

Tolerance Museum Plan OK'd Despite Neighbors' Objections

[Valley Edition]

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Author: MATHIS CHAZANOV
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Document Text

A Los Angeles City Council committee has approved the proposed Museum of Tolerance in West Los Angeles over the objections of a neighborhood group concerned about noise, parking and loss of privacy.

"We're delighted," said Rabbi Meyer May, associate dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, sponsor of the museum, after the Tuesday committee vote. He said ground breaking will go ahead as scheduled Dec. 7, assuming the full council approves the project as expected next month.

The hearing was conducted by the the Planning and Environment Committee, whose members include council members Michael Woo, Hal Bernson and Pat Russell, who did not attend.

The 2-0 vote came after a lengthy hearing at which representatives of the Roxbury-Beverwil Homeowners Assn. appealed for stricter conditions on the project, which includes land zoned for residential use.

Plans call for a 60-foot-tall building with four floors despite its location in a zone restricted to three stories and 45 feet, but Councilman Zev Yaroslavsky told the committee that the museum would not set a precedent for commercial development.

Earlier Trade-Off *

The decision to allow a fourth story came as part of an earlier trade-off in which the Wiesenthal Center agreed to install a 100-foot-wide garden to separate the building from private homes on the south, Yaroslavsky said.

"Everybody has had input into it and, on the whole, it's about the best arrangement we could get respecting both parties' interests," said Yaroslavsky, who recommended that most of the homeowners' last-minute changes be rejected.

He said their interests were adequately protected by 31 conditions imposed earlier by the city Planning Commission.

Those requirements were the result of several months of talks involving both sides and a staff member from his office, Yaroslavsky said.

After the meeting, the newly appointed architect for the project said the latest plans substantially reduce the size of the building.

Although the interior floor space will probably remain about 81,000 square feet, about 6,500 square feet have been trimmed from the building's overall size, architect Maxwell Starkman said.

Issues Resolved

"A lot of the issues that were addressed here already have been resolved," he said.

Starkman said the reduction in size may allow the use of more expensive materials on the exterior.

Plans call for the \$20-million museum, financed in part by a \$5-million state grant, to serve as a memorial to the millions of Jews and others who were killed by the Nazis. It will also include a reference to the mass killings of Armenians by Ottoman Turkey during World War I.

May said some of the world's best museum designers have been enlisted to plan the exhibits, which will feature electronic displays and other gadgetry.

Although the neighbors stressed that they have nothing against the idea of the proposed museum, they said they were concerned that their quiet streets would be disrupted by a flow of visitors and that the building itself would cast a shadow over their homes.

"This community has been there for 35 to 40 years," said Susan L. Gans, president of the homeowners group. "All of a sudden to be exposed to people 60 feet above us is just not right."

Appealed Ruling

She said her group appealed the Planning Commission's ruling because it felt the commission's conditions contained loopholes that the Wiesenthal Center might take advantage of.

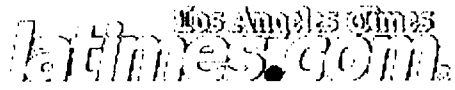
In the appeal, she asked that the building be limited to the originally proposed floor space of 58,000 square feet, that the 45-foot height limit be imposed and that limits be tightened on hours of construction and hours of operation once the museum is open.

She also asked for stricter review by the Planning Commission once the project is built, but Yaroslavsky said the city's normal administrative procedures will provide adequate protection.

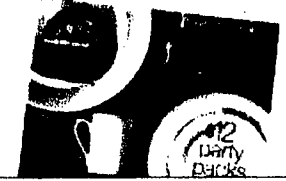
He warned, however, that a separate permit governing activities of Yeshiva University, which is operated in conjunction with the Wiesenthal Center, will be "forcefully" examined when it comes up for review.

Neighbors have complained for years of noise, litter and parking problems caused by students at the school, but May said steps have been taken to improve the situation.

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Council Clears Way for Museum of Tolerance, Adds Restrictions on Use

[Home Edition]

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The Los Angeles City Council has removed the last procedural obstacle to construction of a Museum of Tolerance on Pico Boulevard in West Los Angeles.

The 10-0 vote Wednesday denied an appeal by local residents who were concerned about noise, traffic and parking problems.

However, the City Council responded to their concerns by endorsing 32 conditions imposed by the Planning Commission in an effort to mitigate the impact of the project.

"We'll have to live with it for a couple of years, and if it's a problem, we'll be back in there to get the conditions amended," said Susan Gans, president of the Roxbury-Beverwil Homeowners Assn., which was formed after plans for the museum were announced last year.

'Excited and Delighted'

"We're excited, we're delighted," said Rabbi Mayer May, associate dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, which is sponsoring the museum with the help of a \$5-million grant from the state of California.

"It's going to be an outstanding project," he said.

