

## Communication from Public

**Name:** Andrew Thomas, Westwood Village Improvement Association (BID)

**Date Submitted:** 08/07/2019 01:52 PM

**Council File No:** 18-1101

**Comments for Public Posting:** Dear Honorable Committee Members: Chronic vacancy in Westwood Village is a major impediment to the revitalization of the district. Today, our district suffers from a vacancy rate of 21-percent. Many district storefronts have been vacant for four or more years. The Westwood Village Specific Plan's (WVSP) regulatory restrictions make it challenging to fill these vacancies. The Westwood Village Improvement Association (WVIA) is asking that the Plan be amended to encourage leasing, overcome chronic vacancy, and to make our district more competitive with other commercial centers in the City. In analyzing 47 specific plans throughout the City of Los Angeles, the WVIA found no others that contain the type of restrictions included in the WVSP. In particular, the definitions for food uses, as well as the WVSP's parking requirements, have prevented leasing in Westwood Village. The WVSP's inflexible food definitions, and its caps on the number of allowed restaurants and so-called fast food uses, are incompatible with today's food-service industry which has changed dramatically since the WVSP was adopted. Fast casual uses like Tender Greens and Tocaya Organica (which by definition are considered restaurants everywhere else in Los Angeles) are defined as fast food by the WVSP. Incidental food uses like Starbucks and Stan's Donuts are also considered fast food. These mischaracterizations inflate the number of fast food establishments in Westwood Village and put the district over the Plan's cap, meaning exciting new businesses wishing to locate in the Village instead open elsewhere in the City. The WVSP's parking requirements also contribute to vacancy, in particular the requirements triggered by changes of use. The majority of vacancies in the district are former retail spaces, and the majority of leasing interest is coming from food and entertainment concepts. To change these former retail spaces and thus conform to the WVSP's parking requirements, property owners must build parking on their parcels, or businesses must enter into covenants with other land owners. These options present challenges that are practically impossible to overcome. This leaves properties vacant for years while property owners search for retail tenants in a climate that has seen a consistent decline in brick and mortar retail as more shoppers buy their goods online. The WVSP

attempts to preserve specific aspects of the Village, to limit new development, and to mitigate impacts on nearby residential areas. Many of the concepts in the WVSP are now obviously dated but because they were written so narrowly, they are constricting Westwood Village's growth and ability to adapt. Our community used to be known as a vibrant destination. Today, we are known for our vacancy, which has reached an alarming level with the potential to rise even higher. The WVIA is asking that the WVSP be amended to remove incidental food uses from being classified as fast food, and to eliminate the definition of fast food establishment and the definition of restaurant. The WVIA is also asking that the WVSP be amended to eliminate parking requirements for changes of use, to eliminate the replacement parking requirement, and to re-evaluate the requirements for new developments. We are hopeful this first step will enable us to stop incurring new vacancies while also generating positive momentum to attract new exciting businesses. Thank you for considering our recommendations.



August 6, 2019

Los Angeles City Council  
Planning and Land Use Management Committee  
City Hall  
200 North Spring Street  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Dear Honorable Committee Members:

Chronic vacancy in Westwood Village is a major impediment to the revitalization of the district. Today, our district suffers from a vacancy rate of 21-percent. Many district storefronts have been vacant for four or more years.

The Westwood Village Specific Plan's (WVSP) regulatory restrictions make it challenging to fill these vacancies. The Westwood Village Improvement Association (WVIA) is asking that the Plan be amended to encourage leasing, overcome chronic vacancy, and to make our district more competitive with other commercial centers in the City.

In analyzing 47 specific plans throughout the City of Los Angeles, the WVIA found no others that contain the type of restrictions included in the WVSP. In particular, the definitions for food uses, as well as the WVSP's parking requirements, have prevented leasing in Westwood Village.

The WVSP's inflexible food definitions, and its caps on the number of allowed restaurants and so-called fast food uses, are incompatible with today's food-service industry which has changed dramatically since the WVSP was adopted. Fast casual uses like Tender Greens and Tocaya Organica (which by definition are considered restaurants everywhere else in Los Angeles) are defined as fast food by the WVSP. Incidental food uses like Starbucks and Stan's Donuts are also considered fast food. These mischaracterizations inflate the number of fast food establishments in Westwood Village and put the district over the Plan's cap, meaning exciting new businesses wishing to locate in the Village instead open elsewhere in the City.

The WVSP's parking requirements also contribute to vacancy, in particular the requirements triggered by changes of use. The majority of vacancies in the district are former retail spaces, and the majority of leasing interest is coming from food and entertainment concepts. To change these former retail spaces and thus conform to the WVSP's parking requirements, property owners must build parking on their

parcels, or businesses must enter into covenants with other land owners. These options present challenges that are practically impossible to overcome. This leaves properties vacant for years while property owners search for retail tenants in a climate that has seen a consistent decline in brick and mortar retail as more shoppers buy their goods online.

The WVSP attempts to preserve specific aspects of the Village, to limit new development, and to mitigate impacts on nearby residential areas. Many of the concepts in the WVSP are now obviously dated but because they were written so narrowly, they are constricting Westwood Village's growth and ability to adapt. Our community used to be known as a vibrant destination. Today, we are known for our vacancy, which has reached an alarming level with the potential to rise even higher.

The WVIA is asking that the WVSP be amended to remove incidental food uses from being classified as fast food, and to eliminate the definition of fast food establishment and the definition of restaurant. The WVIA is also asking that the WVSP be amended to eliminate parking requirements for changes of use, to eliminate the replacement parking requirement, and to re-evaluate the requirements for new developments. We are hopeful this first step will enable us to stop incurring new vacancies while also generating positive momentum to attract new exciting businesses.

Thank you for considering our recommendations, and please let me know if I can answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Andrew Thomas  
Executive Director, WVIA