

Plan Approval Findings - Continuation of Previously Granted Variance (No Term Limit)

ZA-2015-3895-ZV | 18731, 18743, 18757 Topham St. & 18800 Calvert St., Los Angeles, CA

Date: September 10, 2025

Executive Summary

The applicant requests Plan Approval to continue, without a term limit, the previously granted variance (ZA-2015-3895-ZV, effective 2016) authorizing the existing, long-standing family-run operations across the subject parcels. No new construction, floor area, or operational intensification is proposed. The request preserves all prior operating parameters, conditions of approval, and best practices that have guided the use for decades.

Project Description & Scope (Unchanged Use)

- Continue the previously authorized use on each parcel exactly as granted in 2016, with no intensification.
- Maintain all operative conditions of approval (screening, hours, routing/ingress-egress, no non-routine repairs).
- Provide regulatory certainty by converting the prior 10-year term to a continuing authorization via Plan Approval.

Site & Operations Snapshot

The subject consists of three contiguous RA-zoned parcels functioning cohesively (approximately 2.3 acres total) with frontage on Topham Street and Calvert Street. Operations are oriented away from the most sensitive residential edges and are buffered by mature screening and fencing. The corridor to the south includes established non-residential uses; to the north and east are low-density residential and institutional uses with intervening buffers.

Family Legacy & Good-Neighbor Record

This is a multi-decade, family-run, generational business. The applicant's objective is to preserve a livelihood built over time, to remain a dependable neighbor, and to leave a positive legacy for the surrounding community. The operation has relied on successive City approvals dating back to the mid-1990s and has implemented screening, housekeeping, and routing practices that protect neighborhood character. The request does not expand rights; it simply removes an arbitrary expiration while keeping all protections intact.

- On-site management presence and a single point of contact for neighbors.
- Perimeter maintenance: annual landscape refresh; repair damaged fencing promptly.

- Traffic discipline: maintain identical hours and routing as previously conditioned (for example, ingress/egress limited as before).
- Operations: no non-routine repairs; housekeeping to control dust, noise, and visual clutter.
- Compliance: maintain a simple complaint log and make available to Planning upon request.

Legally Required Findings (LAMC Sec. 12.27 / Charter Sec. 562) - Expanded Discussion

1. Strict application would result in practical difficulties or unnecessary hardships inconsistent with the intent of the Code.

The multi-parcel, long-established contractor/trucking yard fulfills specialized functional needs, including equipment staging, outdoor storage, and caretaker oversight, that cannot reasonably be replicated on typical RA-zoned lots. A literal application of the base zoning would effectively compel relocation to scarce, cost-prohibitive industrial acreage despite the City's prior determinations that the use is compatible here under tailored conditions. The hardship is not self-created: the use has existed for decades in reliance on City approvals, and the current request proposes no expansion. Converting the term-limited grant to a continuing authorization removes repetitive, purely procedural re-filings that create uncertainty without public benefit, while preserving all substantive protections (no intensification; screening; limited hours; controlled routing). This approach furthers the ordinance's purposes of equity, compatibility, and predictability.

2. Special circumstances (size, shape, topography, location, surroundings) unique to the property.

The subject is an unusually large (approximately 2.3-acre) assembly of three contiguous RA parcels with dual frontages, interior cross-access, mature screening, and adjacency to a corridor of non-residential activity to the south. Buildings and access are oriented to limit exposure to sensitive edges. These physical and locational traits, recognized in prior City determinations, are atypical of ordinary RA lots in the vicinity and continue to justify tailored relief without expanding the use.

3. Necessary to preserve a substantial property right enjoyed by similar properties in the zone and vicinity.

Comparable non-residential yards and plant nurseries in the broader vicinity operate pursuant to variances, conditional uses, or legal nonconforming rights. Continuation here ensures parity rather than preference. Denial would uniquely burden this family-run operation despite its proven compatibility and history of approvals. Granting a continuing authorization preserves a reasonable, long-standing use, sustains local employment and services, and avoids the churn of serial term renewals that do not correspond to any physical change.

4. Not materially detrimental to public welfare or injurious to property or improvements in the vicinity.

The prior grant imposed conditions addressing hours, ingress/egress, screening, and limits on activity (including no non-routine repairs). Those conditions remain operative; no expansion is proposed. The operation is screened from public view, circulation is controlled, and caretaker oversight is provided. There is no evidence in the record of material detriment under the conditioned framework, and the Zoning Administrator retains authority to refine conditions should circumstances change, further protecting public welfare.

