

7-ELEVEN PULLS PLUG

Applicant felt appeal for permit had little chance of passing

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In the hot seat

Erick Vasquez and Jenny Valadez push Caleb Barba down Sunset Boulevard in Hollywood near the 9 mile mark of the Los Angeles Marathon on Sunday. The trio rolled their way through the 26.2 mile race in 7 hours 10 minutes. Story and photos on page 4.

COURIER photo/Steven Felschundneff

7-Eleven appeal withdraws appeal for permit

It's official. There will be no 7-Eleven at the corner of Mills Avenue and Foothill Boulevard.

After the Planning Commission denied them a conditional use permit, the business applicant filed an appeal on the decision, setting up a final showdown between the applicant and a largely hostile neighborhood scheduled for last night's city council meeting.

But on Monday night, Community Development Director Tony Witt received an email from the busi-

ness applicant informing the city they were withdrawing their appeal of the Planning Commission decision. The commission decision now stands.

When asked, Mr. Witt said the applicant gave no indication as to why they were withdrawing the appeal. A representative from 7-Eleven did not return requests for comment.

"I have not talked to [the applicant] so I don't know what information they were acting on, but I guess they saw their chances of reversing the decision as non-existent and that caused them to not proceed [with the appeal]," Councilmember Peter Yao said.

Residents were planning to attend Tuesday night's city council meeting in full force to voice their opposition to the business. Many were happy to hear the appeal had been withdrawn.

"That's very good news," said resident Pat Kuenning. "A 24/7 business is not the right business for that area. Since you can no longer enter the lot from Foothill Boulevard, we need a business that pedestrians and vehicles can access safely. I'd like to see a little restaurant, a cafe or something along those lines."

— Tony Krickl

Renovated auditorium becomes multipurpose venue

The renovation to what was once known as the Avery Auditorium has been completed.

Updated for the 21st century, the George C.S. Benson Auditorium will now be quite a sought after venue on campus as the 4500 square foot, 315-seat capacity auditorium will host classes, lectures, panel discussions and concerts.

"I'm so pleased with how the project came out," said Pitzer College President Laura Trombley. "It's important for the institution because it opens up all sorts of opportunities for us. This far surpassed all of our expectations and we've already been receiving all kinds of requests from the faculty to use the space."

Located inside Avery Hall, the renovated auditorium cost Pitzer College approximately \$5 million. As a result of the renovation, the auditorium has grown from its original size of 3000 square feet.

Benson Auditorium was originally built as Avery Auditorium in 1969. The name of the auditorium was changed in 2008 when Pitzer College supporter Robert Day donated \$3 million towards the renovation project and requested the renovated venue be named after founding Pitzer College trustee George Benson. The construction project began the same year.

"George Benson was a dear friend and a great leader," Mr. Day said in a statement following his donation to Pitzer. "The quality of student life was one of George's great passions and I know he would be very excited by this project and Brenda Levin's design."



COURIER photos/Steven Felschundneff

Pitzer College President Laura Trombley sits in the front row of the new George C.S. Benson Auditorium at the college. The new design includes an existing mural by artist Paul Botello, left, that used to be on the building's exterior.



Brenda Levin of Levin & Associates Architects in Los Angeles was the lead person on the project. The architect said the biggest challenge was creating a new space within the frame of the original structure.

"We were going for sustainability in that we maintained the envelope of the building but created a new inside," Ms. Levin said. "We had the entire room stripped to its structural frame so everything inside is new."

Inside the Benson Auditorium now exists clear stained maple, sand blasted glass with Pitzer logo leaf abstractions, stage flaps that fold out into whiteboards and an atrium that can be used as a lobby, meeting area or performance space, and a 600 square foot stage. Technological additions include a new Dolby Digital 5.1 surround sound system, a nearly 20-foot projection screen, wireless technology, and BluRay and HD capabilities.

The auditorium also contains several "green" features such as the use of recycled content in the walls, a white reflective cool roof, LED lighting for illumination and drought tolerant landscaping.

"This has enabled the college to have a premiere multipurpose facility on campus," Ms. Levin said. "We were trying to create an environment that could be used for all purposes, from academic presentations to a Dalai Lama visit."

The renovation has been just one step in a series of upgrades Pitzer College has experienced the last few

years. The school debuted 3 new residence halls (Atherton Hall, Sanborn Hall, Pitzer Hall) in 2007, the Pit Stop Café in the fall of 2009 and plans to complete a recreation area south of the Benson Auditorium in time for this year's commencement ceremony in May.

According to President Trombley, the Pit Stop Café has become a popular daily hangout for students and faculty alike due to its location being at the center point of many classrooms and administrative services on the west part of campus.

"This is something that people have asked about for years," she said. "We have a great cafeteria and we have the Grove House, but faculty and students have asked for a place on the western side of campus where they can go to grab something to eat or get a coffee."

The Benson Auditorium's first special event will be held this Saturday at 8 p.m. when Folk Music Center Ellen Harper and Pitzer U.S. History professor Stuart McConnell will team up to put on a concert featuring contemporary musicians working in and extending the traditions of protest artists. Located at 1050 N. Mills Ave., the event is part of Pitzer College Munroe Center for Social Inquiry's semester long program, Capitalism in Question. The concert is free to the public.

"Right now, we're going to have a limited number of events because we are still learning the facility but come this fall, we have more events scheduled," President Trombley explained. "There is no facility like it in Claremont."

—Landus Rigsby