

**MINUTES OF A REGULAR MEETING OF
THE TORRANCE PLANNING COMMISSION**

1. CALL TO ORDER

The Torrance Planning Commission convened in a regular session at 7:05 p.m. on Wednesday, February 4, 2004, in City Council Chambers at Torrance City Hall.

2. SALUTE TO THE FLAG

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Commissioner LaBouff.

3. ROLL CALL

Present: Commissioners Botello, Horwich, LaBouff, Muratsuchi, Uchima and Chairperson Drevno.

Absent: Commissioner Fauk. (excused)

Also Present: Planning Manager Bihn, Planning Associate Kim, and Assistant City Attorney Pohl.

4. POSTING OF THE AGENDA

MOTION: Commissioner Horwich, seconded by Commissioner Muratsuchi, moved to accept and file the report of the secretary on the posting of the agenda for this meeting; voice vote reflected unanimous approval.

5. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

None.

6. REQUESTS FOR POSTPONEMENTS

None.

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Chairperson Drevno explained the policies and procedures of the Planning Commission, including the right to appeal decisions to the City Council.

7. CONTINUED HEARINGS

None.

8. WAIVERS

None.

9. FORMAL HEARINGS

9A. ZON04-00001: CITY OF TORRANCE

Planning Commission consideration for approval of a Zone Change from A-1 (Light Agricultural District) to R-1 (Single-Family Residential District) on 121 single-family properties located in the vicinity of Ainsworth Avenue, 169th Street, 168th Street, Cranbrook Avenue, 171st Street, Kornblum Avenue and Fonthill Avenue in North Torrance.

Recommendation

Approval.

Planning Associate Kim introduced the request.

Planning Manager Bihn reported that the subject area was subdivided many years ago when single-family residential property was zoned A-1; that all the properties are currently developed with single-family residences; and that the proposed Zone Change would bring the zoning into conformance with existing uses.

MOTION: Commissioner Muratsuchi, seconded by Commissioner Uchima, moved to close the public hearing; voice vote reflected unanimous approval.

MOTION: Commissioner Botello moved to recommend approval of ZON04-00001. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Uchima and passed by unanimous roll call vote (absent Commissioner Faulk).

9B. EAS03-00013, GPA03-00010: CITY OF TORRANCE

Planning Commission consideration for approval of a General Plan Amendment from Industrial Business Park to Medium Density Residential in order to allow for future residential development on four parcels with the following addresses: 2357, 2349, 2341, 2303, 2295, 2275, 2255 Jefferson Street. This request does not include any rezoning, demolition or construction.

Recommendation

Approval.

Planning Associate Kim introduced the request and noted supplemental material available at the meeting consisting of correspondence received after the agenda item was prepared.

Noting that a letter from legal counsel for Martin Brass Foundry, 2341 Jefferson Street, indicates that 75 employees could lose their jobs should a residential development be built to the east of the business, Commissioner Botello questioned why the loss of jobs was not considered as part of the assessment of the environmental impact.

Planning Manager Bihn noted that the current General Plan Designation for the foundry property (Industrial Business Park) does not conform to its current usage; that the proposed General Plan Amendment (GPA) does not affect the operation of existing businesses; and that no Zone Change was proposed at this time for any of the subject properties. He explained that when a property redevelops, the Zone Change and other entitlements would come before the Commission at which time another assessment of the environmental impact would occur. He stated that the General Plan is a forward looking document and meant to indicate where the City is headed in the future; that the subject area is under transition and moving away from heavy manufacturing toward residential development; and that staff wanted to highlight this trend by changing the General Plan Designation.

In response to Commissioner Botello's inquiry, Planning Manager Bihn confirmed that the foundry could continue to operate even if there was a change of ownership, but noted that if the new owners wanted to make major changes, they would have to go through the same Conditional Use Permit process that any other new business would have to go through.

Referring to the letter from Martin Brass Foundry's legal counsel, Commissioner Botello asked about the contention that residential development to the east would be incompatible with the foundry's operation.

Planning Manager Bihn explained that an application for a residential development to the east of the foundry has been received; that compatibility with adjacent uses would be one of the issues to be considered when that project is brought forward; and that it would be up to the Commission to determine whether the mitigation measures proposed would provide adequate protection for existing businesses as well as new residents. He noted that there is always a degree of incompatibility when an area is in transition.

Commissioner Botello related his understanding that Martin Brass Foundry operates after normal business hours in order to take advantage of lower electricity rates. Planning Manager Bihn stated that there was nothing to prevent the foundry from operating after hours now or in the future and that this was something to be considered when evaluating the mitigations for the proposed residential project.

