

INDEX
TORRANCE PLANNING COMMISSION – FEBRUARY 18, 2015

<u>SUBJECT</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
<u>OPENING CEREMONIES</u>	
1. Call to Order	1
2. Flag Salute	1
3. Roll Call/Motions for Excused Absence	1
4. Posting of the Agenda	1
5. Approval of Minutes	1
6. Requests for Postponement	1
7. <u>ORAL COMMUNICATIONS #1</u>	1
8. <u>TIME EXTENSIONS</u>	1
9. <u>SIGN HEARINGS</u>	1
10. <u>CONTINUED HEARINGS</u>	
10A. CUP14-00026: Jose Ponce (North Torrance Plaza, LLC)	2-6
11. <u>WAIVERS</u>	6
12. <u>FORMAL HEARINGS</u>	
12A. MOD14-00013: South Bay Lexus (City of Torrance)	6
13. <u>RESOLUTIONS</u>	6
14. <u>PUBLIC WORKSHOP ITEMS</u>	6
15. <u>MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS</u>	
15A. Community Development Director Weekly Summary Reports	6
15B. Draft 2014 Planning Commission Annual Report	6-7
16. <u>CITY COUNCIL ACTION ON PLANNING MATTERS</u>	7
17. <u>LIST OF TENTATIVE PLANNING COMMISSION CASES</u>	7
18. <u>ORAL COMMUNICATIONS #2</u>	7-8
19. <u>ADJOURNMENT</u>	8

At 8:20 p.m., the meeting was adjourned to Wednesday, March 4, 2015 at 7:00 p.m.

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

1. CALL TO ORDER

The Torrance Planning Commission convened in a regular session at 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday, February 18, 2015 in City Council Chambers at Torrance City Hall.

2. SALUTE TO THE FLAG

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Commissioner Herring.

3. ROLL CALL/ MOTIONS FOR EXCUSED ABSENCE

Present: Commissioners D'anjou, Gibson, Herring, Skoll, Tsao, Watson and Chairperson Polcari.

Absent: None.

Also Present: Planning Manager Lodan, Planning Associate Martinez, Associate Civil Engineer Symons, Plans Examiner Noh and Assistant City Attorney Sullivan.

4. POSTING OF THE AGENDA

Planning Manager Lodan reported that the agenda was posted on the Public Notice Board at 3031 Torrance Boulevard on Friday, February 13, 2015.

5. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOTION: Commissioner Tsao moved for the approval of the January 21, 2015 Planning Commission minutes as written. The motion was seconded by Commissioner D'anjou and passed by unanimous roll call vote, with Commissioner Herring abstaining.

6. REQUESTS FOR POSTPONEMENTS

Planning Manager Lodan relayed the applicant's request to continue Agenda Item 12A, MOD14-00013: South Bay Lexus (City of Torrance), indefinitely.

MOTION: Commissioner D'anjou moved to continue Agenda Item 12A indefinitely. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Herring and passed by unanimous roll call vote.

7. ORAL COMMUNICATIONS #1 – None.

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

8. TIME EXTENSIONS – None.

9. SIGN HEARINGS – None.

10. CONTINUED HEARINGS

10A. CUP14-00026: JOSE PONCE (NORTH TORRANCE PLAZA, LLC)

Planning Commission consideration for approval of a Conditional Use Permit to allow the operation of a small collection recycling facility within the western parking area of the existing shopping center on property located in the C-2 Zone at 4848 190th Street. This project is Categorically Exempt for CEQA per Guidelines Section 15301 – Existing Facilities.

Recommendation: Approval.

Planning Associate Martinez introduced the request.

Chairperson Polcari, Commissioner Tsao and Commissioner Herring disclosed that they drove by site, but did not speak with anyone about the project. Commissioner Gibson disclosed that she visited the site several times. Commissioner Watson disclosed that she routinely drives by the site and frequents the Starbucks in this shopping center.

