

**THIS IS THE EXACT LETTER (EXCEPT FOR THE NOTES IN RED) THAT THE SWC'S PUBLIC RELATIONS DIRECTOR SENT TO THE MUSEUM'S MAILING LIST JUST BEFORE THE INITIAL PUBLIC HEARING IN OCTOBER 2007. COPIES OF THIS LETTER WERE ALSO PLACED AT THE MUSEUM'S FRONT ENTRANCE FOR VISITORS TO SIGN. FOR EXPLANATIONS OF THE 17 FALSE STATEMENTS IN THIS ONE LETTER, SEE PAGES 2 – 4. WE CALL THIS “‘THE BIG LIE’ LETTER”.**

City of Los Angeles  
Department of City Planning  
Expedited Processing Section  
200 N. Spring Street, Room 721  
Los Angeles, CA 90012  
Attention: Sarah Rigamat and Luci Ibarra

Re: CASE NO. VTT-66144  
CPC 1986-15-CU-PA1  
Simon Wiesenthal Center/Museum of Tolerance

Dear Ms. Rigamat and Ms. Ibarra,

As a nearby resident and neighbor **[FALSE # 1]** of the Simon Wiesenthal Center's Museum of Tolerance, I am writing to express my full support for the Museum's modest addition **[FALSE # 2]** within its existing property line **[FALSE #3]**. The Museum has done a remarkable job of enhancing our community **[FALSE #4]**, educating our children, and putting this neighborhood on the map as one of the most important cultural addresses in the nation **[FALSE #5]** and they have earned our support **[FALSE #6]**.

In addition to the above, it does so in ways that are respectful of its neighbors **[FALSE #7]**, providing outstanding security whose benefits extend beyond the perimeters of the building to become the eyes of the neighborhood and help to reduce crime **[FALSE #8]**. This has made our neighborhood a very desirable place to live **[FALSE #9]** and has, in fact, increased the value of our properties **[FALSE #10]**. Improving this facility is keeping pace with the upgrade of the entire west side of Los Angeles **[FALSE #11]**.

Most important, the footprint of the site remains the same **[FALSE #12]** with the entrance on Pico Boulevard and more than adequate underground parking provided **[FALSE#13]**. The centerpiece of the renovation, the creation of a new cultural center, encloses the existing Memorial Plaza **[FALSE #14]**, which will greatly reduce any disturbance to the neighbors **[FALSE #15]**.

I therefore urge the Department of City Planning and the City Planning Commission to approve the modest expansion plan **[FALSE #16]** proposed by the Simon Wiesenthal Center's Museum of Tolerance.

Sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature)

Address \_\_\_\_\_  
Los Angeles, CA 90035 **[FALSE #17]**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_

PLEASE PRINT, SIGN AND SEND TO:  
Avra Shapiro, Simon Wiesenthal Center at:  
FAX – 310.553.4521 • MAIL • 1399 South Roxbury Drive, LA, CA 90035

AND

Sarah Rigamat, Department of City Planning at:  
FAX – 213.978.4656

PLEASE MAKE SURE TO INCLUDE YOUR ADDRESS.

**FALSE STATEMENT #1:** Of the 300+ copies of this letter received by the Dept. of City Planning as of November 2007, only 11 were from people within the 90035 zip code (where the Museum is located). Of these 11, nine lived at least one mile away from the Museum. Of the remaining 2 letter signers, one is a local merchant who was unaware that the Museum's expansion plans included an on-site café and catering business that might compete with his small business, and the other was a cantor who lives on the east side of Beverwil Drive, a fair distance from the Museum. On the contrary, almost ALL of the actual "nearby residents" and neighbors OPPOSE the Museum expansion.

**FALSE STATEMENT #2:** The proposed expansion is hardly "modest." Whether or not the rooftop garden is enclosed, the total floor area, including the 7,800 sq. ft. the SWC seeks to "annex" from the adjacent Yeshiva property, would be an expansion of almost 40% of the current floor area of the Museum structure. The total size of the expanded building would be either 110,179 sq. ft. or 110,839 sq. ft., which is even *larger* than the 100,000 sq. ft. structure that the SWC wanted to build, and was prevented from building, in 1986 (because then-Councilman Zev Yaroslavsky refused to support such a massive out-of-scale project in a residential neighborhood).

