

September 11, 2024

The Town of Yucca Valley
Community Development / Public Works Department
58928 Business Center Dr., Yucca Valley, California 92284

RE: YVML Art Studio and Residency
56885 Sunflower Drive

Dear Mr. Willoughby,

Thank you for your pre-submittal comments on May 2, 2024, regarding Ms. Schwegler's art studio and residency project at 56885 Sunflower Drive. We've carefully reviewed the DRC comments and would like to address some key points.

Scope of Work:

Please note that we're not proposing a new building. Instead, we plan to rebuild the existing industrial building due to significant damage. The existing structure has deteriorated over time due to structural deficiencies, lack of weather resistance, inadequate roof slope, and termite and dry rot damage. We'll maintain the same footprint and limit the square footage and concrete pad expansion to less than 50%. By minimizing the project's scope, we believe it qualifies as a minor addition. As such, we've outlined our responses below:

Geologic Trenching Study:

We request an exemption from the geologic trenching study. We're rebuilding an existing structure that is currently unsafe and unfit for habitation. The proposed change of use from industrial to art studio is less hazardous. The building expansion will be less than 50%.

Legal / Physical Access:

Our findings regarding legal and physical access indicate that access to Old Woman Springs would be denied by Caltrans due to unsafe sightline conditions. The existing road's grade change and limited visibility would make it difficult for drivers to see approaching cars from the south and accelerate quickly enough.

As documented in the SPR plans, 56885 Sunflower Drive and the three adjacent parcels have historically utilized existing physical access for both site access and public services. We've significantly reduced the project's scope since our initial discussions. Our current proposal, a rebuild and minor addition, should be evaluated in conjunction with the town's requests regarding these matters.

Biological Reports:

We have obtained all necessary biological reports as requested by the Town. Given the minor project scope and positive report findings (no evidence of burrowing owl or desert tortoise on-site and no impact to Joshua Trees), we are requesting a CEQA exemption.

Positive Community Impact:

Lastly, please consider that we are proposing a minor project with a major positive community impact. Please see the attached mission statement and program description prepared by Ms. Schwegler, the Yucca Valley Material Lab (YVML) director.

Best Regards,



David Van Arsdell



APN: 059708121

56885 Sunflower Dr, Yucca Valley

Organization Overview: Established in 2019, Yucca Valley Material Lab (YVML) is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to artist and musician residencies, as well as art-based workshops. Our mission centers on fostering cultural awareness by providing a platform for art education. Currently, we host two programs: art classes and an artist/musician residency program.

Current Operations:

- **Staffing:** We currently employ one full-time and three part-time staff members. We do not intend this to increase with the new facility.
- **Workshops:** We offer approximately 45 art workshops annually, accommodating no more than 8 students each. Each workshop varies in length, ranging from one to five days, and covers diverse subjects such as glass fusing, concrete sand casting, basic metal joining, jewelry making, and felting. We intend to increase this to 75 per year with the new facility. We have 1 instructor per workshop, during which a staff member is always present.
- **Maximum Capacity on the Property:** There are never more than 12 people on the property simultaneously, including 2 staff members, 1 instructor, 1 artist in residence, and 8 students.
- **Operating Schedule:** Our operational hours are intermittent, with closures from June to August and mid-December to mid-January. The sole full-time staff member typically works from 9 AM to 5 PM, including some remote hours. During workshop periods, studio access is also limited to these hours.
- **Activity Highlights:** Our future plans aim to include 75 art workshops, and 8 artist and musician residencies annually.

Residency Program:

- **Structure:** Our residency program lasts for two weeks, providing lodging, supervised access to studio facilities, individualized instruction, and technical assistance.

Proposed Improvements: For APN 059708121, we propose the construction of a 1,758 square foot facility to serve as our new art studio. Additionally, we aim to enhance the parking area to include ADA-compliant spaces. The property already houses a residence designated for temporary lodging for our two-week residencies, as well as a research library accessible by appointment, and staff offices.

We believe these enhancements will greatly improve our ability to serve the community and foster artistic growth, and we appreciate your consideration of our site plans.



APN: 059708121
56885 Sunflower Dr, Yucca Valley

Our Mission

YVML provides a welcoming arts space in the Mojave Desert that supports diverse artists and helps the community express creativity and cultural heritage. In a region with limited multicultural arts programming and education, we fill this gap through affordable workshops, and ADA-compliant facilities.

Accessibility is a priority for us, with plans for **the first ADA-accessible artist studio and residency in the Morongo Basin region**, ensuring participation for individuals of all abilities.

We support **local artists** by hosting solo exhibitions in the Lazy Eye Gallery and primarily hiring high desert artists to lead our workshop series, enhancing community engagement and economic growth. Each year, we offer small and intimate artist-led workshops that significantly contribute to arts education and a sense of community.

Local Partnerships and Community Engagement

Our collaborations with local organizations, including **BOXO Projects**, **Desert Arc** and **MilTree**, enhance opportunities for underrepresented communities, particularly individuals with disabilities and veterans. We are also in the planning stages of a regional partnership with **Arts Connection San Bernardino** for co-funded residencies for their Latinx artist program.

Our Impact

- **Supporting Underserved Artists:** We've hosted 8 artists-in-residence annually with many identifying as non-white or disabled, fostering a supportive creative community.
- **Affordable Arts Education:** Our alternative and affordable workshops and sliding scale scholarship program provide transformative, accessible arts education, teaching specialized techniques often overlooked in traditional instruction.
- **Creative Entrepreneurship:** We promote local artists through mentorship, skill based and professional development workshops, and work-trade programs, empowering them to thrive professionally.
- **Ecological Impact:** Our ecological initiatives promote desert rewilding and native plant growth for regional sustainability. We will also host free permaculture workshops to protect the Mojave Desert ecology while working to eliminate invasive mustard greens on our property to mitigate fire hazards.

The Future of Creative Inclusivity

By building an ADA-compliant space for discounted workshops and fully funded residencies, YVML will provide opportunities for all artists, regardless of ability or financial situation, to explore and inspire creativity. Our expanded facility will serve as a hub for art-making, professional development, and cultural exchange, advancing our mission of inclusivity and access.

Yucca Valley Material Lab
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