

Alex Medina

From: Seth Freeman <sfree6109@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, August 2, 2023 1:16 PM
To: PlanningCommissioners
Subject: Public Comments RE: Town Centre Restaurant developments
Attachments: LBC_Planning_Recommendations_Town_Centre.pdf

-EXTERNAL-

Planning commission,

I am unable to attend this week's commission meeting, but have comments I would like to submit regarding the proposed construction at Town Centre. Please find my comments attached.

If any of the commission members would like to hear more from me on this matter, I can be reached at this email address and would be more than happy to speak with them.

Thank you,

Seth Freeman

Seth Freeman
Resident, Long Beach CA

August 2, 2023

Planning Commission
City of Long Beach, CA

Dear Planning Commissioners,

I am writing to express my strong disapproval of the proposed development of two fast-food drive-thru's at Long Beach Town Centre which are marked for approval at this week's planning meeting.

Land is one of the most scarce and valuable resources the City has. Responsible utilization of this resource is paramount to ensuring an economically and environmentally sustainable future for Long Beach. The City's long-term planning documents discuss this at length and set out goals for shifting land use away from car-dependent sprawl and towards higher density and more efficient uses. In nearly every way, the proposed fast food developments move the City away from these goals and would be a tragic waste of the City's land resources.

If Long Beach wants to meet the climate goals set forth in its Climate Action Plan, the shift away from car-dependency must occur quickly. This can be accomplished by building dense, mixed-use communities where alternative modes of transit are safe and efficient. However, the proposed establishments' business models rely almost exclusively on car traffic. This results in an overwhelming majority of the land area being paved over for parking and vehicle queuing, most of which goes unused nearly all of the time. This design means that the only way to access the restaurants is via car, even for someone who would prefer to use transit, bike, or walk. This will increase car traffic, slow the adoption of other transit modes, and take the City in the opposite direction of its climate goals.

The City's long term planning guidance also includes goals of creating places that are culturally significant or provide important services to residents. The City already has at least half a dozen El Pollo Loco locations, and at least one other Raising Cane's. Neither of these restaurants hold any cultural value for Long Beach and hundreds of identical establishments can be found all over the state and country. Creating a mostly empty parking lot with two unhealthy chain restaurants will detract from Long Beach's character and make it less distinguishable from other communities around the country.

Finally and arguably most important to the City and residents is the economic impact that these establishments will have. From residents' perspective, there is no clear economic incentive for this construction, since each establishment will only create a small number of part-time, low-wage jobs with no opportunities for vertical mobility and which provide few benefits like healthcare or retirement to employees. These employees will find it nearly impossible to make a reasonable living at

these restaurants, especially given the City's current housing crisis. Only the franchise owners and the franchises themselves stand to reap any real economic benefits from this project.

In addition to poor economic returns for residents, this proposal is also likely to be a bad decision for the City's financial position. As mentioned above, the business model of these restaurants relies exclusively on heavy automobile traffic. This traffic is only enabled by the taxpayer-funded road infrastructure which is very costly to maintain and is well known as the least efficient mode of transportation in modern cities. The additional car traffic demand that will be induced by these business will create a larger road maintenance burden to be paid by the city. Because the proposed structures are small and single use with low density, the assessed values of the property throughout it's lifespan will be low relative to the real value of the land. This, coupled with the small revenue streams created by the businesses means that it is unlikely that tax revenues from these developments will be sufficient to offset the induced costs to the taxpayer ¹. In effect, this results in a subsidy given to the fast-food business owners and car drivers (who are typically wealthier) from zones in the city where density is high enough to result in net positive tax revenues (places where lower income families who cannot afford to drive tend to live). This is not only bad for the city's books, it is antithetical to the City's goal of creating an equitable economic future for residents.

I strongly urge the commission to deny approval of this development altogether and to conduct a full cost-benefit analysis of the induced road infrastructure cost vs projected lifetime tax revenues for each of these business before proceeding any further.

I also recommend that the Planning Commission take seriously the City's long-term climate and development goals, and instead grant approval to projects which will actually contribute to achieving these goals, rather than turning more of our city's land into useless asphalt.

Thank you,

Seth Freeman

¹The nonprofit organization Strong Towns has done analysis of many similar developments in cities around the country and has found that in almost every situation, low-intensity development like this results in a net negative outcomes for city finances and solvency. They have a several informative resources that can be found at <https://www.strongtowns.org>