



November 17, 2010

David Hung, Associate Planner
City of Sacramento Planning Division
300 Richards Blvd, 3rd Floor
Sacramento, CA 95811

RE: Northwest Land Park Project (P10-039)

Dear Mr. Hung:

WALKSacramento has reviewed the July 23, 2010 and September 24, 2010 routings for the Northwest Land Park project (P10-039). The project location is a 32-acre site south of Broadway and east of I-5. The first of four phases of development will include 208 residential units on an 8-acre site. We appreciate the opportunity to submit the following comments.

The City of Sacramento - "City of Trees" and "Walking Capital" - needs trees in both public and private spaces to improve air quality, reduce heating and cooling energy demands, and present an attractive and pleasant environment to pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists.

The hot, sunny summers and autumns in Sacramento make it important to shade walking routes with deciduous trees. It's also important to have vegetated areas and permeable areas that provide additional cooling of the air near ground level.

Looking at the land use summary table on the phase 1 site plan drawing, it appears the land area of the Northwest Land Park project site will be about 51% permeable surface. This should provide appreciable cooling for the project site, but the total area of shaded surface will be just slightly more than permeable surface area because only a small portion of the hardscape areas will be under the tree canopy.

The street tree canopy is severely compromised by the proposed subdivision design. The typical building setback from the paved public streets is ten feet. The public streets are proposed to have attached sidewalks, so trees planted halfway between back of sidewalk and building will be ten feet from the curb and five feet from the building. Due to the five-foot spacing between the street trees and the three-story façades, the tree size will be limited and the opportunity to shade the street will be lost. If the streets are not high-albedo concrete or permeable, the streets will sink a lot of solar energy and contribute to warmer air along the public sidewalks.

Trees provide other benefits besides a cooler environment for residents. A portion of the particulates from vehicles on the two nearby freeways can be intercepted and the noise from those vehicles can be attenuated. Trees with leaves or needles during the rainy season can also reduce the storm drainage infrastructure requirements.

We recommend the following to allow for planting of medium and large trees to create a cooler, quieter, healthier, more sustainable neighborhood for pedestrians, bicyclists, and residents.

- 1. Use the City's pedestrian-friendly street standard 53' right-of-way residential street (with detached sidewalks) in place of the proposed street cross sections with attached sidewalks for 4th Street, Tailoff Way, Lug Way, and Cleat Way.**
- 2. Use the City's pedestrian-friendly street standard 59' right-of-way local commercial street (with detached sidewalks) in place of the proposed street cross section with attached sidewalks on 5th Street.**

Compaction of the soil in the narrow landscape setbacks inhibits growth and shortens the life of trees, further diminishing the shade canopy. Structural soil improves the growth and health of trees by allowing more oxygen, water, and nutrients to reach the roots. We recommend that structural soil be used where the planter areas are small and the tree canopy size is important.

- 3. Use structural soil wherever possible for planting shade trees.**

Even if detached sidewalks were constructed, the small landscape setbacks would still place limits on the ultimate size of mature trees. Table 2.4 in the PUD Guidelines allows for upper story portions of buildings to extend three feet into the primary building setbacks and this would further limit tree sizes. The upper story setback should be greater, not less, than the primary building setback to allow for more tree canopy growth.

- 4. Upper story front setbacks should be greater than primary building setbacks.**

The phase 1 tentative map shows 4th Street adjacent to the eastern edge of Arthur Benjamin High School, which allows for houses facing the school. The opportunity for "eyes on the street" to provide a sense of greater safety hasn't been fully exploited, though. While both of "The Towns" units, all three of the "City Homes" units, and three of the five "Bungalows" units have active living space at the front facing the school, only two of the ten "Urban Courts" units have "eyes on the street".

- 5. Add more "eyes on the street" to the "Urban Courts" homes along 4th street.**

The internal pedestrian circulation, as shown on the Phase 1 Circulation Plan drawing, provides connections between the streets and to most of the residential units (the rest are accessed by private entry walks). The Special Permit Site Plan – Phase 1 drawing identifies the internal walkways as three-foot wide, typical, while the private entry walks are not shown. Three feet is not wide enough for two people to walk side by side or to pass one

another comfortably. We recommend the internal and private entry walkways be widened to at least five feet.

