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Via Email/U.S. Mail

January 11, 2016

City Council of the City of Los Angeles
Planning and Land Use Management
Committee
200 North Spring Street, Room 395
Los Angeles, California 90012

Date: 01/12/2016
Submitted in PLUM Committee
Council File No: 15-1368
Item No. 1
Deputy: Comm. from Applicant Rep.

**Re: CPC-2015-2119-CU: Conditional Use Permit for Bridge Back
Reentry Center at 1730 W. Vernon Avenue.**

Dear Chair Huizar and Councilmembers:

I ask for your support for Geo Reentry, Inc.'s ("Geo Reentry") request for a conditional use permit ("CUP") to reinstate the reentry center use at 1730 W. Vernon Avenue pursuant to Section 12.24 U.5 of the Municipal Code and adoption of a categorical exemption under the California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA"). The CUP and categorical exemption were unanimously approved by the City Planning Commission and received strong community support. The appeal filed by Cheryl Branch has no merit and should be denied.

The Bridge Back reentry center proposed for 1730 W. Vernon Avenue would help fill a critical unmet need for reentry services in the City. As recognized by the creation of the Mayor's Office of Reentry last month, the formerly incarcerated population faces extraordinary challenges in finding work, a safe place to live, medical and mental health services, and reconnecting with their families and the community. Bridge Back would support parolees and inmates by providing a safe, structured, supervised environment where residents can gradually rebuild their ties to the community and transition to productive community living. Inmates who transition from incarceration through a reentry center like Bridge Back are less likely to re-offend because of the integrated support services that are provided to them, including job development services, counseling, group therapy, substance abuse treatment, and facilitating access to medical and mental health care. The Bridge Back facility would also create local jobs for area residents and improve the safety and security of the neighborhood by improving and reopening the now vacant building with 24-hour video surveillance monitoring and around-the-clock center staff. For all of these reasons, Bridge Back's CUP request has received strong support from the community, including the Area-1 Leadership Team, the Empowerment Congress Central Area Neighborhood Development Council ("ECCANDC"), and neighbors adjacent to the site.

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At its October 8th meeting, the City Planning Commission unanimously approved the CUP for Bridge Back. As part of this approval, the Planning Commission found that the reentry services Bridge Back would provide are essential to the community, city or region and that the project's exterior improvements will enhance the built environment in the surrounding neighborhood. (Letter of Determination for Case No: CPC-2015-2119-CU, Findings 1.a). The Planning Commission also found that the project's location, size, height operation and other significant features are compatible with adjacent properties, the surrounding neighborhood, or the public health, welfare, and safety. Indeed, the Planning Commission found that "the existing structure is uniquely suited to the proposed use as it is self-contained and has operated without incident at this location since 1982." (Findings 1.b). The Planning Commission also found that the Bridge Back project substantially conforms with the purpose, intent and provisions of the General Plan and applicable Community Plan, and is consistent with the following Health and Wellness Element policies:

Policy 7.5: Reintegration of the Formerly Incarcerated. Support programs for previously incarcerated persons that provide job training, secondary education opportunities, substance abuse, mental health, tattoo removal, housing services, etcetera to foster healthy community reintegration.

Policy 7.6 Diversion. Proactively collaborate with public, private, and nonprofit partners to divert vulnerable populations such as homeless individuals, veterans, individuals with mental health issues, at-risk youth and young adults, and other non-violent offenders from conviction and incarceration to supportive services that promote access to economic, education, housing, and health resources within their communities.

Specifically, the Planning Commission found that the Bridge Back project "will use an underutilized building to improve the social health of a city by focusing on one of the most vulnerable groups of individuals – the formerly incarcerated," and that "[t]he type of support services provided to program participants offer lasting social and economic benefits not only for those individuals who are successfully re-integrated into society, but these benefits will have far-reaching positive impacts in the broader context of the community." (Findings 1.c). Nothing in the appeal filed by Ms. Branch justifies overturning the Planning Commission's findings. In fact, all of her contentions are without merit.

Ms. Branch argues in her appeal that the project site is not an appropriate location for a reentry center use. However, the City Planning Commission approved three CUPs for reentry center use on this property in 2009 (CPC 2008-4759-CU), 2004 (CPC 2003-9221-CU), and 1998 (City Plan Case 98-0319 CU), and the property has been used as a reentry center for many years without incident. In fact, Ms. Branch previously approached the owners of the Bridge Back site

about opening a reentry center of her own on this property. Despite the verbiage in her appeal, it appears even Ms. Branch agrees that this site is appropriate for a reentry center use.

