

We are here in our official capacity representing the Serra Mesa Planning Group. We have together spent hundreds of hours studying, researching, and discussing this project. We have met with the applicant, affected community members, representatives from Development Services, City Planning and Community Investment, land use and CEQA experts, and staff from many of your offices.

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The Serra Mesa Planning Group strongly recommends that you not approve this Palladium at Aero project as currently proposed, not certify the Mitigated Negative Declaration, reduce the proposed rezone to RM-3-7, not approve the proposed Public Right-of-Way vacation, and continue the proposed Community Plan Amendment.

We delivered booklets to your offices last week detailing our concerns and providing supporting documentation, so we shall attempt to simply summarize our main points this afternoon.

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This is a crucial project for Serra Mesa, as it sits on a site that defines the primary gateway between our community and Kearny Mesa. The project takes on major importance because it is the first of what City Staff wants to see in redevelopment of up to 25 parcels in both directions from the project along Aero Drive, and so will set the tone and precedent. It must be done right. As proposed, the project will radically transform the character of our community in a way that the community does not support. The Serra Mesa Planning Group has repeatedly voted against this project, and received over 150 petition signatures from immediate neighbors opposing the project.

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The project site is within the boundaries of the Kearny Mesa Planning Group, but as **this figure** from the General Plan shows, it is geographically isolated from the rest of Kearny Mesa by Montgomery Field, while it is contiguous with Serra Mesa. Additionally, this area was historically part of the Serra Mesa Planning Group jurisdiction. When the Kearny Mesa Planning Group was established, the area was divided to give Kearny Mesa the industrial areas and Serra Mesa the residential areas. This boundary, and how to bridge the transition, was the topic of much discussion at the two Planning Commission hearings.

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The proposed project is not in conformance with the goal of the City of San Diego General Plan to “ensure that quality of life is maintained, and essential community character is respected” by providing “infill housing... that is sensitive to the character and quality of existing neighborhoods.”

The General Plan defines neighborhood character, in part, by qualities that repeat throughout neighborhoods, such as landscape and massing of buildings.

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Allow me to show you some photos of the existing conditions on Aero Drive  
The project site is low industrial buildings in muted colors with expansive open space.

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It is surrounded by single family homes, and more one to three story office and industrial style structures, deeply set back from the street.

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Now let's look at what the Architects have proposed for the project site,  
Notice the height, how close it is to the street, the massiveness of the structure, how much it sticks up on the end, the lack of open space.

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Now, compare a rendering of this project to another project by the same architects.  
Note how similar the two renderings look in shape, scale, and style.

Now let's see what that project looked like when it was completed.

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This does not integrate with the existing fabric and scale of development in surrounding neighborhoods, as called for in the City's General Plan.

This project will not be compatible in height with the commercial and industrial uses to the east and west. Along Aero Drive, this project will be four stories tall, with a six level parking structure in the middle. Most buildings on Aero Drive are one and two stories tall, and none are taller than three stories. Along Sandrock Road and Dubonnet Road immediately to the south of the project, are single-story, single-family homes.

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As this figure shows, buildings along Aero Drive are deeply set back from the street. This proposed new zoning would place the building significantly closer to the street than any other building along the south side of Aero Drive, and this project is asking for a setback deviation to be even closer to the street.

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The Kearny Mesa Community Plan Urban Design Element calls for new development to be consistent with the scale and character of surrounding development, and for new buildings to transition to older buildings by providing similar setbacks.

It also calls for vertical step-backs on taller projects, such as Palladium, to avoid abrupt differences in building height, as shown in this illustration from the Community Plan.

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To the south, the project is immediately adjacent to single-story single-family homes. Planning Commission asked the developer to provide increased transition along the east and west elevations to this area. The applicant's response included a two story section that is a mere ten feet long. This is not sufficient transition.

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The revisions the applicant has made to the Sandrock Road elevation, while improving the streetscape, have opened the massive six level parking structure to view from the public right-of-way.

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The proposed density is incompatible with the surrounding neighborhoods in Serra Mesa and Kearny Mesa. Planning Commissioners Golba and Griswold support this position.

The physical structure is 10 times larger than the average building along Aero Drive.

It will have half as much street setback as the next closest building along Aero Drive.

We strongly support a reduction in density to RM-3-7. This would still allow mixed-use, multi-family residential, but will make the project much more compatible with the surrounding community, and address traffic, parking, and water use issues.

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The Mitigated Negative Dec. states the proposed project quote would not result in a visual impact unquote.

It also indicates that the project will not result in substantial alteration to the existing character of the area.

Yet this project will replace four relatively small, deeply set back, one- and two-story buildings with a single, massive, up to 6-story structure, extending into the existing public right-of-way, with a completely new architectural style.

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Our experience with the nearby Serra Mesa-Kearny Mesa library shows the positive outcome from community input. The popular new building represents extensive discussions between the two communities and the architect, Randy Coombs, resulting in a hybrid style that bridges the two neighborhoods. Mr. Coombs and the community have all been very happy with the result.

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The Streetscape Guidelines, which comprise part of the Kearny Mesa Community Plan Amendment, have not been adequately reviewed.

This document will be incorporated into the Community Plan and will require an act of City Council to revise; we need to get these Guidelines right the first time. ~~Only Staff and the applicant had any input during their development,~~ but they will guide all future projects along Aero Drive, which is proposed as corridor for future development.

Commissioner Otsuji had significant concerns with this document, which we feel have not been adequately addressed in the limited time allowed. Without Commissioner Otsuji's support, this project would not have been approved by Planning Commission.

Public review of the Community Plan Amendment has been insufficient, and what has been conducted thus far has identified inconsistencies, inaccuracies, and items incompatible with existing Kearny Mesa plans.

*We have now come to an agreement with the Applicant and Staff to propose continuing these Guidelines into the new year.*

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The Traffic Study indicates that 70% of project traffic will go west on Aero Drive towards the Kearny Villa Road and Mesa College Drive onramps. However, at peak times, this area is heavily congested and we can say from experience that the shortest route, by time, from the project site to Mission Valley is through the neighborhood streets of Serra Mesa.

The Traffic Study failed to study major thoroughfares through Serra Mesa, despite the fact that they are the most likely route for project residents to reach prime destinations in Mission Valley, and for Kearny Mesa residents to reach the schools in Serra Mesa.

The Traffic Study also failed to analyze cumulative impacts, even though that the project is in the center of an area considered to be underutilized and prime for redevelopment (per West Aero Drive Land Use Study).

Additionally, the Traffic Study did not consider, or offer mitigation for, traffic impacts due to construction, which would likely drive traffic off of Aero Drive and onto the neighborhood streets past two schools.

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The Mitigated Negative Declaration is inadequate.  
The CEQA Significance Determination Thresholds were met but not considered.  
An Environmental Impact Report should have been prepared.

The MND and Findings concerns are too numerous to present in this limited time.  
We have detailed them in our booklet, and summarized them in your handout.

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In summary on today's subitems,

We ask you to:

- A: Not certify the MND
- B: Reduce the zoning to rm 3 7
- C: continue CPA
- D: not approve ROW vacation
- E: continue site development permit

We support mixed use and multi-family residential on this site, but this project is inconsistent with the General Plan, the SM and KM Community Plans, and the WADLUS. The proposed setbacks are inadequate. The proposed zoning is inappropriately high. The bulk and scale are out of character for the area.

In short, this project is not ready for approval. Because of its gateway location and it being precedent setting for the rest of the 25 lots, it must be a successful, landmark project. We ask that you continue this project at this time.

Thank you.