

## BEL AIR PRESCHOOL CONSTRUCTION PROJECT KICKS UP DUST

The Brentwood Residents Coalition and Bel Air Skycrest Property Owners Association oppose the construction of the Bel Air Preschool, saying it will increase traffic and noise in the area.

By [Newly Paul](#) | September 19, 2010

The Bel Air Preschool, an offshoot of the Bel Air Presbyterian Church, has proposed to build a new multi-million dollar preschool on Mulholland Drive, between Brentwood and Encino. The project, currently in its initial stages, drew flak from some residents who said it would increase traffic congestion and noise in a primarily residential area.

In a letter to the Zoning Administrator, Maya Zaitzevsky, representatives of the Brentwood Residents Coalition and Skycrest Property Owners Association stated their main objections to the project in August.

These included the proximity of the project site to the Bel Air Skycrest residential community; the fact that the proposed preschool makes allowances for a 4,500 sq ft gathering room, 3,500 sq ft of administrative offices and large outdoor facilities, which residents feel "are clearly designed to accommodate more than a 155-student preschool" and the "significant adverse noise, light, parking and traffic impacts," of the school.

The letter objected to the operation of the school as a multi-use facility where the church planned to hold "hundreds of evening and weekend events annually, having nothing to do with preschool use", and stated that the Bel Air Church was "a destination church and a destination preschool", which don't serve the local community.

Jeffrey Ebenstein, field deputy for Councilman Paul Koretz, said the City takes residents' concerns very seriously. "We want to hear all the concerns and address them individually on a case-by-case basis," he said.

According to Ebenstein, the school had been asked to scale down the number of extracurricular activities they had planned to organize on the campus. "Originally they had selected a large amount of night and weekend activities and they scaled that down drastically to be more respectful to the neighbors," said Ebenstein. "We also asked the school for a plan check review and the city will review the progress of this with the Encino and Brentwood Homeowners Associations, to ensure that the preschool follows the rules and is respectful of the neighbors' concerns."

Andrea Petsche, executive director of the preschool—which is currently operating about 300 to 400 yards from the proposed site—said students from the school routinely get admitted into public and private schools in the neighborhood and all over Los Angeles. "We have fed into some of the most competitive and prestigious schools in our 32 years history, like the Westland, Buckley, Curtis schools, and Roscomare Road Public School," Petsche said.

She said the new preschool will not create any significant impacts to nearby residents because it would simply replace a larger middle school, which operated on that land for more than 20 years. "This is just a relocation of the preschool just a few hundred yards away, so I don't believe that the environmental claims are significant," she said.

Roy Marshall from the Bel Air Presbyterian Church, who is also the project manager, said the church draws people from the neighborhood as well as San Fernando Valley and West Los Angeles. "It will be helpful to have some of the church meetings at the preschool because it has a large meeting room which is to be used for large functions like parent teacher nights, and can accommodate a couple hundred people," said Marshall. He said it would also be practical to hold the church's Sunday school classes (about 50 students) at the pre school.

According to Marshall, the plan allowed for features that would lessen noise from the school. "We have plans that show we are going to heavily landscape the border of the school nearest the residential area with trees," he said. "During construction we have planned on putting acoustical panels along the property line to reduce noise."

Another issue of concern for the residents was the route that would be taken to haul construction materials to the building site. However, the route will only be addressed in the future if the project is approved.

"We want to make sure that there is neighborhood protection, but that there is also a chance for a responsible, respectful educational institution to conduct its activities smoothly," said Ebenstein. "We don't want to put so many restrictions on the institution so as to ultimately kill a church and a school that have been a fabulous institution for the community for so many years."

Currently the project is under consideration with the Zoning Administrator, Maya Zaitzevsky. It was presented to her at a hearing on August 18, and Zaitzevsky left the record open for 30 days to allow time to gather additional information in order to make a decision.

Do you think the Bel Air Preschool should be allowed to follow through with their project?