

Communication from Public

Name: Adele

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Comments for Public Posting: I am a Studio City resident. I support developing this site, but I oppose final approval of Riverwalk until the City requires a real, independent evacuation and emergency access analysis for the Ventura Boulevard corridor. The Jensen Hughes study submitted with the appeal found that evacuating our area already takes more than six hours, and that Riverwalk and Sportsmen's Lodge together would add 27 minutes in the project's evacuation zone. The developer's "20-minute" study counts only the project's own cars on an otherwise empty road. It ignores every neighbor and the hillside residents on 12-foot-wide roads across the street. As I write this, families in San Juan Capistrano, San Clemente, and the Malibu hills are fleeing wind-driven fires. In Los Angeles, the question is not if, but when. Please see my attached letter for my full comments and requests.

October 16, 2026

To: Members of the Planning and Land Use Management (PLUM) Committee;
Los Angeles City Planning; Studio City Residents Association; Office of
Councilmember Nithya Raman, Council District 4

From: Adele Slaughter

Dear Committee Members, Planning Staff, and Neighbors,

I am a Studio City resident, and I am writing about the Riverwalk project after the PLUM Committee's recent hearing.

First, I want to be clear about where I stand. I am not against developing this site. It badly needs it. Much of this plan is good: the new access to the Los Angeles River, the open spaces, the native planting palette, and the shade trees along Ventura Boulevard. I am grateful that the developer has committed \$675,000 to plant trees and care for the stretch of river that borders the project. These are real benefits.

However, I am seriously dismayed by the lack of planning for the safety of our community.

The evacuation question went unanswered

The appeal presented by attorney Amy Minter clearly laid out the danger of approving this project without an evacuation plan, and without studying what it means to add 814 new apartments, potentially 1,600 or more people, to the half-mile stretch between Whitsett and Coldwater Canyon. The appeal was backed by a detailed study from fire-safety engineers at Jensen Hughes, who modeled a wildfire evacuation of Studio City and its surrounding neighborhoods. Under current conditions, before a single new apartment is built, it would take nearly four hours for 90 percent of evacuating residents to reach the freeway, and more than six hours for the last of them. Those times don't even include the time it takes to receive a warning and get out the door. In the evacuation zone that contains Riverwalk, adding Riverwalk and Sportsmen's Lodge pushes the time for the last residents to get out back by another 27 minutes.

Not one single councilmember on the PLUM Committee addressed this issue. Not one member responded to the appeal's evidence that, even without this development, it already takes four to six hours to evacuate this area. The only

thing Councilmember Raman addressed regarding the increased density was the need to stagger the construction of the three major projects along this half-mile stretch of Ventura Boulevard. Staggering construction may ease traffic while the buildings go up, but it does nothing once they are full. She did not address the impact of adding 814 units at Riverwalk, 520 units at Sportsmen's Lodge, and 27 units at Sunswept, which could bring over 2,700 people to the area. How will we evacuate these additional people?

The applicant's attorney dismissed the appeal's concerns in two ways, and neither answer was good enough.

First, the applicant argued that the project is exempt from CEQA and therefore does not need an evacuation study. That may be procedurally true, though the appellants have raised serious doubts even about that. The exemption requires compliance with fire safety standards, and this project, in a Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone, has areas a standard fire hose cannot reach and fire lanes surfaced with artificial turf. But even if the exemption applies, a legal exemption is not the same as an ethical one. As a community, we are responsible to one another. What happens when the big earthquake comes? What happens when a wind-driven fire moves the way the Eaton and Palisades fires did through Altadena and Pacific Palisades? We all watched people trapped in their cars on roads that could not carry everyone out at once. The question isn't whether the law requires a study. It is whether this city wants to approve 814 homes without knowing whether the people in them, and the people already living here, can get out safely.

Second, the applicant's attorney said the developer conducted its own study and found the building could be evacuated in 21 minutes. I found this claim stunning. How do 1,600 people get out of their homes in 21 minutes? What if the power is out and the elevators aren't working? What if residents are elderly, disabled, or caring for small children?

I read the developer's study. It doesn't say what the attorney claimed. The Dudek report, which is marked "Draft" and calls itself "qualitative," never measures how long it takes to get people out of the buildings. It doesn't mention elevators or stairs at all. What it does calculate is that the project's 1,040 resident cars could clear a segment of Ventura Boulevard in about 21 minutes, assuming no other car is on the road. It doesn't count a single neighbor, the hillside residents across the street, or the cars from the project's own 766 commercial spaces. It doesn't consider earthquakes. It even refers to the "Gateway Center Project," apparently left over from another client's report.