Commissioner Muratsuchi questioned why staff was pursuing a General Plan Amendment at this time, noting that during his year and a half on the Commission, this was the first time a General Plan Amendment was proposed without an accompanying project.

Conceding that there was no urgency, Planning Manager Bihn explained that an update of the General Plan will be initiated later this year and the change could have been addressed at that time, but staff elected to bring it forward at this meeting because they felt this area deserved a more focused debate.

Christopher Wilson, Christopher Wilson & Associates, 21535 Hawthorne Boulevard, Suite 260, legal counsel for Martin Brass Foundry, Inc., voiced objections to the proposed General Plan Amendment for his client's property. He stated that there are environmental issues that need to be explored prior to the adoption of a Negative Declaration; that he did not believe residents would ever be happy living next to the

foundry; and that their dissatisfaction was likely to spawn litigation. He maintained that it would be best to wait and see how the already approved residential project to the west and north of the foundry fares before changing the General Plan. He noted that the foundry employs a considerable number of people and has been in operation in Torrance for over 40 years. He contended that the City should try to preserve the business instead of forcing it out for somewhat speculative housing.

Tom Paradise, Standard Pacific Homes and Cypress Land Company, 3030 Old Ranch Parkway, #450, Seal Beach, stated that he was stunned to learn the foundry was opposing the General Plan Amendment for these properties. He reported that he worked with Martin Brass Foundry to devise appropriate mitigation measures for the residential project to the west and to the north; that the foundry went on record in support of the project; and that City staff, the Commission, and the City Council agreed that the measures proposed would be effective in mitigating the impact and subsequently approved the project. He maintained that nobody was trying to put the foundry out of business, noting that the project was specifically designed to be compatible with the business and that a very explicit disclosure was crafted to ensure that present and future homebuyers would be aware of adjacent industrial operations and their right to continue to operate.

Mr. Paradise stated that the General Plan is a long-range policy statement and that it is important for businesses contemplating long-term leases to be aware of the City's plans for the future. He noted that the General Plan Amendment itself would not create any environmental impact as existing businesses will continue to operate and explained that it is impossible to assess the potential impact of a residential development without knowing what the homes will look like and where they will be located. He reported that a detailed environmental assessment would be done at the time a specific proposal is brought forward and the Commission would then decide whether the proposed mitigations were adequate.

Roland Martin, representing Martin Brass Foundry, stated that while he felt he could live with residential development to the west and the north, he believed allowing a residential use to the east would create problems because the business would then be an island in the middle of residential developments. He explained that the operation is forced to work nights during the summer in order to save on electricity costs.

Commissioner Muratsuchi stated that he was one of two Commissioners who voted against the residential project next to the foundry because he was concerned about the loss of industrial property, as well as the increase in traffic and the effect on the quality of life in Torrance, and that he would continue to oppose this trend. Indicating that he would not support the proposed GPA, he suggested that the matter could be revisited should any specific proposal be brought forward.

Commissioner Horwich commented on the difficulty of trying to determine the environmental impact of a residential project at this location without having any details or a specific proposal. He explained that he voted in favor of the residential project to the west because he was satisfied that the mitigation measures proposed were appropriate and no harmful environmental impact would result, however, he did not have enough information to make such a judgment in this case and was inclined to abstain from voting on the proposed GPA.

Commissioner Botello stated that he thought the GPA was a little premature because there is a pending project and that he was reluctant to adopt a Negative Declaration when additional mitigation measures will be required later on.

Planning Manager Bihn advised there was nothing to preclude the addition of mitigation measures when a project comes forward; noted that it was unlikely that staff would recommend a GPA for parcels to the east without also proposing one for the foundry; and reiterated the General Plan's importance as a means of signaling the City's plans for future development.

Commissioner LaBouff stated that he was opposed to the GPA because of concerns about the people who have established businesses in this area. He voiced his opinion that when the City invites people to do business in Torrance, they should be afforded some kind of guarantee they can rely on in the future.

Commissioner Botello echoed concerns about the impact on existing businesses and stated that he believed the environmental study was lacking key information with regard to traffic and the loss of jobs.

Planning Manager Bihn emphasized that it was not the City's intention to force a business out of Torrance and that the foundry could continue to operate until its owners decide it is to their advantage to close it down or move. He commented on the City's long history of being business-friendly.

MOTION: Commissioner Muratsuchi moved to continue this item indefinitely. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Horwich and passed by unanimous roll call vote (absent Commissioner Faulk).