Plans call for a ground-breaking ceremony Dec. 7, at which an artist's rendition of the four-story building may be available for public viewing, May said.

Fund-raising activities have been scheduled across the country to raise the last \$6 million needed to build the project, May said. Pledges already in hand total \$18.5 million, including the state grant, he said.

The museum is intended to commemorate the victims of Nazism in World War II, as well as earlier depredations, including the mass deaths of Armenians during World War I.

Millions Expected

Officials of the Wiesenthal Center, named after the Vienna-based Nazi-hunter, hope to install the latest in electronic technology in order to make the exhibits as effective as possible.

"I think millions will come and see it," May said.

It was the prospect of masses of visitors that mobilized homeowners to oppose the zoning changes required for a four-story building at the site, which is part of a Pico Boulevard corridor zoned for a height limit of three stories or 45 feet.

After a series of meetings mediated by a staffer from the office of Councilman Zev Yaroslavsky, the Planning Commission approved a compromise under which a fourth floor would be allowed in exchange for creation of a garden to separate the museum from the homes immediately to the south.

Limitations Imposed

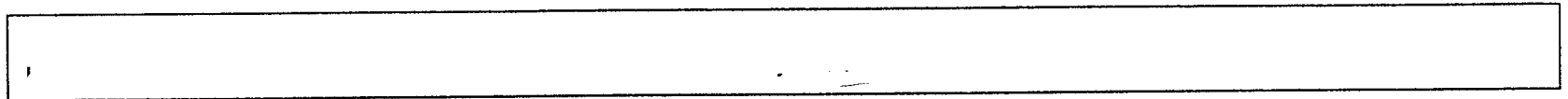
At Wednesday's session the City Council voted to allow the Wiesenthal Center to use the garden for public events no more than four times a year. Ten-day notice to the neighborhood association is required before any such event.

Other conditions include the requirement that the museum open no earlier than 10 a.m. and close no later than 5 p.m. on weekdays and that its hours be limited to 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Sundays. It is to be closed on Saturdays.

Nighttime activities are to be limited to 12 a month and can only be held Monday through Thursday. Additionally, the new facility, which is to include a 325-seat auditorium, cannot be used for weddings, bar mitzvahs or any religious service not connected with museum activities.

Off-street parking is also required, and no motor vehicle access is to be provided from residential Roxbury drive except in case of emergency. The approval calls for a review of the conditions by the Planning Commission after two years.

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Keeping Memories Alive Council Panel Approves Tolerance Museum Over Neighbors' Objections

[Home Edition]

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Author: MATHIS CHAZANOV

Date: Sep 25, 1986

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Document Text

A Los Angeles City Council committee Tuesday approved the proposed Museum of Tolerance in West Los Angeles over the objections of a neighborhood group concerned about noise, parking and loss of privacy.

"We're delighted," said Rabbi Meyer May, associate dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, sponsor of the museum. He said ground-breaking will go ahead as scheduled Dec. 7, assuming the full council approves the project as expected next month.

"We are disappointed that the city is allowing the center to be built in such a totally inappropriate and unsuitable location, but we certainly are not surprised by the committee's decision," said Susan L. Gans, president of the homeowners group.

However, she said, the neighbors feel that guarantees imposed by on the project by the city "should protect our interests as long as they are enforced, and we will certainly see to it that they are enforced."

The hearing was conducted by the the Planning and Environment Committee, whose members include Councilmen Michael Woo, Hal Bernson and Pat Russell, who did not attend.

The 2-0 vote came after a lengthy hearing at which representatives of the Roxbury-Beverwil Homeowners Assn. appealed for stricter conditions to be imposed on the project, which includes land zoned for residential use.

Plans call for a 60-foot-tall building with four floors despite its location in a zone restricted to three stories and 45 feet, but Councilman Zev Yaroslavsky told the committee that the museum would not set a precedent for commercial development.

The decision to allow a fourth story came as part of an earlier trade-off in which the Wiesenthal Center agreed to install a 100-foot-wide garden separating the building from private homes to the south, Yaroslavsky said.

"Everybody has had input into it and on the whole it's about the best arrangement we could get respecting both parties' interests," said Yaroslavsky, who recommended that most of the homeowners' last-minute changes be rejected.

He said their interests were adequately protected by 31 conditions imposed earlier by the city Planning Commission.

Those requirements were the result of several months of talks involving both sides and a staffer from his office, Yaroslavsky said.

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In the appeal, she asked that the building be limited to the originally proposed floor space of 58,000 square feet, that the 45-foot height limit be imposed, and that limits be tightened on hours of construction and hours of operation once the museum is open.

She also asked for stricter review by the Planning Commission once the project is built, but Yaroslavsky said the city's normal administrative procedures will provide adequate protection.