**FALSE STATEMENT #3:** The expansion is not all within the Museum's existing property line. The SWC seeks to annex 7,800 sq. ft. from the *adjacent* Yeshiva property.

**FALSE STATEMENT #4:** People who actually live near the Museum do not feel that it has enhanced their neighborhood. It has brought bus traffic, pollution from diesel exhaust from buses, pickets and demonstrations, bomb threats, street closures limiting access to their homes, and parking problems.

**FALSE STATEMENT #5:** This is wishful thinking and hyperbole. The Museum ranks only **#60** out of 451 Los Angeles attractions on the TripAdvisor.com website ([http://www.tripadvisor.com/Attractions-g32655-Activities-oa20-Los\\_Angeles\\_California.html](http://www.tripadvisor.com/Attractions-g32655-Activities-oa20-Los_Angeles_California.html)) and is not even mentioned in the list of top L.A. attractions in the popular on-line family travel guide Away.com (<http://away.com/stores/travel-guides/los-angeles-attractions.html>). As a *national* cultural institution, it is easily outranked by the U.S. Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C. and the Jewish Museum in New York, not to mention many far better-known world-class art, history and natural history museums in the United States.

**FALSE STATEMENT #6:** The Museum has not earned the support of its "nearby residents and neighbors." Approximately 80 to 90% of homeowners in the streets surrounding the Museum have signed a petition opposing the proposed expansion. Although everyone supports the *mission* of the Museum, only a small handful of the Museum's actual neighbors support the Museum in its efforts to expand and "reposition" itself as a cultural center or are ambivalent.

**FALSE STATEMENT #7:** SWC officials have for many years treated the Museum's neighbors with contempt, arrogance and disrespect, ignoring repeated complaints about traffic, trash, noise, parking and other nuisances and violations of the conditions of the 1986 Conditional Use Permit. The mere fact that these expansion plans were underway for a year or more before any mention was made to the community (and then only because of the City's requirement to send notice of the public hearing 30 days in advance), is clear evidence of such lack of concern and total disrespect. When neighborhood leaders requested a postponement of the public hearing in order to read, evaluate and communicate to residents the contents of the SWC's 75-page project description and related documents, the SWC flatly rejected this reasonable request. It is only very recently, after encountering strong opposition and hiring a public relations firm that specializes in "community outreach," that Museum officials have made an attempt to show "concern". Neighborhood residents, with good reason, are skeptical about the sincerity of their motives. Based on their prior conduct, it is likely that Museum officials will revert to ignoring

neighborhood complaints and to violating the conditions imposed by the City, as soon as they get everything they want and are allowed to start construction.

**FALSE STATEMENT #8:** The neighborhood surrounding the Museum was a quiet, safe neighborhood before the Museum was built and brought in its security guards. The guards are stationed at the garage and main entrance on Pico Blvd. and rarely see anything that happens on the nearby streets. It is the *Museum* that makes neighborhood residents feel unsafe - - knowing that they involuntarily live near what is probably one of the biggest terrorist targets in Los Angeles, that all cars entering the Museum must be searched for bombs and weapons, and that all Museum visitors must pass through a metal detector (unlike any other museum in Los Angeles). The neighborhood never had its streets barricaded because of bomb threats before the Museum came to Roxbury Drive, but this has happened several times since the Museum opened. The expansion of the Museum and its repurposing as a cultural center will make it an even more vulnerable and likely target for terrorist attack, and put innocent homeowners at even greater risk.

**FALSE STATEMENT #9:** The neighborhood near the Museum has become a desirable place to live because of its proximity to the booming business center of Century City, the shops and restaurants of Beverly Hills, and many excellent religious schools and synagogues – not because of the Museum. Moreover, the Museum’s presence on S. Roxbury Drive has made it very difficult to sell homes on that street, resulting in several homes remaining vacant for long periods of time or being rented because there were no interested buyers. If the Museum is granted all of the extreme relief it is seeking from City zoning laws and is allowed to expand, no one will want to buy or invest in a home on S. Roxbury Drive.

**FALSE STATEMENT #10:** If the Museum has had any impact on residential property values, it has been a negative one, with homes on Roxbury Drive staying on the market for months longer than comparable homes elsewhere. While it is undeniable that property values in the neighborhood have risen dramatically in the last 15 years, this is true of ALL of West Los Angeles and has absolutely nothing to do with the Museum. If the Museum expands as it is contemplating, with the rezoning of its property from a single-family residential use to a commercial use, one professional real estate appraiser has estimated that property values of homes on S. Roxbury Drive will decline by 20 – 30%, and home values on other nearby streets will decline by 15 – 25%. Is that fair to these homeowners, most of whom bought their homes long before the Museum was there?