6. Increase width of internal walkways and private access walkways to at least five feet.

The “Neighborhood Center” is located midpoint between the phase 1, 2, and 3 areas. If it was a facility for private use by the residents of Northwest Land Park, the central location would be logical. Since the facility, if constructed, would be built by the City for public use, the center should be located closer to the surrounding communities and within walking distance of more residents.

7. Move the “Neighborhood Center” to 5th Street.

The drawings are not consistent in showing the location of the multi-use trail that connects Setzer Run trail to Festival Way. Most of the drawings show the trail separated from 4th Street, but the Overall Circulation Plan shows the trail at the edge of the street where the sidewalk would be. Placing a multi-use trail within the public right-of-way makes it difficult for users to determine the function of the trail and how they and others should behave.

8. Separate the multi-use trail (Class I bikeway) from sidewalks and streets.

We recommend the Setzer Run multi-use trail have as direct a path as possible between the Miller Park Tunnel and 5th Street. This will provide efficient travel and reduce conflicts between modes. The proposed pathway adds an extra four hundred to five hundred feet of travel distance.

9. Add a Class I bikeway directly between Festival Way and Setzer Run.

The pedestrian travel way between Tailoff Way at 4th Street to the southern segment of Log Pond Loop (Circle?) is too long. Connecting Tailoff Way to Log Pond Loop could improve access and mobility for all modes and improve “eyes on the park” and “eyes on the schools”. The additional street would come close to completing the grid in Northwest Land Park.

As an aside, note that the grid is incomplete for two reasons. One, already mentioned, is that Tailoff Way is not connected to Log Pond Loop. The second reason, although not on the project site, is the lack of a roadway along the west side of Jediah Smith Elementary School. A new street between the existing McClatchy Way and Log Pond Loop would provide better access to the schools and the Northwest Land Park neighborhoods. It appears there might be room for a residential street with no parking between the school playground fence and the Caltrans right-of-way.

10. Extend Tailoff Way (Phase 1) to Log Pond Loop (Phase 3).

The phase 1 block lengths of 400’ to 450’ are acceptable, but phase 2 blocks are from over 500’ to over 700’. Blocks of this length are not pedestrian friendly in suburbs, much less in a medium-density urban residential neighborhood such as Northwest Land Park.

11. Reduce the Phase 2 block lengths to less than 500’.

Providing mixed-use commercial space is a benefit to residential neighborhoods, but it should be in a convenient location to be neighborhood-serving. The northwest corner of the project site is, perhaps, the least convenient location for pedestrians to access the mixed-use commercial space. There are few trip generators directly north and to the west because of the freeways, so most pedestrian trips will be residents to the south and east. Also, because it's on the west side of the project, it's not located where it will be convenient for transit riders using the existing local bus route.

12. Move the neighborhood-serving mixed-use to the east side of the project site.

The Miller Park tunnel option provides for a possible pedestrian and bicycle connection between the Land Park neighborhood and the Sacramento River Parkway bicycle trail and destinations along the river. The tunnel would greatly improve pedestrian and bicycle access to the Central Business District, the River District, and West Sacramento, making non-motorized commuting more attractive to Land Park residents.

13. Ensure that access to the potential Miller Park tunnel is retained.

We believe the Northwest Land Park project has good potential to be excellent infill development. The sidewalk, street tree, and connectivity issues we have identified may be easier to resolve with a change to block sizes. Although we prefer smaller blocks to provide shorter travel distances and more travel routes, wider blocks might allow detached sidewalks and more streets without affecting the density. The proposed internal walkway network for phase 1 is extensive, although of inadequate width, and provides connections to the public sidewalks. Wider blocks in phase 1 would not diminish pedestrian mobility and access if mid-block internal walkways provided public right-of-way through an easement.

WALKSacramento encourages people to walk and bicycle in their communities. The benefits include improved physical fitness, less motor vehicle traffic congestion, better air quality and a stronger sense of cohesion and safety in local neighborhoods.

WALKSacramento reviews land-use development proposals and provides recommendations to create neighborhoods, schools, shopping centers, office buildings, streets, and parks more walkable, bikeable, and transit friendly.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments and recommendations. If you have questions or need additional information, please contact me at (916) 446-9255 or cholm@walksacramento.org.

Sincerely,



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