He warned, however, that a separate permit governing the activities of the Yeshiva University, a high school and college institution operated in conjunction with the Wiesenthal Center, will be "forcefully" examined when it comes up for review.

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At Wiesenthal Center Homeowners Object to New Museum Plan

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Architects for the Simon Wiesenthal Center have presented new plans for a proposed Museum of Tolerance on Pico Boulevard but nearby homeowners say the four-story building will disrupt their quiet community.

While sympathizing with the neighbors, Councilman Zev Yaroslavsky said Wednesday that the new design will help mitigate the institution's impact.

"There are probably 100 better places for a Holocaust museum in Southern California than the corner of Pico and Roxbury," Yaroslavsky said. "Unfortunately, they own the property at Pico and Roxbury and our job is to reconcile any conflicts that may arise."

His comments came after residents urged a hearing examiner Monday to deny approval of the latest design, which would violate a height limit of three stories, or 45 feet, for buildings on Pico Boulevard.

They said the proposed fourth story would dominate the skyline, but Yaroslavsky said the new design was "least intrusive and most responsive," since there would be no construction on two lots that abut the residential area.



Instead, a private garden has been proposed at the back of the site—an area in which the original plans envisioned a lower, more sprawling museum building.

"Yes, for this to happen there will have to be an exception (to the height limit)," Yaroslavsky said. "If the difference in having a Holocaust museum in Los Angeles is the difference between three and four stories, then the city can and should make the distinction."

Parking Entrance

The new proposal was drawn up after a year of informal talks that was preceded by Yaroslavsky's announcement that he would oppose the original plans.



The latest design calls for cars to enter the museum's three-story underground parking garage through an entrance on Pico Boulevard instead of residential Roxbury Drive. The upper floors of the building would be set back to reduce the impact of its 60-foot height, according to James Conkie, a representative of the museum's building committee.

Susan Gans, president of the Roxbury Beverwil Homeowners' Assn., said the homeowners appreciated some of the changes, but that the sheer bulk of the structure would overwhelm their neighborhood of single-story houses.

This and other objections were discussed last week in a flurry of meetings between representatives of the association, the developer and a Yaroslavsky aide, but members of the homeowner group voted Sunday to oppose the conditional-use permit that the Wiesenthal Center needs.

Gans and other residents who testified at Monday's hearing cited concerns about traffic and parking problems and said the increased security precautions at the center, including a metal detector and a 24-hour guard, made them anxious about possible terrorist attacks. The center recently sponsored a conference on the war against terrorism.

One woman said she had been frightened by a warning from the FBI that agents would be clambering on her roof during a visit by former Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin to the Wiesenthal Center, which is named after a renowned Nazi-hunter.

Although they sympathize with the goals of the museum, "we don't want it here," Gans said.

"It does not belong so close to a residential community," she told hearing officer Paul Beard. "If it is approved, we urge that you do so only with the strongest possible conditions."

Beard will submit his report to the city Planning Commission on June 5.

Although representatives of the Wiesenthal Center agreed in last week's talks to limit construction hours to 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. and the museum, once it opens, to 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays and 11 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. on Sundays, the homeowners are concerned about how the agreement will be enforced, Gans said.

If they drop their opposition to the museum and the conditions promised them for doing so are then ignored, she said, "we'd be left holding the bag. Our silence would be bought at too cheap a price."

Yaroslavsky said he sympathized with the neighbors' concerns, especially because there has been a history of complaints over the private school that shares its facilities with the Wiesenthal Center.

"The neighbors are unable to distinguish between the museum and the yeshiva, and the yeshiva has been a big problem, as most schools can be," he said.

Still, he said, "if everybody will try to be reasonable, including the museum, things will work out."

Rabbi Meyer May, executive assistant to Rabbi Marvin Hier, dean of the center, said that steps have been taken in the last year to meet the neighbors' concerns about the high school.

These included car pools to limit traffic, extra landscaping and full-time playground supervision to minimize disruption from basketball games and other student activities, he said.

In any case, May said, the project enjoys wide support despite the objections from the immediate neighbors.

"It's just not appropriate that it should be planted in Iowa," May said. "There is a question about the legitimate concerns the neighborhood may have, but like anything else, you have to look at what the museum will accomplish, and I think it overrides (the objections)."

Yaroslavsky said operational questions, such as where buses will discharge museum visitors and when outdoor events will be allowed, will be more important in the long run than whether the museum is allowed a fourth story.

"Some of the residents of the area don't want a museum there at all," he said. "That's a legitimate point of view for people to take, but I don't believe that's going to happen," he said.

The museum, which won a one-time, \$5-million state grant last year, will be devoted to exhibits that recount the history of anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance in order to combat all forms of prejudice, according to officials of the Wiesenthal Center.

May said an additional \$12 million has been raised by the center's board, which includes some of the wealthiest businessmen in the United States and Canada.