

## Elyse Eisenberg

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**From:** Elyse Eisenberg [eisenberg@earthlink.net]  
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**To:** Eisenberg, Elyse  
**Subject:** Tower Records Development Presentation 2007 11 07 - Summary

Tower Records Development Presentation 2007 11 07 – Summary

View the slideshow of the presentation at <http://picasaweb.google.com/wehoheights>



Wednesday, November 7<sup>th</sup>, the community was invited to an informal presentation to view the current proposal filed with the City of West Hollywood by Centrum Properties for the development of 8801 Sunset, the former site of Tower Records.

The atmosphere was informal and friendly and allowed for everyone to examine the models, have questions answered, codes explained, more details provided.

### Present

Centrum Properties – Sol Barket, owner and our host; Jackie Schwartz.  
 Gensler – Michael Darnier, lead architect. I believe Bart Tucker and Ken Hsu from Gensler were also there, although I missed the introduction to them.  
 David Barton Gym – David Barton, owner.  
 Marathon Communications – Richard Lichtenstein, owner; Brian Lewis  
 Attorney – Nicky Carlsen  
 West Hollywood Planning Department – John Keho, Planning Manager; Adrian Gallo, Project Planner.  
 Community – about 30 residents. Most, if not all, appeared to be from WeHo Heights NA (WHHNA).

### Public Notices

City notices are legally obliged to be sent only to addresses within a 500' radius from the property. When a request was made to include all WHHNA addresses, including those outside this radius, the city and Marathon extended the list for this and future notices concerning the development. We would like to thank the city, Centrum and Marathon for complying with this request.

Unfortunately, on the south side of Sunset, the radius includes mostly commercial property and would likely not have been sent to many residents who live on Holloway, Palm and other nearby streets who will also be affected by this development.

### Presentation

Available for viewing were a 3D scale model of the proposed structure in context with the neighboring buildings in circumference, including the IAC building and several Larrabee residences going uphill on the west side; The Coffee Bean/Spago's building, Shoreham Villas, several Horn residences going uphill on the east side; and the north-facing block along Sunset including the former Tower Video, Book Soup and Carolco buildings on the south side.

Also available for viewing were property maps, architectural illustrations, floor plans, concept designs, and other information. The complete application permit should soon be available on-line.

### Building Specifications

Many of the details about the proposed structure have been known from previous presentations and so won't be repeated here. Please refer to the July 31, 2007, email entitled "Clarifications: Tower Records Developer Meeting 07 25 2007" for more information.

#### Notable Changes

The loading/public parking ingress/egress is now on Sunset. One public parking ingress/egress remains on Horn. Previously both were on Horn.

Open garage to residential areas is now enclosed. Possibly greenery on walls proposed. We do not consider this enclosure a concession as it is per city code given its proximity (12') from residential property.

All existing deciduous trees on property, estimated at over 100 trees over 10" in diameter, will be removed. N and W borders of property line will have setbacks of approximately 12' with Canary Island-type palm trees bordering residential areas. E border on Horn will have canopy trees as previously indicated.

Valet parking drop-off will be on Level 4 and be 2x10 car lengths deep, to allow for a back up of twenty cars from Horn street entrance.

We were told that the building height has been lowered 10', although it is not evident from either the illustrations or the scale model. The elevator shaft on Sunset continues to reach 84'. Note: IAC building is 60' at Sunset, 70' at rear.

No other changes were evident.

#### NEIGHBORHOOD CONCERNS

The neighborhood concerns from the previous presentation are as follows:

1. Public and commercial vehicular entrances should be on Sunset, not Horn (PARTIALLY ADDRESSED)
2. Increased traffic to neighborhood and Sunset
3. Open garage facing residential areas needs to be enclosed. (ADDRESSED)
4. Building too massive and too high
5. Rooftop parking noise pollution issues
6. Inadequate building setbacks
7. Green zone separating residential properties from commercial areas
8. Green roof desirable
9. Distinctive landscaping design desired
10. Undesirable oversized billboard facing Horn
11. Valet parking for all parking?
12. Public and neighborhood parking discounts
13. Tenant hours limited
14. Multi-use preference - i.e. residential/office vs. office/gym/retail
15. Building design doesn't conform with Sunset Strip
16. Developers commitment to community

While acknowledging the major change of moving one ingress/egress to Horn, the overall concept has not changed in any meaningful way. The changes have been superficial and inconsequential to the impact that a proposal like this will have on the quality of life in the neighborhood and the city. Furthermore, with the distribution of the actual plans and models, and the evident scope of the project, many more problems are evident.

This project may be perfectly suitable for more commercial areas of West Hollywood and Los Angeles. However, the proposal is inappropriate for this intersection at every level. The highlights are:

#### EIR

We anxiously await the EIR. Impact on the neighboring streets, especially Horn, Shoreham, Sherbourne, Larrabee and Clark, must be taken into consideration. The South of Sunset streets of Holloway, Palm, Hancock and their off-shoots will also be significantly impacted. We anticipate that the current scale of the proposal will be rejected based on the EIR alone.

