

Noise, Light, Market Values: Costco's Magical Wall

An applicant must prove that the proposed use “Will cause no objectionable noise, vibrations, fumes, odors, dust, illumination, glare, or physical activity at the subject site” (Sec. 59-G-1.2.1(a)(4)). The same subsection of the standards also requires the applicant to show that its use will not adversely affect the use, peaceful enjoyment, economic value or development of surrounding properties or the general neighborhood at the subject site.

Costco originally a wall to address numerous aspects of those requirements: placed on the outer edge of the ring road, starting at 14 feet high by the store's loading docks and tapering to eight feet as it continued around the corner of the mall, ending near the swim club. The wall, it said, would be high enough to block light from the cars, station, or store from shining into neighbors' second floor bedrooms (many of which are at ring road level).

The wall would also, Costco's studies claimed, be high enough, long enough, and thick enough, to block virtually any additional noise from the station or the loading docks from intruding on the neighbors as well as blocking any views of the station. Finally, the wall was to be a landscaped “green wall” that would “improve” the view towards the mall for the neighbors.

According to Costco's marketing analyst, based on what Costco told him would be the effect of the wall, the station would have no adverse impacts on the neighbors and in fact, they would be *better* off due to the added landscaping. If there were any effects on market values, they would all come from the existing mall and *nothing* could be attributed to the station.

Sounds great, doesn't it? Only a couple of problems:

First, the calculations on noise, smell, and the like appear to be based on much smaller numbers of cars using the station than we believe are accurate. We'll have to wait for the updated studies for the new application, which we expect may change the numbers. We'll update this report after that. (And, we can use help from anyone who is familiar with these sorts of traffic issues to help us read these reports!)

Second, the notion that an offensive structure with a wall is *better* than no structure at all violates common sense. And any real estate agent will tell you that buyers aren't always persuaded by “oh, don't worry, that problem has been completely solved!”

Third, we're still waiting to find out what they are proposing for this wall. We've heard hints that they may be planning to cut back on the original proposal, but that will mean they have to redo all of these studies on the neighborhood impacts. Again, we'll have to wait and see.

Last, and most important, Westfield already promised to build this wall in order to convince the County to give them the \$4 million construction subsidy *for the store*. So, we don't need the station to get the wall. In fact, County Executive Ike Leggett, Director of Economic Development Steve Silverman – when are you going to follow up?