And even if every resident made it out the door in 21 minutes, where do they go? They step onto Ventura Boulevard and into the same street network that, by the appeal's evidence, already takes more than six hours to clear. The developer's own number shows that the project needs about 21 minutes of road time just to move its own residents. The Jensen Hughes study shows where those minutes actually go: onto the end of an evacuation that already takes more than six hours. Getting out of a building is not the same as getting out of harm's way. Either the 20-minute figure is bad math, a best-case scenario presented as fact, or it reflects a dismissal of the community's concerns. None of those should satisfy the City.

The people most at risk may not even live in the project. Across from the site, the hillside neighborhood is served by substandard roads, some only about 12 feet wide. The Jensen Hughes study found that many hillside neighborhoods in our area have only a single way out, too few exits for the number of homes they serve, or long drives before reaching a main road. In a fire or earthquake, those residents have to come down narrow streets and merge into the same corridor that 1,600 new residents will be trying to leave, making it a death trap. If the City is willing to accept community improvements from this developer, those improvements should include the infrastructure that keeps people alive. Widening, repairing, or otherwise improving evacuation access on those hillside roads is perhaps the most urgent need of all.

How the public was treated

I am also troubled by how this hearing handled public participation, beginning with a lack of transparency. First, Councilmember Raman's office introduced amendments to the project immediately before the hearing. I was in the room, paying close attention, and I could barely understand what those amendments were. If an engaged resident sitting in the hearing could not follow them, the public certainly had no real opportunity to review them or respond. Second, one appeal asked that planted parkways be included along the project's riverside, and the appeal was denied. Yet at the very end of the hearing, Councilmember Raman asked that the parkways be included in the project. If the outcome the appeal requested does indeed happen, the official record will always indicate the appeal was denied. If the request had merit, the record should say so. When changes are made too late for the public to understand them, and when residents who do the work of filing an appeal are rejected on the record only to see the idea quietly adopted afterward, it obscures the public record.

Councilmember Raman also said during the hearing that she had worked with the community on this project. With respect, that is not the whole picture. Her office engaged with the Studio City Neighborhood Council, but not with the Studio City Residents Association (SCRA), which represents many of the homeowners and renters who live closest to this site and would be most affected in an emergency. The Neighborhood Council is one voice, and it does not represent the full range of views in Studio City. Many residents do not feel represented by it. A project of this size, on a corridor this vulnerable, deserves outreach to every organization that speaks for the people who live here.

I was also struck by how often Councilmember Raman referred to the developer's financial contribution during the hearing. I don't doubt that the money will do good. But the repeated emphasis left many of us with the impression that safety concerns had been weighed against a payment, and that approval of the project as proposed was tied to those improvements. I would ask the Committee to state clearly on the record what role, if any, this contribution played in its decision. And if contributions like this can be part of an approval, I would ask why they are not being directed toward the most serious risk this project creates: getting people out safely.

The ask:

I am asking the PLUM Committee, City Planning, and the City Council to:

1. Require a real, independent evacuation and emergency access analysis for this corridor before final approval. It should account for existing residents, the hillside neighborhood across from the site, the new residents of Riverwalk, Sportsmen's Lodge and Sunswept, commercial visitors, and years of construction traffic.
2. Make public findings on evacuation capacity and emergency vehicle access, coordinated with LAFD, LAPD, and the Emergency Management Department.
3. Formally respond to the Jensen Hughes evacuation study submitted with the appeal.
4. Condition approval on a binding emergency evacuation plan for the project that ties into a neighborhood-wide plan.
5. Direct any developer contributions toward evacuation infrastructure, including improvements to all intersections around the site.
6. Correct the record so that it accurately reflects the parkway modification and credits the appellant who asked for it.

7. Consult the Studio City Residents Association and other community organizations, not only the Neighborhood Council, before final approval.
8. Publish the final amendments in plain language, along with an explanation of what changed, before the project goes to the full City Council.

This project could be something Studio City is proud of: a model for how to build near the river responsibly. I want to be able to support it. But I can't support approving it until we know it keeps people safe, residents and neighbors alike, when catastrophe comes. As I write this letter, families in San Juan Capistrano, San Clemente and the Malibu hills are fleeing wind-driven fires, and homes are already burning. Less than two years after the Eaton and Palisades fires, it is happening again. In Los Angeles, the question is not if, but when.

We expect our city leadership to keep us safe.

Respectfully,

Adele Slaughter

4544 Ethel Ave, Studio City, CA