### Increased Traffic

Of utmost concern. Even with the closure for the past year of Tower Records, this intersection remains the major pain point of the Sunset Strip. The addition of more than 324 cars and trucks daily (number of parking spaces planned), and likely more than 1,000 vehicles if the building is even moderately successful, is horrific. Sunset cannot handle any more traffic. Residents of WeHo Heights and the City of Los Angeles above, all of whose streets dead end onto Sunset will be hostages in their neighborhood.

### Addition of Center Turn Lane on Horn

The addition of a center turn lane on Horn would be desirable under any circumstances. However, expanding street only 2' to accommodate a third lane is unrealistic given the size of SUV's, Hummers, and other cars today, and that it is already difficult for two normal cars to pass on this street. The street would have to widen a minimum of 15' and would encroach on the Tower property.

### Valet Parking Only/

To the best of our knowledge, there are no buildings in WH, and possibly all of LA, which are exclusively valet parking. Is it realistic to assume that office workers arriving en masse during morning rush hour are going to patiently wait to drop off their cars while four or five valets rush to park their vehicles? Or gym goers arriving at a gym that is expected to have 2-3,000 active members, as an earlier presentation indicated. Twenty cars will back up into the street pretty quickly. Plus, there is an implied obligation for everyone to tip valets. 24 hour valet parking? Unlikely economically sustainable when the traffic drops off in early morning hours, especially weekdays. This is not user friendly for retail shoppers, gym goers, office workers, or neighborhood residents who may lease spots long term. The parking floor plan is 2- and 3-cars deep on each level. If the garage space was designed for self-parking, there would be far fewer legal spaces and only support a drastically smaller structure.

### Parking Spaces

Inadequate for proposed uses of building, especially full gym with significant membership, in structure with over 52,000 sf. Legal minimum parking spaces offered. As a comparison, Tower Records, with about 8,000 sf required only 28 spaces, although it had about twice as many. As we all know, the parking lot was constantly overflowing and they eventually added another lot, now owned by the city. The fifty extra spots for the neighborhood are fungible as they are based on 40% of the gym being used as a spa. This space could at some point be reconverted to gym space (as Equinox recently converted part of their gym space to a spa), in which case the proposed number of parking spaces would be inadequate and would not support the height bonus incorporated into the proposal. And questionable is whether 50 extra valet parking spaces satisfy the intent of this code requirement, even if it satisfies it legally.

### Building Height and Mass

The design of the building covers every inch of the site with no articulation. Reviewing the photos, it is evident that this complex will dwarf the IAC building, being twice as large and higher. Imagine a small Beverly Center at this intersection to get an idea of its mass, shape and impact on surrounding areas. For the Horn and Larrabee homes immediately next to the property, the structure will tower 35' above as it takes advantage of a loophole in building code because of the uphill slope of the property. It uses the hillside next to the residences as the slope of the property, instead of the already graded parking lot. The residences will be living in a canyon and it will impact light to these homes. This is not a pedestrian friendly building as it will expand to current sidewalk borders on Sunset and Horn (minimum allowed), rising three stories from the street level before setbacks. It will also directly impact the views of the multi-million \$ units in the not yet fully occupied Shoreham Villas. Furthermore, the proposed building is on the North side of Sunset, the area abutting a prestigious residential community of Los Angeles, an area which is treated differently in the Sunset Specific Plan for that reason. The mass of this structure is out of proportion for this district. The real mass of this structure is close to 200,000 sq ft, across a building six stories high, from the 8,000 sq ft of the current Tower building structure – 25 times the size!

### Green Zone

Although requests have been made to the developer and to the city to create a green zone and expand the buffer area between the commercial property and the residential zone, this area will essentially be eliminated in its entirety and be the legal minimum setback allowed – 12'. Every existing tree in the current green area of approximately 30' will be removed. This sloping hillside is to be removed, and the structure will abut the residential area.

### Billboards

Three different types of billboards for three different areas are proposed for the building. Although following code, surely this is beyond the intent of the signage guidelines, especially the 5,000 sf horizontal billboard facing Horn.

Billboards of this size are only found vertically on high rise towers along Sunset, not horizontally on low rise buildings. There appears to be greater emphasis on exploiting every square inch of space on the building than there is on creating unique and exemplary design for this iconic location.

#### Landscaping/Green Zone

Trees planted around a building do not constitute landscaping design. Palm trees are wholly inappropriate buffer trees to a residential zone. Any green zone has been eliminated. This is unacceptable in its entirety. It should be noted WeHo Heights NA has formally requested a green zone for this residential community of 1,000 homes. We have no parks or green areas affecting about 2,000 residents and a major dog walking community. We are severely under served in this area. To give up the existing green area and get a monster box in return is unacceptable, not to mention the environmentally inadequacy of the plan.