Ms. Branch further states that the community shares her new found concerns regarding the location of the Bridge Back center: "I believe the residents of South Los Angeles subscribed to the notion that transitional halfway facilities are better placed in light industrial zoned area and/or buildings that are far removed from surrounding low density residential and viable commercial nodes." This is simply incorrect. The Planning Commission found that the project site was appropriate for the reentry center use precisely because it is not isolated in an industrial zone or far removed from residential and commercial uses: "The use is appropriately located in proximity to residential, educational, institutional uses and community resources, which directly support the facility's mission to aid and guide the transition of the center's residents." (Finding 1:b). The community also supports the location of the Bridge Back reentry center at this site. The Bridge Back project is supported by the Area-1 Leadership Team, the ECCANDC, and other community members, including two of the adjacent residential neighbors who would be most affected, Marcelino del Campos and Leonard Delpit. See the attached letters of support from the ECCANDC and Marcelino del Campos dated September 25, 2015, and September 23, 2015, respectively, and the Area-1 Leadership Team. Ms. Branch did not attend the Planning Commission hearing or submit any written comments. The community members who did attend the hearing or submitted comments were overwhelmingly in favor of approval of the CUP.

Ms. Branch next contends that locating the Bridge Back reentry center at 1730 W. Vernon Avenue is not consistent with the intent of the South Central Community Plan ("Community Plan"), because the proposed project is a residential only development. Specifically, Ms. Branch states that the proposed site is inconsistent with Objective 2-1: "To conserve and strengthen viable commercial development," and Policy 2-1.2: "Protect commercially planned/zoned areas from encroachment by residential only development." Again, this contention is simply incorrect. Bridge Back is not a residential only development, but is deemed a correctional institution use under Section 12.24 U.5 of the Los Angeles Municipal Code. The Bridge Back center will include offices, a multipurpose room, a conference room, administrative space, dining facilities, a day room, a computer room/library, and a group room in addition to group bedroom and bath facilities. None of these facilities or uses comprises a 'residential only' use. The project is thus entirely consistent with the Community Plan and any additional findings required for residential only development are inapplicable.

It is also important to note that the CUP is limited in term to five years or the termination of Geo Reentry's government funded contract, whichever is less. Ms. Branch states in her appeal that the project site is better suited to commercial use. Yet, she also acknowledges that due to poor economic conditions and civil unrest, "many businesses have moved out of the area . . . [and] left behind a proliferation of mini-shopping malls and an overconcentration of certain nuisance uses, including liquor stores, check cashing facilities, recycling centers, and drive through fast food

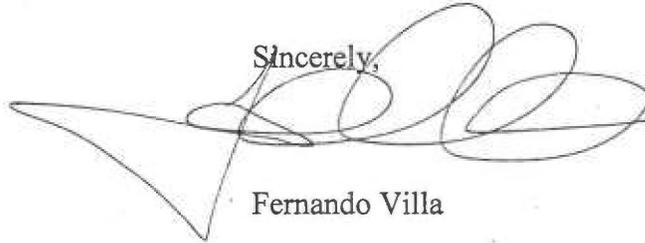
Allen Matkins Leck Gamble Mallory & Natsis LLP
Attorneys at Law

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establishments." As suggested by Ms. Branch's observations, commercial use of the project site is currently not a viable option. The owners of the project site marketed the property for five years before entering into an agreement with Geo Reentry, and there was no interest in the property from commercial users during this five-year period. But if economic conditions change and commercial use of the site becomes viable in the future, the City Planning Commission will have the opportunity to take changed conditions into consideration in determining whether the CUP for reentry center use should be reauthorized at the end of its short term of no more than five years.

For all these reasons, we respectfully ask the PLUM Committee to issue a recommendation denying the appeal. Nothing in Ms. Branch's appeal justifies overturning the unanimous decision of the City Planning Commission to approve the CUP for reentry center use at this site. The Bridge Back reentry center is supported by the community and will help the City reach its own stated goals of providing critical services to the formerly incarcerated population and supporting their transition back into the community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Fernando Villa", written over a horizontal line.

Fernando Villa

FV:emo



To: Hearing Officer for the City Planning Committee

Re: GEO Reentry Services, Case # CPC-2015-2119-CU

We the Area 1-Leadership Team, had the opportunity of having Mr. Weaver present the corporate vision for their projected use of the old "Bridgeback" facility on West Vernon Ave. This facility is located within the boundaries of "Area 1 Leadership Team".

The major points discuss were;

- Additional persons from GEO congregating outside of their facility and in our community.
- Programs for their in-house residents and for the community as well.
- The origins of the participant in GEO in-house program.
- What procedures were in place to monitor their program participants.

Mr. Weaver, during his presentation to our Team, assured us that the integrity of the community would be of major interest to them. We were also inform that the 'GEO' residents would be pre-screened and required to follow the rules and regulations as set forth by GEO's national committee. We were also informed that the community has the opportunity to be part of their "Community Relations" committee. We were given the invitation to have members from the Leadership Team be a part of that committee.

We, Area-1 Leadership Team, would like to lend our support to GEO's effort in returning to our community a rehabilitation program of which will be an asset to the individual and to our community. We will continue to engage and collaborate with GEO, in order to maintain an open-end dialogue, community awareness and corporate integrity.

Sincerely,

Members of Area 1 Leadership Team

Rev. Robert Campbell
Deborah Strong
Wanda Capers
Lorraine Curry
Algie Lee

Leonard Delpit
Diane McDowell
Delores Alleyne
Willie Green
Robert Campbell Jr.



