

# WINNETKA NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL

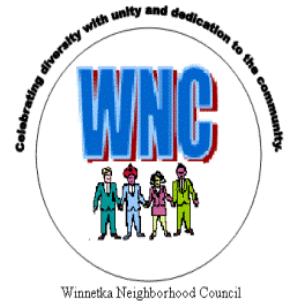
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March 15, 2007

Mr. Dennis P. Zine  
LA City Councilmember CD 3  
200 North Spring Street, Room 450  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Dear Councilmember Zine:

The Winnetka Neighborhood Council (WNC) voted 11-0 to reaffirm our position against the placement of Valley Region Elementary School No. 10 on the grounds of Sutter Middle School at our March 13, 2007 meeting. The WNC has been opposed to this project since its inception and we communicated our concerns in a June 2006 letter to the LAUSD School Board.

The WNC shares many of the same concerns expressed by our stakeholders at two public meetings regarding this project. Among those concerns are:

- Traffic:** The WNC has received numerous complaints from stakeholders in the area regarding congestion. The problem is intensified during drop off and pick up hours. Parents stop short causing blockages along the side streets surrounding Sutter Middle School or double park while their children exit and enter the vehicle. This creates a huge safety problem with children darting in between parked and stopped cars. In addition, Winnetka Ave has developed into a significant thoroughfare with heavy traffic from people heading towards the Orange Line, the Ventura Freeway, Pierce College and the West Valley Occupational Center. Adding more trips will exacerbate the situation and devastate the area. **This issue, while addressed by the EIR, has not been adequately addressed and the mitigation plans are simply not adequate. The EIR only deals with the added problems created by the new school, and fails to address the existing problems at Sutter Middle School. The two are linked and cannot be ignored.**

The traffic study for this particular EIR was conducted on 11/20/05, which was only days away from Thanksgiving. The traffic during this time period would not represent the normal traffic flow for the area. It would already be reduced for the holiday time period. The traffic study should have been conducted during a time period not associated with major holidays, spring, winter, or summer breaks.

In addition, the finding that there would be no significant impact to the Winnetka/Valerio & Valerio/Quakertown Ave locations cannot possibly be correct. Not only does it not address the traffic

flow issues on these streets, it completely fails to address street parking. The study needs to take into account that parents will not just sit idly in cars waiting for their children, but will need a place to park to pick up these younger children. In addition, the study does not take into account assemblies, afterschool meetings and so on that a school generates. The onsite parking will likely support staff and leave very little room for parents.

The EIR also addresses pedestrian safety. The goal seems to be to educate parents and students about which routes are safest. While education of this type is laudable it is not enough to secure the safety of students. Surely parents have been educated to not allow their children to get out of double parked cars and walk in front of and between cars stopped along the adjacent streets. Yet this problem exists and has led to reports of accidents where children were almost hit.

The EIR also calls for the creation of drop off and pick up areas outside of traffic flow areas. The proposed project does create this for students attending the proposed elementary school, but does not address the problem for the existing Middle School. This has been a long standing problem for Sutter to begin with and the new school will only exasperate the problem by increasing density of drop offs along Valerio and Winnetka because middle school children will not be dropped off along Lubao. In addition it did not address the numerous complaints from local homeowners who report private alleys as being used for pick up and drop off of students.

Winnetka Ave and Sherman Way are both very busy streets. While the EIR recommends a crossing guard for the Winnetka/Valerio intersection as a mitigation step, it fails to address the larger (and for smaller children...more dangerous) intersection of Winnetka/Sherman Way and the intersection of Winnetka Ave/Leadwell St, controlled SOLELY by a crossing guard and the main route for students headed to both Sutter Middle School and the new proposed elementary school. Certainly the least the EIR can do is require a crossing guard for this location. Traffic signals are no substitute for children who are younger and less disciplined. In addition these are large intersections and smaller children may not be able to safely cross them in time for light changes.

**The WNC requests that the final EIR address how the impact to the community can be mitigated.**

2. **Safety of the children:** Sutter Middle School has a growing gang and tagger problem. Increasingly we are receiving reports from stakeholders in the community about an increase in tagging activity, some of which is gang related. According the LAPD there is an active tagging gang at Sutter that they have been working to clear out. The Board feels that adding impressionable elementary aged children to this campus, even though they would technically be segregated, would cause them harm by exposing them to negative role models. Nowhere in the EIR or any other report has this issue been adequately addressed.
3. **Adequate space:** At first glance Sutter Middle School has a large footprint. However, the Board and community are extremely concerned that an elementary school at this location would take away vital space used for sports and physical education activity. Again, this has not been addressed by any LAUSD official.
4. **Abundance of seats:** Winnetka has four elementary schools. Within less than two miles of this proposed school there are two elementary schools. Winnetka does not have a need for additional elementary seats. In fact WNC Board member Marilyn Robinson recently reported to our Board that discussion with administrative staff members at Hart St. Elementary indicate that the addition of just four **double** bungalows at that location would relieve the need for year round school schedules and remove the need

for this project. Finally population figures are declining and our population is aging. Why do we need an additional school? This has yet to adequately be addressed by the LAUSD representatives.

While not noted in the initial letter, it has been noted that parents and administrators of Sutter are concerned about the increase in noise levels both from construction (a temporary but real problem) and from normal operation of the proposed school. At the last public meeting it was noted that classrooms will overlook the construction area and playground for the new elementary school. Sutter is an older middle school and would at the very least need to be upgraded in terms of soundproofing so that classes and children's concentration would not be interrupted by a noisy playground.

The WNC implores you to re-evaluate this proposed school and move it to an area of the city that has a greater need of an elementary school. Our Board members and stakeholders have repeatedly stated that the goal should not be to build more schools but to *improve* the quality of education we provide our children at the schools we have. Let's focus on providing books for children to learn from, books in our school libraries, music and enrichment programs, safe after school activities, and decent pay and incentives for our teachers.

In closing, the WNC categorically opposes this school. In addition, the WNC strongly urges the LAUSD School Board to hold the meeting at which this proposed school will be voted upon at Sutter Middle School. The WNC cannot stress enough how vitally important it is for the Board to meet within the community so that the community can have a voice in the decision. Many stakeholders simply cannot attend a meeting downtown during the day. This must be addressed, discussed, and decided among the people that it will ultimately affect. Failure to do so is a clear dereliction and disregard for the duty of a duly elected public official.

Sincerely,



JJ Popowich  
President, WNC

CC:

Antonio Villariagosa, LA City Mayor  
Councilmember Dennis P. Zine  
Marlene Canter, LAUSD School Board Member  
Jean Brown, Local Superintendent  
John Moreno, LAUSD CEQA Project Manager