#### Architectural Compatibility

This building might be appropriate at Hollywood & Highland or Sunset & Vine, but is wholly unsuitable for Sunset & Horn. It is incompatible with the Monterey Colonial style of the shopping district which would allow a visible extension of the elegant Sunset Plaza, which would be desirable. It is not compatible with the Sunset Millennium buildings. Neither is it of unique and exemplary design on its own. The IAC building and the Carolco buildings were grandfathered into the city plan and have never been used as standards for Sunset Blvd – nor should they be. That being said, this structure is not even compatible with the architecture of those buildings.

#### Summary

The proposal for the retail/gym/office center at 8801 Sunset requests maximum allowances and bonuses for the barest minimum requirements and concessions. Nothing has been given back to the community.

In fact, the community's impression of the plans has deteriorated in its viability as more details become known. Alarm is increasing that the developer's repeatedly stated intention to be a good neighbor is proving increasingly insincere.

This perception is being strengthened by the problems surrounding temporary uses of the building, for which there is no overall objection as we do not want yet another abandoned site in the area. However, allowing such things as early morning sound checks that were heard two blocks up the hill, and construction, painting and set up work being performed after hours does not indicate appropriate sensitivity to the residential neighborhood abutting the property.

Almost 1,000 homes and about 2,000 WeHo citizens, members of the WHHNA, are severely impacted by this plan. To date, the developer has not made a serious bid to accommodate this community after multiple meetings with various neighborhood representatives.

It is unfortunate that the people involved in this project - the developer, the architect and the primary proposed tenant - are all from out of state and this is their first venture in Southern California. This is readily apparent in this ill-conceived proposal. Not having prior firsthand experience as a developer or landlord anywhere in the Greater Los Angeles area, there appears to be a major misperception of what is appropriate for this site and who frequents this district.

A cursory look up and down Sunset will note that interspersed between the destination nightclubs, restaurants and hotels are small businesses that cater to the neighborhood.

The David Barton Gym will offer the same services and features as Equinox 1,500 feet away, and will have a personality like Crunch. Counting in 24 Hour Fitness on Santa Monica, there would be four high membership gyms within one mile. There is no shortage of gyms in this city. Gyms are not destination facilities and people generally participate based on convenience either to work or home.

What kind of retail establishment is truly a destination? While Tower was unique for many years, it was impacted by the opening of Virgin down the street, a shopping center removed from the traffic jam of the Strip and with adequate and convenient parking in a wide commercial zone. With major shopping destination sites like The Grove, Westfield Century City, the Beverly Center and the Beverly Connection, Rodeo Drive, and Hollywood and Highland, all with ample parking and numerous access points, how many people in Los Angeles truly want to venture to the congestion of the Sunset Strip – and for what kind of destination store? Book Soup is one of the most famous and prestigious book stores in the county, but is it a destination store? Unlikely. The possible tenants that were mentioned as having been approached for this site, such as Crate & Barrel or Restoration Hardware, were truly uninspired and unlikely candidates for other than major shopping districts – which the

Sunset Strip is not. With few exceptions, the stores in this area that have survived have been boutiques and are not part of chains. Even an upscale chain like L'Occitane lasted less than one year at Sunset Millennium.

Now with the recently announced possible break-up of IAC, a proposed office tenant, is more office space on Sunset truly necessary?

It should be noted that there are thousands of feet of prime available office and retail space along Sunset between Cory and King's Road, a distance of a little over one mile. Much of this space has been vacant for years.

Recently, an informal survey from Cory to LaCienega found the following Sunset addresses all had vacancies:

9229 - high rise office tower  
 9200 - high rise office tower  
 9145 - The Nu Image/Millennium building, two stories. Vacant since 2002.  
 9040 - Scandia. Targeted for development, vacant for more than five years.  
 9030 - vacant office space  
 9026 - vacant office space  
 9000 - high rise office tower  
 8981 - modern medium rise office building, never fully occupied since overhauled over ten years ago  
 8961 - vacant office space  
 8912 - formerly framing store. Vacant over three years  
 8800 - restaurant and retail space in Carolco building has been vacant for over three years  
 8840 - Tower Video  
 8801 - Tower Records  
 8795 - Spago's - vacant since 2001 because of lack of available parking  
 8730 - Nicky Blair's/Barfly (closed since 2004)  
 8720 - Le Dome (closed quickly again after brief reopening after many years vacant)  
 8667 - vacant retail space  
 8580, 8570, 8560 - Sunset Millennium - vacant offices, frequent turnover of retail and restaurant space  
 8535 - vacant retail space  
 8518 - Never reoccupied since closing of North Beach Leather over ten years ago  
 8500- 8518 - never occupied  
 8501 - Sunset Collection shopping plaza - never occupied, no available parking near by

#### Conclusion

This project is unsuitable for this site in its entirety.

The traffic flow throughout the county has been a hot button issue for several years now. This proposal does not seem to consider how these issues will affect 8801 Sunset's realistic potential for success.

Furthermore, it is the position of the WeHo Heights NA that no serious concessions have been made after multiple meetings with the developers with the same concerns repeatedly expressed verbally and in writing. The developers are requested to be conciliatory to neighborhood concerns and reconceptualize the project from the ground up on a more human scale.