

November 10, 2023

Adrian Gallo

Planning & Development Services

8300 Santa Monica Blvd

West Hollywood, CA 90069

Adrian,

I am writing this letter to voice my unmitigated support for chef Aitor Zabala and his efforts to build a world-class restaurant in the City of West Hollywood, CA.

My backing of Aitor and his project is driven by three primary factors: i) Aitor is an unbelievable human being who has focused on the best outcomes and support for his cooks and teams, ii) Aitor has the talent to bring international recognition and prestige to the City of West Hollywood from sources such as Michelin and World's 50 best, and iii) West Hollywood food and beverage sales have vastly underperformed since COVID and without more and better venues, this performance gap will never resolve, costing the City visitors, tax revenues and in the longer term materially reducing property values.

1) Aitor is an Unbelievable Human Being

I have known Aitor for nearly 15 years. He is honest, hard-working, passionate, and generous. He came to the United States as a Hispanic immigrant with no money and barely any English but through his immense talent, effort and heart became one of the most talented chefs in the world. And like his mentor Jose Andres, through this success he has taken it upon himself to pay it forward to the team members who have worked with him along the way. To highlight this passion for his teams I will provide three examples.

- In August 2020 The New York Times published an article entitled **Twilight of the Imperial Chef** which used Aitor and his amazing treatment of his team as a counter example to how star chefs historically did not treat people well including, "When I asked him [Aitor] in an email about the design, Mr. Zabala replied that he wanted the whole team to feel connected to the restaurant, and responsible for its experience. He explained that it's part of why meals at Somni include a service charge, and why all employees both contribute to service and share in those earnings. A menu is just a menu, but I found this one a tiny, eloquent gesture, urging diners to consider the restaurant as a whole — a collective — with so many people at work beyond the chef."
- Aitor's focus on his team has not just been about recognition but also compensation. Somni's service model included a service fee in lieu of a tip. Because the restaurant was counter-driven (think a sushi bar) and without significant front of house employees this fee was predominantly split between the back of house hourly team of the restaurant. At the

time cooks in Los Angeles were generally making less than \$20 per hour (less than \$40,000 per year), whereas the average cook at Somni was making approximately \$70,000 plus benefits.

- When the pandemic struck and Somni was forced to close, the hotel where the restaurant was based furloughed/laid off Aitor's team. When one of his regular customers at Somni offered to help Aitor with money, instead of taking it for himself, he gave it all to his team. Aitor is not and was not rich and the money would have provided him with much needed support, but he put his team first.

2) Aitor's Project will Bring Recognition and Prestige to West Hollywood

At Somni, Aitor earned two stars from the Michelin guide just 14 months after the restaurant's opening. This is an unbelievable accomplishment with most new restaurants requiring years to reach two stars even if they deserve it day one. Aitor was also recognized as the number 8 ranked chef in the world by the Best Chef Awards in 2020 (number 2 ranked chef in the United States) before the closing of Somni for COVID shortly thereafter.

With his new project in West Hollywood, Aitor will look to elevate his experience even more to achieve three Michelin star status. He will also target recognition within San Pellegrino's World's 50 Best. Having trained for five years under Ferran Adria at el Bulli (five times the #1 restaurant in the world) and 10 years under Jose Andres (James Beard Outstanding Chef), and as an immigrant who pulled himself up by his bootstraps, Aitor has a unique skill set and a unique story that will propel him to reach these goals. This will also be aided by using the name Somni at his new West Hollywood restaurant. By retaining the name Somni and Aitor as chef, Michelin will approach the restaurant as an extension of Aitor's prior operations, accelerating the star process versus a greenfield project.

