints to this otherwise appropriate use. Adding to the uniqueness of the site is the fact that its General Plan designation allows for a greater height (40'-0") than the CS zoning district.

Approval of a Standards Variance is not expected to cause substantial adverse effects on the community since the site is completely isolated and buffered from the neighboring school, park, and residential neighborhood. Allowing for increased building height on the subject site which is surrounded by freeways, a river and light rail tracks would not impede any significant views or create any issues related to shading and shadows. Furthermore, the project site is at a lower grade than the light rail track and adjacent neighborhood. The unique circumstances of the site, in conjunction with the operational needs of contemporary, large-scale self-storage facility such as the proposed project, merit the subject height variance request, given the improbability of a similar project being proposed on a site with similar conditions and site constraints as those of the subject site.

Conditional Use Permits

The City of Long Beach recognizes that certain types of land use, due to the nature of the use, require individual review. Such review shall determine whether the type of use proposed, or the location of that use, is compatible with surrounding uses, or, through the imposition of development conditions, can be made compatible with surrounding uses. In accordance with the regulations of Section 21.32.130 of the LBMC, Conditional Use Permits (CUPs) are required for self-storage, car wash and parking lot uses in the CS zoning district. The CUP findings include special conditions with which the proposed use and its operations must comply, which include the following standards:

- Use permitted only if no other reasonable alternative exists;
- Use and design shall not disrupt, impede or negatively affect pedestrian or traffic circulation;
- Use and design shall not disrupt or impede the concentration of high intensity activities;
- Attractive landscape buffering and screening shall be provided for parking lots and car wash uses;
- Use shall not be permitted in existing business or office park;
- Use permitted only if the site is impractical for industrial development due to conditions such as residential proximity;
- Storage spaces shall not be used for manufacturing, retail, offices or human habitation;
- Prefabricated shipping containers not allowed;
- Building/roof design to be compatible with surrounding development. Should include design elements that break monotonous facades;
- Hours of operation that limit noise levels to certain times; and
- Provision of security plan.

Exhibit E – Findings, provides a detailed analysis of how each finding can be made to support the CUPs. CUPs can be approved when the proposed uses will not be detrimental to the surrounding community. The site's location in terms of access, contamination and surrounding land uses (freeways, the river, metro light rail tracks) render it an auto-oriented property that prevents pedestrian compatibility by default. Self-storage facilities, R.V. parking lots and car washes are all characterized by significant reliance on vehicles for their operations. Although the natural features of the project site preclude it from being a pedestrian-compatible development, the high-quality architecture of the proposed building minimizes scale and massing, to the extent feasible.

Controlled access to the site will be limited to customers of the self-storage facility or R.V. parking lot. The proposed 2,153-square-foot car wash will be limited only to those patrons who utilize the primary uses. As conditioned, limits will be placed on hours of operation, from 7:00 a.m. – 7:00 p.m., Monday through Friday and 9:00 a.m. -5:00 p.m., Saturday, Sunday and Holidays. Conditions of Approval will also be incorporated to reflect specific requirements related to self-storage facilities and parking lots as a business use (Exhibit G – Conditions of Approval). Among the conditions are the requirement that the Applicant adhere to the security plan that has been submitted to staff (Exhibit H – Security Plan). The security plan covers operational practices related to daily walkthroughs and monitoring, tenant communication, access hours, locking systems, collaboration with law enforcement if needed, and eviction protocol.

Lot Merger

As shown in Figure 1 on page 2, The project site is split into four parcels. The Applicant proposes to consolidate the parcels into a single property for development. The consolidation of the individual parcels will result in a site

area of approximately 608,000 square feet, well over the minimum lot size required by the CS zoning district, 10,000 square feet. Positive findings for a Lot Merger can be made for the project site and are also included in Exhibit E - Findings. Consolidation of the four existing parcels into one lot will preclude the sale of individual parcels, an action that could result in zoning compliance issues in the future (such as separating the use from its required parking) and otherwise ensure compliance with all applicable building and zoning code provisions, including those requirements that a building be constructed on a single lot.

Relationship to the Los Angeles River Master Plan

The proposed project properties are partially located within the area that is included in the Los Angeles River Master Plan (LARMP) area. This Master Plan is currently in the process of being updated, led by the Los Angeles County Public Works Department. According to the LARMP this area adjacent to the river, which identifies the subject site as being located within an area designated as a 'Planned Major Project'; however, the properties are privately owned, and the property owner has proposed a different use of the property. Even though the proposed uses, the self-storage building and RV Storage area, comprise a significant portion of the site, the applicant has indicated they are willing to work with the entity responsible for developing this particular area of LARMP. That commitment includes development and on-going maintenance of a section of the Native Plant Preserve located within the property boundaries at the northwest corner of the site, and development and on-going maintenance of an accessway to the larger LARMP site, proposed to be located in the southwestern corner of the property (Exhibit I - Conceptual Drawings for the Los Angeles River Master Plan Area). The project has been conditioned to work with relevant public agencies to develop and maintain this river connection.

PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE

A total of 145 Public Hearing Notices were distributed on November 23, 2020, in accordance with the requirements of Chapter 21.21 of the Long Beach Municipal Code. At the time of writing this report, no letters in opposition of the project have been received.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

The Applicant self-reported that he had engaged with various members of the surrounding community throughout the development of this project. A formal community-wide virtual meeting, set up by the Applicant, was held on November 19, 2020. Staff was in attendance as a member of the audience. The Applicant and members of the project team, specifically the geologists, had PowerPoint presentations that described the overall project and different aspects of the project that were of concern to the neighbors including dust, preservation of the site as open space, and access to the Los Angeles River. Participating on the call was approximately 40 individuals. A key takeaway from the call was that the Applicant will provide access through the project to the adjacent Los Angeles River open space development (as conditioned and shown in submitted plans), per the Los Angeles River Master Plan. To address those with concerns specific to the site cleanup, the Applicant indicated a second virtual meeting would be held on December 2, 2020 after the staff report was completed.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

In accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the CEQA Guidelines, a Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) was prepared for the proposed project (Exhibit J - Mitigated Negative Declaration

07-20 (Exhibit K – MND Appendices List). The IS/MND provided mitigation measures addressing Air Quality, Biological Resources, Cultural Resources, Geology and Soils, Hazards and Hazardous Materials, Noise, and Tribal Cultural Resources. The Notice of Availability (NOA) for the MND was distributed to public agencies and interested individuals and was made available for review and comment via a link to the City’s website. IS/MND finds that, by implementing identified mitigation measures, the project will not result in significant effects to the environment. The comment period for the project met the minimum of 30-days that spanned October 19, 2020 to November 16, 2020.

The NOA was filed with the Los Angeles County Clerk on October 23, 2020¹ and filed with the State Clearinghouse on October 16, 2020. At the time the staff report was written, approximately 100 public comment letters were received from unique individuals on the IS/MND (Exhibit L - MND Comment Letters) of the comment letters received the trending topics are included in the following table.

Table 2 – Public Comment Topical Summary

TOPICAL CONCERNS FROM PUBLIC COMMENTS		
Toxic Dust/Contaminants	Soil Surcharge	Not Enough Open Space
Lost Opportunity for Open Space	Air Quality	Consistency with LA River Master Plan/Riverlink/Riparian Zone
Truck Idling	Truck Traffic	Dept. of Toxic Substances Review of Site.
Cultural/Tribal Resources	Increased Weight on Toxic Site	Heat Trap
City’s Vehicle Miles Travel analysis	Equestrian Impacts	Environmental Justice/ Disadvantaged Community (CalEnviroScreen)
Decline in property values	Property rezoned without notice.	

Editorial changes were made after the conclusion of the IS/MND public review period, these edits and response to comments are noted in the Memorandum (Exhibit M – Responses to MND Comments and Edits). The MND determined that with mitigation measures in place, the proposed project would not result in any significant adverse environmental impact. The preparation and public availability of this IS/MND has been carried out in compliance with the provisions of CEQA and the CEQA Guidelines. Staff therefore recommends the Planning Commission make a recommendation that the City Council adopt IS/MND07-20.

Conclusion

¹ Per Executive Order N-80-20 filing of the NOA at the Los Angeles County Clerk’s Office has been suspended and is not required at this time.

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The most recent active use on the subject property was a golf driving range, which ended operations in 2007. While subsequent golf-related uses (retail and equipment rentals) continued on the site until 2015, they occupied a very small percentage of the property. The vacancy of the site has contributed to blight and dilapidation and has resulted in nuisance activity and homelessness therein. Because of level of contamination on the site, viable options for appropriate uses are minimal. The applicant's proposal to establish a self-storage facility with accessory office space, R.V. parking and a car wash is an appropriate use, considering the site's environmental issues, as well as its limited access and isolated location in relation to surrounding land uses. The proposed project includes high-quality architecture and materials, new paving, new landscaping and several offsite improvements including roadway upgrades that will help remove blight from the community. Staff recommends that the Planning Commission approve the project, subject to Conditions of Approval.

Respectfully submitted,



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DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

OO:CK:PAD:AO:AH:CJ

Attachments:

- Exhibit A - Vicinity Map
- Exhibit B - Photos
- Exhibit C - Plans
- Exhibit D - Zone Change Map
- Exhibit E - Findings
- Exhibit F - Renderings
- Exhibit G - Conditions of Approval
- Exhibit H - Security Plan
- Exhibit I - Conceptual Drawings for the Los Angeles River Master Plan Area
- Exhibit J - Mitigated Negative Declaration 07-20
- Exhibit K - MND Appendices List
- Exhibit L - MND Comment Letters
- Exhibit M - Response to MND Comments and Edits