Commissioner Muratsuchi requested that detailed information regarding the impact on schools be provided the next time a housing project of significant size is brought forward.

Commissioner Botello stated that should a residential project at this location be brought forward, he believed the loss of jobs should be included in the analysis, as well as the impact on weekend traffic.

9C. LUS03-00003: CITY OF TORRANCE

Planning Commission consideration for approval of an Ordinance to amend portions of the Torrance Municipal Code so that multiple-family units that are required to provide three parking spaces may have one of the spaces in tandem.

Recommendation

Approval.

Planning Associate Kim introduced the request.

Planning Manager Bihn reported that the Code currently allows tandem parking for the third parking space with approval of a Variance, but the application costs \$3,000 and requires the approval of the City Council. He advised that staff reviewed the

Variances requested for this purpose over the last ten years; that all of the requests were approved; and that this record indicates that the City is supportive of tandem parking for the required third space, therefore, staff was recommending that the Code be amended. He noted that having a parking space in a driveway in front of a garage is in effect tandem parking.

Indicating that he is a strong proponent of the City's parking requirements, Commissioner Horwich stated that he could not recall ever denying a request for tandem parking and believed that it was logical to eliminate the need for a Variance.

Commissioner Botello questioned whether staff investigated projects that have tandem parking to find out if it has created any problems, i.e. parking spaces used for storage resulting in overflow parking on nearby streets.

Planning Manager Bihn advised that while staff did not inspect the projects, they did look to see if complaints about parking were greater for developments with tandem parking and that was not the case. He noted that it was not uncommon for garages of single-family residences to be used for storage and that it can happen no matter how many parking spaces are required.

Commissioner Muratsuchi voiced his preference to retain the requirement for a Variance so that the Commission could continue to evaluate projects on a case-by-case basis to ensure that adequate parking is provided. He stated that while there may not be conclusive evidence that tandem parking causes cars to spill out onto the street, it encourages it more than it discourages it.

In response to Commissioner Horwich's inquiry, Planning Manager Bihn stated that he could not recall any project where tandem parking was the only issue to be considered by the Commission.

Planning Manager Bihn commented on the practical difficulty of designing a town home with three side-by-side parking spaces.

Voicing support for the staff recommendation, Commissioner Uchima noted that requiring three side-by-side parking spaces could increase the cost of a three-bedroom condominium making it less affordable.

In response to Commissioner Botello's inquiry, Planning Manager Bihn stated that he could envision tandem spaces in a common garage in some cases, noting that this type of parking is not used for storage. He pointed out that whenever a project is brought forward, the Commission has the authority to require the parking layout to be revised if it is not satisfactory.

MOTION: Commissioner Uchima, seconded by Commissioner Muratsuchi, moved to close the public hearing; voice vote reflected unanimous approval.

MOTION: Commissioner Uchima moved to recommend that the City Council approve an Ordinance to amend portions of the Torrance Municipal Code to allow tandem parking for the third required parking space for multi-family units. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Horwich and passed by unanimous roll call vote (absent Commissioner Faulk).

Commissioner Muratsuchi indicated that he was swayed by Commissioner Uchima's comments about the affordability aspect.

10. RESOLUTIONS

None.

11. PUBLIC WORKSHOP ITEMS

None.

12. MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS

None.

13. REVIEW OF CITY COUNCIL ACTION ON PLANNING MATTERS

Planning Manager Bihn reviewed recent City Council action on Planning matters, noting that the Jack-in-the-Box restaurant on Redondo Beach Boulevard was approved with a condition requiring additional buffering for residential uses to the east.

14. LIST OF TENTATIVE PLANNING COMMISSION CASES

Planning Manager Bihn reviewed the agenda for the Planning Commission meeting of February 18, 2004.

15. ORAL COMMUNICATIONS

15A. Commissioner Botello expressed concerns that Calle Mayor was turning into a used car lot.

Planning Manager Bihn advised that this problem seems to move from location to location and that there was not a lot that could be done when it involves legally parked vehicles on public streets.

15B. Commissioner Muratsuchi commented on a recent article in the *Los Angeles Times* in which California's population was projected to double within our children's lifetime.

15C. Commissioner Horwich expressed support for the City's stringent parking requirements.

15D. In response to Commissioner Uchima's inquiry, Planning Manager Bihn updated the Commission on plans to renovate Del Amo Fashion Center.

16. ADJOURNMENT

At 8:52 p.m., the meeting was adjourned to Wednesday, February 18, 2004, at 7:00 p.m.

Approved as Written March 3, 2004 s/ Sue Herbers, City Clerk
