

P R E S S R E L E A S E

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Contact: James Feinberg
Community Action Committee of the Serra Mesa Community Council
Website: www.SerraMesa.org
Email: jamesf@PalladiumAtAero.com

Attorney: Craig A. Sherman Office No.: 619-702-7892

Community Group Sues City to Block Oversize Development Near Airport

Serra Mesa Community Demands Better Planning

SAN DIEGO -- The Serra Mesa Community Council filed Friday in California Superior Court seeking to block the conversion of three currently occupied industrial lots into one massive multifamily residential building at the intersection of Aero Drive and Sandrock Road in Kearny Mesa, next to Montgomery Field.

The proposed project, dubbed "Palladium at Aero," would replace four relatively small, deeply set back, one- and two-story buildings with a single, massive, extremely dense structure up to six levels tall, extending into the existing public right-of-way, with an incompatible architectural style.

Palladium at Aero and its nearly completed sister project on Kearny Villa Road, Mirabella (formerly Parkview), are precedent-setting as the first phase of redevelopment of the Aero Drive corridor, according to the West Aero Drive Land Use Study, which was funded by the developer, a partnership of Westcore Properties (www.westcore.net) and Wermers Companies (www.wermerscontractors.com), and prepared by their associate, Latitude 33 (www.latitude33.com). These partners own or have interests in other properties along Aero Drive. This project amends the Kearny Mesa Community Plan to incorporate the West Aero Study and to revise the streetscape along Aero Drive to encourage future conversions.

The Serra Mesa Community Council believes that Palladium at Aero, as approved by the City Council, is not in compliance with the City of San Diego General Plan, the Kearny Mesa Community Plan, the Serra Mesa Community Plan, the California Environmental Quality Act, and the legal prohibition against spot-zoning and piecemeal land use planning.

Palladium at Aero will be significantly taller, wider, and deeper than any nearby building, resulting in a physical structure 10 times larger than the average building along Aero Drive. It will be twice as close to the street as its neighbor, Canyon Pottery. At the corner of Sandrock and Aero, a major entrance to Serra Mesa, the corner of the building will sit in the median of the existing right turn lane. Yet, the City's environmental documents state that the project "would not result in a visual impact," would be compatible with surrounding development in bulk, scale, and style, and would not result in substantial alteration to the existing character of the area.

The project site abuts the residential community of Serra Mesa, and the immediate neighbors are single-story, single-family homes. The residents of Serra Mesa, as represented by the Serra Mesa Planning Group, have attempted to work with the developer to find a compromise solution, but the developer insisted on the out-of-character density, height, and bulk of the project.

The Serra Mesa Planning Group twice recommended against approval of the project to the City of San Diego Planning Commission and again to the San Diego City Council. (The details of these presentations are available at www.palladiumataero.com/documents/) The Planning Commission initially refused to approve the project, and then decided by a single swing vote to recommend approval to City Council after the applicant hastily made significant changes to the design.

In City Council's brief discussion of the project on November 18, Councilmember Donna Frye challenged the density and the environmental impact of the proposal, noting that the project "stands out like a sore thumb" and will set a precedent for every other project along Aero Drive. City Council voted 6-2 to disregard the recommendation of the impacted Community Planning Group and approve the project.

The Serra Mesa Community Council has determined that, without a reduction in density, bulk, and scale, the project will have a tremendous negative impact on the community. Therefore, the community group is now asking a Superior Court judge to overturn the City Council's decision and require the developer to design a project that is in compliance with the City's design standards and the State's environmental laws.

This is not the first time a community group has taken the City of San Diego to court over a massive development project, and the City historically does not do well in the judge's chambers. Recent community victories include Kensington Terrace (www.kensingtonterrace.info) and 301 University (http://members.cox.net/no301/html/no_301.html).

The City of San Diego General Plan calls for new development to integrate with the existing fabric and scale of development in surrounding neighborhoods, and has a goal of ensuring 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 facts and evidence in this case support SMCC's belief that Palladium at Aero does not meet these requirements.

The developer describes the 412 units as "workforce housing," but has indicated that rents will start at a pricey \$1,400 for one-bedroom units and \$1,800 for two-bedroom, two-bath units. Ten percent of the units will be on-site affordable housing.

The developers have retained the services of the Atlantis Group, LLC. Marcela Escobar-Eck, president of Atlantis Group, was formerly Development Services Director for the City of San Diego during the approval of the Sunroad tower, another project in Kearny Mesa near Montgomery Field.

The Serra Mesa Community Council (SMCC) is a volunteer organization that works toward the improvement of the Serra Mesa Community. The SMCC holds monthly meetings that provide information to the community and act as a forum for identifying and solving community problems.

The Community Council is in the midst of a successful campaign to raise the funds necessary to continue to pursue this costly litigation. More information is available online at www.SerraMesa.org under the "Demand Better Planning" button.

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