Jose Ponce, applicant, briefly described the proposed recycling facility and reviewed his business plan, noting that this is a family-run business committed to providing friendly and respectful service to Torrance residents. He stated that the facility will be open Monday through Sunday from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and it will be staffed by three attendants – one to direct traffic and keep the area clean, one to weigh and store material, and one to enter the weight on the computer and pay the customer. He reported that the State of California requires every convenience zone to have a recycling facility and only 7 of 23 convenience zones in Torrance currently have one and this is a location that needs to be covered. He disputed claims that the recycling center would increase traffic, attract vagrants and lead to more burglaries in the area, explaining that the majority of customers will be nearby residents, who drop off recyclables when visiting other stores in this shopping center. With regard to concerns about noise, he reported that noise will be minimal since about 80% of the business involves recycling plastic bottles and additionally, the shopping center has agreed to construct a 200-foot long, 8-foot high block wall to screen the facility and buffer noise. He maintained that there are no odors associated with the recycling center because only clean, dry materials are accepted. He promised to work closely with neighbors to address any concerns.

Chairperson Polcari asked about restroom facilities for employees, and Mr. Ponce reported that employees will use restroom facilities at CVS or the grocery store and he will rent a portable hand-washing unit.

Commissioner Gibson asked if Mr. Ponce has permission to use restroom facilities in these stores, and Mr. Ponce indicated that he did not have permission at this time, but plans to ask the landlord.

Commissioner Skoll questioned whether the applicant was aware that a permit must be obtained from the State of California in order to operate a recycling facility and a copy must be posted on-site in a place where everyone can see it.

Mr. Ponce reported that he has already obtained the permit and will post it as required.

Planning Manager Lodan suggested that a condition could be added requiring the permit to be posted and kept up to date.

In response to Commissioner Watson's inquiry, Mr. Ponce confirmed that he would take responsibility for removing unsolicited donations that cannot be accepted by the recycling facility as required by Condition No. 4.

Commissioner Herring expressed concerns about photographs submitted by a resident (Staff report – Attachment 1) showing unsightly conditions at two other locations where Mr. Ponce operates recycling facilities.

Mr. Ponce explained that materials are usually stored inside the container immediately when they are received, but the generator was down for two hours on the day the photos were taken of the Carson St./Avalon Blvd location (photos #1-3) so materials had to be left outside until power was restored. He reported that the resident (Peb Conrad) visited the location several times and neglected to submit photos taken when the site was clean. He stated that he could not tell what was being shown in photos #4 & 5 from the Lomita Blvd./Main Street location due to the quality of the photos. He noted that the other facilities are operated by two employees and he was proposing to add a third employee at this location to ensure that the site is kept clean at all times.

Commissioner Tsao questioned whether the applicant had met with residents to discuss their concerns, and Mr. Ponce reported that a meeting was held last Tuesday, but it was unproductive and nothing was resolved.

Commissioner Skoll expressed concerns that the Commission had received no details about the perimeter wall mentioned by Mr. Ponce, and Planning Manager Lodan advised that an 8-foot high wall can be approved "over-the-counter" and does not require Planning Commission review.

Commissioner Gibson asked if there are parking requirements for recycling facilities.

Planning Manager Lodan explained that the shopping center in which a facility is located must comply with parking requirements, but there are no additional parking spaces required for a recycling facility since it is viewed as a complementary use to a grocery store. He noted that the subject shopping center is required to provide 547 parking spaces and 548 will remain after 4 spaces are dedicated for this use.

Chairperson Polcari invited public comment.

Glenn Walcher, Arvada Street, stated that he has lived directly behind the shopping center for the past 20 years and has experienced a decline in his quality of life due to the shopping center's lack of consideration for residents. He expressed concerns that the recycling facility will exacerbate existing problems, noting that there is already a problem with illegal dumping behind the store in plain sight of his home. He related his belief that noise and odors from the recycling operation will further degrade residents' quality of life.

Commissioner Skoll questioned whether the proposed wall would help alleviate his concerns, and Mr. Walcher responded that while the wall would block the facility from view, it would not block the noise from semi-trucks dropping off containers.