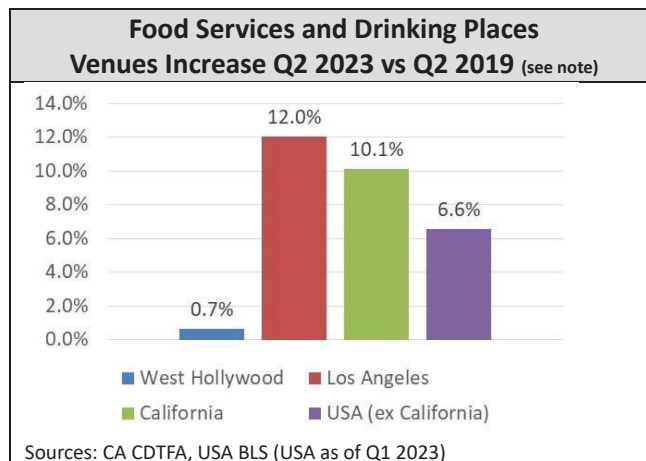
Currently the City of West Hollywood has just one restaurant with Michelin star recognition. Further, the overall Los Angeles MSA has never had a restaurant earn three Michelin stars or receive World's 50 Best status. Achieving one or both will bring unparalleled recognition and prestige to West Hollywood.

3) West Hollywood Food and Beverage Sales have Materially Underperformed Since COVID

West Hollywood food and beverage sales underperformance has been staggering since COVID. As shown in the chart below, during Q2 2023 (the latest data available as of November 8, 2023), West Hollywood underperformed Los Angeles City (-5.7%), The State of California (-13.9%), and the United States (ex: California, -36.3%) in sales performance vs the equivalent pre-COVID quarter (Q2 2019).



On a number of venues basis, West Hollywood’s performance has been even worse versus Los Angeles (-11.4%) and the State of California (-9.5%) while also trailing the United States (ex: California, -5.9% - note USA figures is as of Q1 which is latest available). Whereas Los Angeles has added 12.0% to its food service and drinking places venue count between Q2 2019 and Q2 2023, the State of California added more than 10%, the City of West Hollywood is up just 0.7%.

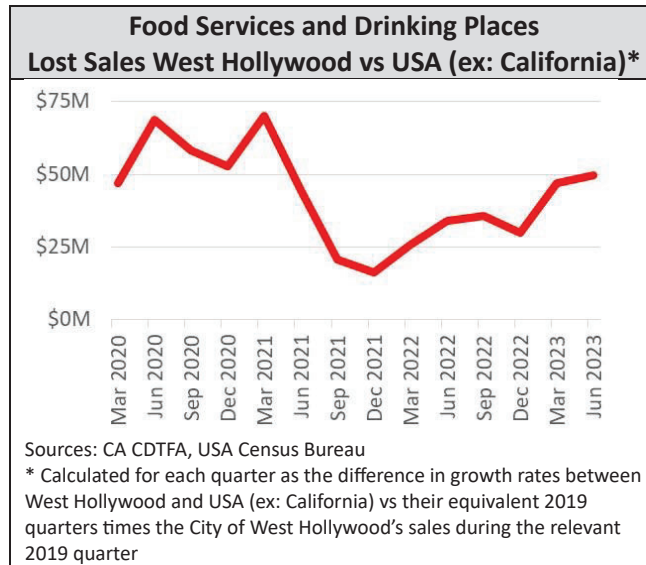


These figures are even worse cumulatively.

If the City’s Food Services and Drinking Places had performed at the same level as the United States (ex: California) between the beginning of 2020 and June 2023, over **\$600 million** of additional food and beverage sales would have been generated. This has cost the City of West Hollywood directly over \$4.5 million in sales taxes (0.75%), the County over \$21 million (3.5%) and the State of California over \$36 million (6.0%). Let that sink in, \$4.5 million less of sales taxes for the City of West Hollywood based solely on Food and Beverage underperformance since COVID.

The situation is not getting better. As shown in the chart following, the City’s underperformance in food and beverage sales has been increasing steadily since Q4 2021 from a low of \$16 million in Q4 2021 to now almost \$50 million in Q2 2023. We should also anticipate that these figures

will continue to get worse as the impact on restaurants from the WGA and SAG-AFTRA strikes will likely increase in Q3 (the WGA strike began on May 2, 2023 and ended September 27, 2023 and the SAG-AFTRA strike began on July 14, 2023 and ended in early November).