5. Consistent with and not adverse to any element of the General Plan.

The request aligns with Framework policies that support retention of viable local businesses and employment while maintaining compatibility with adjacent residential areas. The Community Plan designations remain unchanged; no intensification or physical expansion is proposed; and the prior environmental conclusions continue to apply. Maintaining a well-managed, screened operation with limited hours and controlled routing does not adversely affect land use, circulation, conservation, or neighborhood character policies.

Conditions Reaffirmation (No Intensification)

- All conditions from the 2016 approval remain in effect unless modified by the Zoning Administrator.
- No increase in vehicle counts, equipment, or operational intensity beyond previously authorized levels.
- Maintain screening, hours, routing/ingress-egress, and the prohibition on non-routine repairs.
- Maintain a neighbor contact protocol and complaint log available to Planning upon request.

Conclusion

For nearly three decades, the City and community stakeholders have recognized the site's unique conditions and the appropriateness of a strictly conditioned contractor/trucking yard at this location. A continuing Plan Approval with no term limit maintains all protections, avoids repetitive filings, and provides stability for a family-run, generational business intent on leaving a positive neighborhood legacy. Approval is warranted.

September 11, 2025
Office of Zoning Administration
Los Angeles City Planning
200 N. Spring Street, 7th Floor
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Re: Plan Approval - Request to Remove Time Limitation in Condition 8
Case: ZA-2015-3895(ZV)
Addresses: 18731, 18743, 18757 Topham Street & 18800 Calvert Street, Los Angeles, CA

Dear Zoning Administrator,

I write on behalf of the owners and operators of the above properties to respectfully request a Plan Approval that removes the 10-year term requirement set forth in Condition 8 of the prior variance determination issued in 2016. All other conditions, operating parameters, and limitations would remain fully in effect. This request seeks only to delete the requirement to return every decade for a new authorization. The record shows that a term limit is unnecessary to protect the public interest and, in practice, imposes uncertainty and cost without proportional public benefit.

For nearly three decades, this site has been home to a family-run, generational business that provides steady employment and reliable landscape-contracting services to the San Fernando Valley. The business has operated responsibly and transparently, with on-site oversight, mature screening and fencing, disciplined circulation, and the same no-intensification operating profile that City Planning previously approved. In 2016, the public record reflected neighborhood support, acknowledgment by the Council District that the operation is innocuous, and findings of no material detriment under tailored conditions. Those facts remain true today, and the applicant continues to be a good neighbor to adjacent and nearby stakeholders.

The purpose of a time-limited condition is typically to provide a check-in where circumstances are unsettled or a use is evolving. Here, the opposite is true. The use is stable, conditioned, and not expanding; and the same protective measures that safeguarded compatibility then remain the operating backbone now: limited hours, ingress and egress controls, prohibition on non-routine repairs, and no intensification. Moreover, the Zoning Administrator already retains authority to convene a plan approval or impose corrective measures should verified complaints arise or conditions change. In other words, performance-based oversight already exists; a fixed calendar return is redundant.

Requiring a family business to re-entitle every ten years creates avoidable uncertainty for long-term planning, equipment financing, and intergenerational succession. My client intends to leave the business to his children without episodic entitlement risk unrelated to performance on the ground. Eliminating the sunset while preserving all substantive limits provides the

predictability needed for a smooth generational handoff without diluting any neighborhood protections.

The request is also consistent with the General Plan direction to retain viable local businesses and the jobs they support while safeguarding neighborhood character. Removal of the term does not alter land-use designations, intensify activity, or introduce new environmental effects; it simply ends a procedural cycle that neither advances compatibility nor measurably improves public safety or welfare.

To be clear, we are not asking to relax conditions, expand rights, or change how the site operates. We are asking only to replace a calendar-based condition with the City's existing performance tools. If the Department ever finds substantial evidence of non-compliance, it can notice a plan approval hearing and calibrate conditions at that time. That flexible, performance-triggered tool is superior to a hard-dated return that arrives regardless of actual performance.

For these reasons, we respectfully request that the Plan Approval: (1) delete Condition 8s 10-year term language from the 2016 determination; and (2) state that the grant continues in effect subject to all existing conditions, with the Zoning Administrator retaining authority to require a plan approval hearing upon verified complaints or material non-compliance. This preserves every substantive neighborhood protection while avoiding repetitive filings and uncertainty. It honors three decades of responsible stewardship at this address and enables a positive legacy for the next generation.

Thank you for your consideration. I am available at any time to answer questions, provide additional documentation, or meet with staff.

Respectfully submitted,

Enrique Pardo

Agent for Owner | Pardo Landuse Consultants

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