**FALSE STATEMENT #11:** Improving the facility is not “keeping pace” with the “upgrade” of West Los Angeles. This is an absurd statement. If anything, the increase in traffic that the expanded Museum will bring, especially in light of its expanded hours of operation (which will include both morning AND evening rush hours), will “keep pace” with and actually add to the growing and unbearable traffic congestion in West Los Angeles. Having a row of buses parked on Pico Blvd. (the only place they are allowed to load and unload passengers) will take over a lane of traffic at rush hour in a “no-parking/anti-gridlock” zone, as will the long queue of cars backed up on Pico waiting to be searched before entering the Museum garage for an event at the “cultural center.”

**FALSE STATEMENT #12:** Unless you consider the outdoor Memorial Garden to be part of the Museum’s “footprint,” this is an outright lie. Under any rational view, the footprint will expand by 80 linear feet, as the garden/buffer zone/setback depth is decreased from 100 feet to 20 feet. In addition, the Museum proposes to formally annex 7,800 sq. ft. of space from the adjacent Yeshiva property, expanding into that property’s footprint (although technically acquiring only so-called “airspace” rights - - this is just a question of semantics). The Museum is not expanding upwards by adding additional stories, but rather outwards and eastward - - that makes it a substantial increase in its “footprint.”

**FALSE STATEMENT #13:** This is another outright lie. The Museum's parking is currently well below L.A. Municipal Code requirements, due to the fact that it was anticipated that many Museum visitors would be schoolchildren and other groups arriving by bus and not needing underground parking, and there would be no restaurant on the premises. Even so, the Museum frequently finds it necessary to post a "Parking Lot Full" sign at the entrance to the garage, even now, without the expansion. With only 198 spaces (or 209, depending on who is counting), and no on-site parking being added, there will not be nearly enough parking for the huge events that the SWC expects to host at the new "cultural center." The rooftop garden alone is being designed to hold 500 people, the interior space can hold 500 people at a sit-down banquet (far more at a standing reception), and the theater can hold another 300 people. Even with the addition of all 75 spaces at the SWC headquarters building across the street (which will only be available at certain times of the week), the amount of available parking stalls is still completely inadequate.

**FALSE STATEMENT #14:** While it is true that the new cultural center "encloses the existing Memorial Plaza," this *completely* fails to mention that (at the time this letter was written) the SWC was proposing that the new cultural center would have a rooftop garden at a height of 48 feet, open to the sky and overlooking the neighborhood, designed to hold up to 500 people for a wedding, bar/bat mitzvah or other party, lasting until midnight six nights a week - - and all only a few feet from peoples' homes. (Note: The SWC has recently said that it would consider enclosing the rooftop garden with a glass atrium-style ceiling; however, if it does so it will request that the building height be increased by another 12 feet (to 60 feet, on property now subject to a 33-foot height limit), and there are no assurances that a glass enclosure will eliminate the noise of 500 people attending a raucous party.

**FALSE STATEMENT #15:** This is another false, even ludicrous, statement. Holding huge wedding, bar/bat mitzvah and other parties and receptions, in a building that is open from 7 AM until midnight, six days a week, and regardless of whether the rooftop garden is "enclosed" in glass, will greatly *increase* disturbance to the neighbors, not just on the block, but for a vast distance, because noise travels even farther from a rooftop. No homeowner should have to put up with such a nuisance. And while the parties may end at midnight, the catering staff will remain on the rooftop far longer cleaning up, and inebriated revelers will fill the streets on foot or in cars, making noise throughout the neighborhood's formerly quiet residential streets. Several young children live on S. Roxbury Drive. Even now, their parents complain that noise from activities at the Museum makes it difficult for their children to get a good night's sleep.

**FALSE STATEMENT #16:** See False Statement #2 above.

**FALSE STATEMENT #17:** How interesting that the SWC's form letter would actually *include* the 90035 zip code, instead of leaving a blank for signers to fill in the city and zip code! Might this be because they were hoping that people would not bother to fill in their correct zip code, thus causing the City Planning Dept. to think that the letters were actually sent by people who live in the neighborhood?