

Historic Sportsmen's Lodge hotel may be demolished for 520-unit apartment complex

April 3, 2024 3 AM PT Aug. 9, 2021



A rendering of the proposed residential building that would replace the Sportsmen's Lodge hotel.

(Marmol Radziner)

The historic Sportsmen's Lodge in Studio City could be demolished to make way for [a 520-unit residential complex and mixed-used development](#) if the Los Angeles City Council approves the project Wednesday.

Proponents of the development say it would bring much-needed affordable housing that would enable workers to live closer to their jobs.

Opponents say the developers have not sufficiently weighed the project's effects and that it would erase an important piece of history.

The Sportsmen's Lodge hotel permanently closed when the COVID-19 pandemic began. Now, the only active part of the property is the neighboring Shops at Sportsmen's Lodge, which opened in 2021 with retailers including grocery chain Erewhon and the sustainable clothing and shoe store Allbirds. The lodge's event center was demolished to make room for the shops.

Developers have long had designs on the nearly nine-acre property at Ventura Boulevard and Coldwater Canyon Avenue. Best Buy eyed it for a superstore in the '90s. Richard Weintraub, who owned the land at the time, had plans to revamp the lodge in 2009 and reopen it as "Sportsmen's Landing," with a boutique shopping center and modern restaurants. Legal issues with the hotel lease prevented that project from coming to fruition.

In addition to the 520 apartment units, 78 of which would be set aside for low-income tenants, the project would include 46,000 square feet of commercial space. The design would

also include a bike and pedestrian path along the L.A. River.

Erewhon, the Studio City Residents Assn. and Unite Here Local 11, which represents hotel workers, filed appeals with the City Council's Planning and Land Use Management Committee to stop the project, which had been approved by the city Planning Commission in July.

At a meeting earlier this month, the committee denied the appeals, sending the proposal to the full City Council for Wednesday's vote.

"This will bring one of the most important and catalytic developments to this part of the San Fernando Valley," Dave Rand, a lawyer representing the developer, Midwood Investment & Development, said at the meeting. "For years, Ventura Boulevard has been a largely ignored, yet hugely important corridor in the Valley. With this city's unbelievably ambitious housing goals and obligations, the corner of Coldwater and Ventura Boulevard at this site is the perfect location to bring housing, mixed use and river-appropriate fronted development."

The property, which became popular for its trout fishing and bait-and-tackle shop in the 1930s, was first owned by actors Noah and Wallace Beery.

Dancers Peta Siddall and Josie Neglia demonstrate salsa moves before a crowd in the Sportsmen's Lodge in 2001.

(Lawrence K. Ho / Los Angeles Times)

In 1946, the event center and restaurant opened, followed by the 190-room hotel in 1962. In its heyday, Sportsmen's Lodge was a movie studio hangout, and many local residents knew it as a popular venue for weddings, bar mitzvahs, New Year's parties and more.

In recent years, most hotel guests were tourists visiting nearby Universal Studios, but that dried up in the pandemic, and the hotel has been shuttered since then. In 2020, the hotel was a Project Roomkey site, housing people

experiencing homelessness to reduce the spread of the virus.

In 1964, the lodge became the first hotel to unionize in the San Fernando Valley and was one of the first union hotels in Los Angeles. The organizing drive was led by Bill Robertson, a leader in the Los Angeles labor movement.

"We continue to believe that ... the historic hotel is an important remaining link to that history, and therefore should be preserved," Unite Here Local 11 co-President Kurt Petersen said in a written statement.

An Erewhon representative did not respond to a request for comment.

Midwood Investment & Development, which bought the property in 2017, sued Erewhon in 2022, accusing it of failing to pay rent and overusing the retail center's parking lot for its employees.

Erewhon countersued, alleging that Midwood wrongly prohibited Erewhon employees from using the parking lot and that Midwood "induced" Erewhon to lease a space in the proposed shopping center.

Amy Minter, an attorney for the Studio City Residents Assn., said the association doesn't want to kill the Sportsmen's Lodge project but to reduce its height and lessen the

construction effects.

Across the L.A. River, Harvard-Westlake school is [building an athletic campus](#) on a former golf course.

The cumulative effects of both projects are a big concern, Minter said — not only air quality and construction noise but also the loss of mature trees.

"The Residents Association doesn't want there to not be a project," Minter said. "They just want this project revised, to mitigate the impacts to the community and to come into closer alignment with existing standards for the neighborhood."

The residential building will be 97 feet tall, while the tallest building in the area is 56 feet.

"It's just way out of proportion with everything else in the area," Minter said.

Rand, the attorney for the developer, said the project received a density bonus to raise the height beyond the usual 30 feet, which can only be denied if there is a "quantifiable and identifiable health and human safety risk."

Crispin Carrasco, who lives near the proposed project and is a member of the Western States Regional Council of Carpenters, said the council supports the development

because Midwood has said it will work with contractors who will hire local carpenters.

Stella Stahl, communications director for Councilmember Nithya Raman's office, said Raman has not yet taken an official position on the project.

At the committee meeting, Mashel Majid, Raman's deputy chief of staff, said that the development will not significantly affect the area and that Raman's office is "committed to supporting housing projects." But Majid expressed disappointment that the historic hotel would be demolished.

"Because this project is on private property and dictated by state laws that protect the ability for this site to build housing, the city, unfortunately, cannot require that the hotel remain," she said.