Based on Q2 2023, food and beverage underperformance is costing the City of West Hollywood ~\$0.37M in sales tax every quarter (plus an additional \$4.73M every quarter that would go to the County and State).

The scale of the problem is not something that will resolve itself and will instead require dedicated action including adding more and better food and beverage venues within the City of West Hollywood. Aitor's project specifically is one that should be supported in closing this gap huge. And, based on the uniqueness of the experience that Aitor will be providing, there is no comparable venue in West Hollywood that will be cannibalized when Aitor opens, instead it will no doubt increase visitation, hotel and nearby business performance.

Conclusion

After reviewing the clear facts of the project i) it is led by an amazing human being ii) it will bring international recognition and prestige to West Hollywood, and iii) it will drive much needed incremental food and beverage sales revenue to the City of West Hollywood, my opinion is that the City should not be asking Aitor why his project deserves to exist, or what hours he deserves to be open and able to serve alcohol to his guests, but instead selling Aitor on why the City of West Hollywood deserves to have his business.

The City of West Hollywood should be doing everything in its power to aid Aitor in Somni's opening. No roadblocks, delays, conservative code interpretations, technicalities like most restaurateurs trying to open in the City of West Hollywood experience and broadcast within the larger Los Angeles restaurant community, but instead an easy, shepherded, and quick process that rewards Aitor for the benefits that Somni will bring to West Hollywood and gives the

restaurant the operational latitude to best serve their guests and build their business. If the City of West Hollywood is unable to get fully and without condition behind this project, something is dreadfully wrong.

Best Regards,

Saul Cooperstein

saul cooperstein

Letters

1 message

aitor lozano zabala <aitor@feedyourdreams.la>
To: Mark Lehman <mark@marklehmanesq.com>

Fri, Nov 10, 2023 at 10:45 AM



To: Honorable Director of Community Development and Planner Adrian Gallo

Re: Support for APA 23-0004 Somni2 at 9045 Nemo Street, West Hollywood, CA

My name is Chef José Andrés, and I am a well-known international restaurateur, 4 Michelin star recipient and business owner in L.A. I have owned and managed several restaurants in the area for many years and currently own and manage two restaurants out of the Conrad Hotel. My company owns over 35 locales worldwide and is proud to be one of the premier restaurant companies in the country.

I fully support Chef Aitor Zabala's new restaurant Somni2's application for an Administrative Permit **APA 23-0004** ("AP") which will allow outdoor restaurant operations, including the service of alcoholic beverages and low-level ambient music until 2:00 a.m. daily at their new premises located at 9045 Nemo Street, West Hollywood, CA.

Chef Aitor has formidable experience and is widely renown as a top-rated chef whose most recent Los Angeles endeavor Somni earned 2 Michelin stars. Somni2 will be the first of its kind, fine dining establishment focusing on a small-scale tasting menu concept which is not otherwise available in West Hollywood.

Somni 2 will be meticulously designed and include a small main patron chef's dining counter, a separate private dining room, a space featuring stellar wine selections, a front gallery featuring rotating art installations, an outdoor entry host area and a dining patio under the leafy tree enhanced landscaping. The many existing mature trees onsite will be retained, improved, and nurtured. To ensure that ambient music is not heard by neighbors, the sound system will focus all sound on the interior of the outdoor courtyard.

The kitchen and back of the house areas, the existing structures and back wall on the premises fully enclose the outdoor dining patio, further buffering sound and preventing noise from traveling outside the site. Given that the ambient low level music inside and outside should not be audible outside the Premises, and the true asset Somni2 will be to the community I fully support granting Somni2's AP to allow outdoor dining with alcohol service until the usual 2:00 a.m. closing time.

In view thereof, we respectfully request that Stache's applications be approved. Thank you.



José Andrés

¡José Andrés
Group!