Brian Boyd, Towers Street, expressed concerns that this all-cash business will create security issues and that power-washing the pavement as has been proposed by the applicant, will send debris out into the street on Anza. He reported that the new perimeter wall will border Edison property and questioned whether Edison was consulted because the wall will have to be shored up since the property sits 3-4 feet lower than the shopping center. He contended that the recycling operation will take up far more than just four parking spaces and bring a lot more large truck traffic to the center, which already has numerous deliveries for other businesses. He suggested that this type of business should be in a location away from residences in the commercial zone.

Peb Conrad, Arvada Street, noted that he took the photos included in the agenda item and has many more but did not print them because it was cost prohibitive. He reported that he visited a number of recycling facilities to gain a better understanding of how they operate and observed that the noise they generate far exceeds what Mr. Ponce has represented. He explained that these recycling centers are frequented by high-volume recyclers who make a living by scavenging for bottles and cans and they are not just for people in the neighborhood. He stated one of the photos indicates that Mr. Ponce pays \$1.16 for a pound of plastic bottles and it takes 40 bottles to make one pound so this is not a business where a neighborhood child can bring in a few bottles and earn enough to buy a candy bar.

Commissioner Skoll thanked Mr. Conrad for all the research he did in connection with this proposal.

Lori Plesz, Arvada Street, reported that she and other members of her family are asthmatic and have many allergies and expressed concerns that odors from the recycling center could trigger a severe allergic response necessitating a trip to the emergency room. She noted that she personally is allergic to the hops in beer and fragrances used in other drinks and these allergens are present in bottles and cans people bring to recycling centers.

Chairperson Polcari asked if Ms. Plesz is bothered by the nearby nursery.

Ms. Plesz responded that the nursery is not a problem because she is only allergic to chemicals. She added that she believes the recycling center would also create traffic and safety issues, relating her observation that there is a back-up of traffic in the morning at the intersection of Anza/190th Street since the bus stop was relocated and there have been several accidents. She asserted that the proposed recycling facility was unnecessary because there is one on Hawthorne Boulevard only 0.6 miles away.

Shelly Hickey, Arvada Street, stated that her main concern is that the recycling center will increase cut-through traffic because people use Arvada Street as a cut-through to get to Inglewood Avenue.

William Smith, Arvada Street, reported that it is against EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) regulations to allow water used in power washing to flow into storm drains.

Paula Langevin, Athena Property Management, the management company for North Torrance Plaza, reported that the company also manages a shopping center in Porter Ranch that is similarly situated near residences and a recycling center there has created no problems. She explained that when pressure washing is done at the center, the water is reclaimed per requirements and it never flows into storm drains. She stated that efforts to work with residents were unproductive because they did not want the recycling center under any circumstances.

She offered to relocate the facility to the other side of the parking lot or to the middle and encase it with a block wall if Commissioners would prefer. With regard to concerns about increased traffic, she suggested that it was unlikely that anyone would drive any distance to get \$1.16 for 40 plastic bottles since it would cost more than that in gas.

Commissioner Skoll expressed surprise that the management company would consider allowing this facility when a major tenant like Starbucks objects to it. He questioned the lack of information about the proposed perimeter wall.

Ms. Langevin explained that detailed plans for the wall were not submitted because she was advised by Planning staff that she should wait until the Conditional Use Permit was approved since the wall might have to be moved.

Commissioner Watson asked if Ms. Langevin was concerned that the recycling center would encourage more illegal dumping since this has been a problem at this shopping center.

Ms. Langevin responded that she believes the recycling center will actually discourage illegal dumping because having its employees in the parking lot will serve as a deterrent. She noted that the management company recently hired a new parking lot maintenance company and a day porter, who will be responsible for disposing of any illegally dumped items.

Commissioner Gibson doubted that the shopping center in Porter Ranch is in an area as congested as the intersection of Anza Boulevard and 190th Street.

Ms. Langevin responded that the center is in a very busy area close to Reseda.

Melanie Dreike, representing West Torrance Homeowners Association, expressed concerns that the perimeter wall could create line-of-sight issues and that it could attract graffiti and be used as a place for people to hide behind.

Voicing objections to the project, Ron Bentley, Arvada Street, stated that the shopping center is not in the best shape and a recycling center will not make it look any better or help anyone's property values.

