



CITY OF LONG BEACH

THE CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

CH-2

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August 15, 2006

HONORABLE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL
City of Long Beach
California

RECOMMENDATION:

Receive the supporting documentation into the record, conclude the public hearing, overrule the appeal, and sustain the decision of the City Planning Commission to approve a Conditional Use Permit to establishment a church at 1925 Pacific Avenue, a Standards Variance for a reduced number of parking spaces and off-site parking without a deed restriction, and an Administrative Use Permit for off-site joint use parking at 1951 Pacific Avenue (Case No. 0508-23). (District 6)

DISCUSSION

The applicant, Dr. Lawrence A. Lasisi, for Springs of Hope Christian Ministries, is requesting approval of a Conditional Use Permit, Administrative Use Permit and Standards Variance to legalize an existing storefront church at 1925 Pacific Avenue. The church has been in operation at this location since August 2005 without benefit of City approvals. An application was submitted to the Planning Department on August 22, 2005. The application was completed in February and a Planning Commission hearing date was scheduled for March 2, 2006 (see Planning Commission staff report and minutes, Attachment 1). At the first Planning Commission hearing nine individuals spoke in opposition to the project, and six letters from neighborhood groups and approximately forty letters from residents were received in opposition to the project. Two letters and two petitions submitted by the church were received in support of the project (Attachment 2). After a lengthy discussion regarding the operation of the church, parking, and appearance of the church, the Planning Commission voted to continue the case to April 6, 2006, in order to allow the pastor additional time to obtain a deed restriction for the off-site parking located at 1951 Pacific Avenue.

On April 6, 2006, the Planning Commission conducted a second public hearing. At this hearing the Commission considered a second continuance and requested staff to investigate other unpermitted churches in the area and report back to the Commission. Three people spoke in opposition to the continuance request and one letter was received in opposition to the request. The applicant was unable to obtain a deed restriction for the off-site parking lot and requested a continuance, which was granted to May 18, 2006 (see Planning Commission staff report and minutes, Attachment 3).

On May 18, 2006, the City Planning Commission conducted a third public hearing for this request (see Planning Commission staff report and minutes, Attachment 4). Staff reported back to the Commission that seven other churches were operating on Pacific Avenue between Pacific Coast Highway and Willow Street: two with a Conditional Use Permit and five without any City approvals. Each of the churches operating with a Conditional Use Permit received a Notice of Violation letter for operating in violation of the conditions of approval. These letters were mailed in April and May of 2006. Letters of violation were also mailed to the five other churches operating without a Conditional Use Permit. These letters were mailed between August 2005 and April 2006.

Four individuals spoke against the project. Issues raised at this hearing were parking, code enforcement for the other nonconforming churches, and the appearance of the church. After additional testimony the Planning Commission voted to approve the request, subject to conditions of approval. Additional conditions were added to create and maintain a bookstore in the front of the church in perpetuity with the operation of the church, provide floor to ceiling partition walls in the sanctuary area, and require notification to the City if the off-site parking lease expires or the property is sold. Commissioner Stuhlbarg made a motion to approve, seconded by Commissioner Winn. The motion passed 4-1 with Commissioner Gentile voting in opposition. Commissioners Greenberg and Rouse were absent. Three appeals were filed (Attachment 5).

The subject site is a 16,300 square foot lot with a one-story 5,161 square foot commercial building constructed in 1945 with 17 on-site parking spaces. The off-site parking is located approximately 100 feet to the north at 1951 Pacific Avenue. This site is improved with a one-story, 2,000 square foot medical office and open parking lot to the rear with 16 parking spaces. The parking lot is accessed off the alley.

The church has been in operation for the past year. If approved, the conditions of approval require a bookstore with storefront windows to be established in the front portion of the building facing Pacific Avenue to create an active pedestrian use within 6 months of the date of final action. Other exterior improvements include removal of exterior security bars, new paint, new fencing, landscaping, removal of nonconforming signage, parking lot stripping, and a limited assembly area.

The subject site is also located in the Central Redevelopment Project Area and in the Pacific Avenue Neighborhood Center of the Central Long Beach Strategic Guide for Development. The long-term goals of this area are to focus on neighborhood related and pedestrian-oriented uses and upgrade the appearance of the corridors with streetscape and facade improvements.

This report was reviewed by Assistant City Attorney Michael J. Mais on July 28, 2006.

TIMING CONSIDERATIONS

The Long Beach Municipal Code requires that an appeal of the Planning Commission's decision be heard within 60 days of filing of the appeal or by July 28, 2006. Due to the election of new councilmembers and cancellations of meetings during the month of July, the meeting date has exceeded the 60-day time period.

A 10-day public notice of the hearing is required.

FISCAL IMPACT

None.

SUGGESTED ACTION:

Approve recommendation.

Respectfully submitted,

MATTHEW JENKINS, CHAIR
CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

BY: 

SUZANNE M. FRICK
DIRECTOR OF PLANNING AND BUILDING

SF:GC:LF

Attachments:

- 1) Planning Commission staff report and minutes dated March 2, 2005
- 2) Letters in support/opposition
- 3) Planning Commission staff report and minutes dated April 6, 2006
- 4) Planning Commission staff report and minutes dated May 18, 2006.
- 5) Appeal forms