City of Los Angeles

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Email: secretary@eccandc.org

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Corey W. Flournoy • Co-Chair
Keith McCowen • Secretary
Ayana McCowen • Treasurer
James Hadley | <p>Area Representatives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Algie Lee, Area 1 • Leonard Delpit, Area 1 • Charletta Butler, Area 2 • Vacant • Hazel Dean, Area 3 • Vacant, Area 3 | <p>Members at Large</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gwendolyn Wood • Barbara Jones -Chikosi • Rita Banks <p>Stakeholder Associate Rep</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vacant <p>Youth Representative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tyrone Lewis |
|--|--|--|

September 25, 2015

Michelle Singh
Hearing Officer
City Planning Commission
City Hall 10th Floor Room 1020
200 N. Spring St
Los Angeles, CA 90012

RE: Support for Bridge Back Residential Reentry Center at 1730 W. Vernon Ave. (CASE NO. CPC-2015-2119-CU)

Dear Ms. Singh,

It is with great pleasure that the Empowerment Congress Central Area Neighborhood Development Council, ECCANDC, write this letter of support for the Bridge Back Residential Reentry Center.

This facility is a necessary and much needed component for assisting in the edification of our community. This facility will assist in preparing men to effectively reenter society and become positive and productive citizens. All too often individuals are released from prison and soon return to a life of crime. However, having the Bridge Back facility will help to reduce the rate of recidivism by providing shelter and vital programs to help men get their lives back on track as well as give hope to individuals by showing them there is a better way to live.

City of Los Angeles

Empowerment Congress Central Area Neighborhood Development Council

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Visit our website: www.eccandc.org

Email: secretary@eccandc.org

ECCANDC is committed to the revitalization and positive growth of our community and having the Bridge Back facility would be a great step in that direction.

If you have any questions please feel free to contact us.

Sincerely,

Ayana McCowen,
ECCANDC Secretary
Eccandc.org
Ayana.eccandc@gmail.com
424-209-7729

October 1, 2015

Michelle Singh
Hearing Officer
City Planning Commission
City Hall 10th Floor Room 1020
200 North Spring Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

RE: Support for Bridge Back Residential Reentry Center at 1730 W. Vernon Ave.
(CASE NO. CPC-2015-2119-CU)

Dear Ms. Singh:

My name is Leonard Delpit and I live directly behind the Bridge Back facility. I am also an Area 1 Representative on the Empowerment Congress Central Area Neighborhood Development Council and a member of the city attorney's neighborhood justice panel.

I am writing to you today to express my support for the GEO Group's application to operate the Bridge Back Residential Reentry facility. Ms. Carolyn Evans and her husband were excellent stewards of this property and have passed the responsibility on to an equally qualified and quality company. After speaking with GEO Group numerous times about their plans for the facility and involvement in our community, I am confident in their ability to run a safe and quality program.

It is important that this facility be properly run by a company that is willing to improve and support our community. I believe GEO Group will become a valued member of our community and be a responsible property owner. They have agreed to continuously engage the community and be receptive to feedback and any issues that may arise as they operate this facility. They are also committed to helping residents recover and prepare to reenter the community by hosting job fairs and 12-step programs, as well as offering mental health services.

GEO Group has taken into consideration the concerns of neighbors and the community in their security plans, while also committing to being a full-time member of our community. They are committed to keeping the allies and sidewalks around the property clean and preventing residents from loitering. They have also committed to staying involved in the community and hiring locally.

I encourage you to support GEO Group's application.

Sincerely,

Leonard Delpit

September 23, 2015

Michelle Singh
Hearing Officer
City Planning Commission
City Hall 10th Floor Room 1020
200 North Spring Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Sent Via Electronic Mail to Michelle.Singh@lacity.org

RE: Support for Bridge Back Residential Reentry Center at 1730 W. Vernon Ave.
(CASE NO. CPC-2015-2119-CU)

Dear Ms. Singh:

My name is Marcelino del Campos and I am writing you to express my full support for GEO Group's application to operate the Bridge Back Residential Reentry facility in Los Angeles.

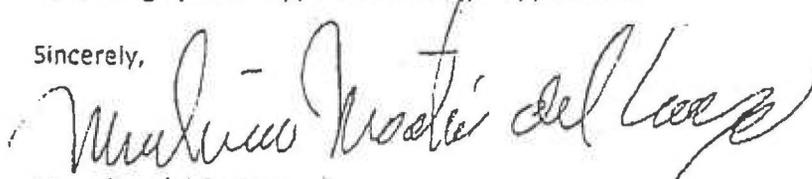
My family and I have lived directly adjacent to the property for several years. During this time, we have not experienced any safety issues or concerns resulting from the property or its operation.

I believe that reopening the Bridge Back facility will help elevate the safety of our community because of the enhanced security measures of the project, including a 24-hour video surveillance monitoring system and around-the-clock facility staff.

I also believe that Bridge Back will greatly assist its residents to transition back into our community through the various programs and services that reentry facilities provide.

I encourage you to support GEO Group's application.

Sincerely,



Marcelino del Campos
ADDRESS:

1734 W. VERNON AVE
LOS ANGELES, CA 90062