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 **9045 Nemo Street.pdf**
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PHILLIPS

October 19, 2023

Adrian Gallo
The Honorable Director of Community Development and Planner
City of West Hollywood

Re: Public Meeting for APA 23-0004 Somni2 at 9045 Nemo Street, West Hollywood, CA

I am the Director of Phillips Auction's Los Angeles office and gallery located at 9041 Nemo Street, adjacent to 9045 Nemo Street. We have had a lease at our space for five years, and opened our gallery to the public in October of 2022. Over the past year, we have had several events during the evening at our space, during which hundreds of people were present over a three to five hour period, usually between 5 pm and 10 pm. Our space includes an outdoor patio in the back area of our space along Willey Lane, and we have served light snacks and beverages in this patio during our events. We have not received any complaints from neighbors, businesses or the city for any of our events.

In fact, rather than an issue of too much noise or business, Nemo street has suffered in the past several years from the opposite issue, a lack of business while our location was under construction, and Donna Karan's Urban Zen closed a few years ago at 9045 Nemo Street, not to mention the failure of the pizza business at the end of Nemo, and the continued lack of development across the street at the large Melrose triangle area. This decrease in business activity has led to an increase in the homeless population taking up residency along spots of Nemo Street (including at our front door before we opened) and a general feeling of malaise due to the lack of foot traffic that resulted from the business closures. Our street needs an increase in customer traffic, not a decrease.

Therefore, I fully support Chef Aitor Zabala's new restaurant Somni2's application for an Administrative Permit APA 23-0004 ("AP") which will allow outdoor restaurant operations, including the service of alcoholic beverages at their new premises located at 9045 Nemo Street, the former home of Donna Karan's Urban Zen. Chef Aitor's reputation and previous success (his Somni in LA received two Michelin stars) will bring a sophisticated audience to the area, making Nemo Street a destination in West Hollywood. My understanding is that Somni2 will be a small scale tasting menu concept, seating a small number of guests for a single sitting each night. This will be a committed and decidedly non-rowdy group of people who will be there for a special dining experience. This is the type of business that is not only essential to the future of Nemo Street, it is essential to the present and future of West Hollywood.

Sincerely,

Blake Koh
Senior Vice President
Director, Phillips Los Angeles
9041 Nemo Street, West Hollywood

Dominic Gray

From: Adrian Gallo
Sent: Friday, November 10, 2023 12:11 PM
To: Dominic Gray
Cc: David Gillig
Subject: Fwd: Item 5A: 11/14 Meeting re: Somni

Additional correspondence for the DH.

-Adrian

Begin forwarded message:

From: Jim Banks <banks90069@yahoo.com>
Date: November 10, 2023 at 11:47:36 AM PST
To: Nick Maricich <Nmaricich@weho.org>
Cc: Adrian Gallo <AGallo@weho.org>, Bobbie Edrick <bobbieace@aol.com>
Subject: Item 5A: 11/14 Meeting re: Somni

You don't often get email from banks90069@yahoo.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

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Re: Item 5A Community Development Meeting 11/14

Dear Commissioner Maricich,

As co-captains of the Norma Triangle Neighborhood, Bobbie Edrick and I had the pleasure of meeting Chef Aitor at the site of his new restaurant, Somni, on Nemo Street here in the Triangle.

Somni will be a highly desirable, small scale, high-end restaurant that will be a true gem for our city.

Chef Aitor's plan is to create an intimate, tastefully designed space surrounded by mature trees. The restaurant will have a maximum seating capacity of only 20 people on any given night where the clientele will enjoy a sophisticated culinary experience.

We understand that a sound demonstration will be required before the restaurant opens. After listening to Chef Aitor's concept for the new restaurant, we feel confident that there will not be any potential for sound intrusion to the surround neighbors as the courtyard is surround by walls, mature trees and existing building with no residential windows facing south to the site. And along with his concept for a sophisticated experience, we believe the concept is perfect for this site and we further believe Chef Aitor and Somni will be great neighbors.

Chef Aitor will be making beautifully designed improvements to the property which will benefit everyone in the community.

On behalf of the Norma Triangle Neighborhood, we welcome Chef Aitor and Somni into the neighborhood!

Best,
Jim Banks & Bobbie Edrick
Co-Captains, Norma Triangle Neighborhood