Returning to the podium, Mr. Ponce offered his assurance that he will keep the site as clean as possible and work with neighbors to address their concerns.

Chairperson Polcari stated that he would not support this project because so many neighbors oppose it and because he did not believe the recycling center was a good fit for this particular parking lot, which is very tight and in a congested area.

Commissioner D'anjou stated that while she did not doubt Mr. Ponce's intentions, she could not support the project because this parking lot is already very crowded and a recycling center is a high-volume business that ends up encompassing a much larger portion of the parking lot than just the spaces used for the storage container.

Commissioner Skoll voiced his opinion that the only place for recycling facilities is in an industrial area away from residences. Additionally, he noted that the proposed location does not appear to be the best place for a recycling center on this site and related his belief that the application was incomplete because it does not include any details about the new wall. He

indicated that he also had doubts about whether the facility would be properly managed based on Mr. Conrad's report of conditions at his two facilities in Carson.

Commissioner Watson stated that she is very much in favor of recycling and does not doubt Mr. Ponce's sincerity, but could not support the proposed project. She reported that she travels these streets on a regular basis and the area is heavily congested, with many accidents. She suggested that Mr. Ponce consider a location that does not back up to residences or have thoroughfares on three sides of the property.

MOTION: Commissioner Gibson moved to close the public hearing. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Herring and passed by unanimous voice vote.

MOTION: Commissioner Skoll moved to deny CUP14-00026. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Gibson and passed by unanimous roll call vote.

Planning Manager Lodan noted that a resolution reflecting the Commission's action will be brought back for approval at a later date.

11. **WAIVERS** – None.

12. **FORMAL HEARINGS**

12A. **MOD14-00013: SOUTH BAY LEXUS (CITY OF TORRANCE)**

Planning Commission consideration for approval of a Modification of a previously approved Conditional Use Permit (CUP05-00041) to allow the operation of an automobile dealership in conjunction with the existing automobile service center, and to allow renovations and expansions to the existing building and site, on property located in the M-2 Zone at 24777 Crenshaw Boulevard. This project is Categorically Exempt for CEQA per Guidelines Section 15301 – Existing Facilities.

Item was continued indefinitely.

13. **RESOLUTIONS** – None.

14. **PUBLIC WORKSHOP ITEMS** – None.

15A. **COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR WEEKLY SUMMARY REPORTS**

Planning Manager Lodan noted that the Community Development Director Weekly Summary Report for February 5, 2015 was distributed to the Commission.

15B. **DRAFT PLANNING COMMISSION 2014 ANNUAL REPORT**

Planning Manager Lodan noted that the Draft 2014 Planning Commission Annual Report includes a summary of annual activities and a list of significant projects, and upon approval it will be forwarded to the City Council.

Commissioner Skoll suggested that a list of cases that were appealed to the City Council and their disposition be included in the report.

Assistant City Attorney Sullivan advised that it was not necessary to include information about the City Council's action on Planning matters since the Council already knows the outcome of appeals.

Commissioner D'anjou suggested that it might be helpful in the future to list the number of cases involving the Hillside Overlay District since an ordinance regulating trees is being considered for that area.

MOTION: Commissioner Gibson moved to approve the 2014 Planning Commission Annual Report as submitted and to forward it to the City Council. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Watson and passed by unanimous roll call vote.

16. **REVIEW OF CITY COUNCIL ACTION ON PLANNING MATTERS** – None.

17. **LIST OF TENTATIVE PLANNING COMMISSION CASES**

Planning Manager Lodan reviewed the agenda for the March 4, 2015 Planning Commission meeting.

18. **ORAL COMMUNICATIONS #2**

18A. Commissioner Herring thanked his fellow Commissioners for granting him excused absences for the previous two meetings, noting that he was pleased to be back.

18B. Commissioner Watson extended Chinese New Year greetings.

18C. Chairperson Polcari thanked Commissioners for their cooperation during this meeting.

19. **ADJOURNMENT**

At 8:20 p.m., the meeting was adjourned to Wednesday, March 4, 2015 at 7:00 p.m.

Approved as submitted March 18, 2015 s/ Rebecca Poirier, City Clerk
