

**NEIGHBORHOOD BATTLE:** Protesters take their message against a new high-rise to the street in the 1700 block of Bissonnet on Wednesday. STEVE UECKERT : CHRONICLE

# Round goes to Southampton

## APPROVED AND WITHDRAWN

In a Sept. 4 letter to the firm that performed a traffic study for a proposed 23-story tower on Bissonnet, a Houston Public Works official said the city approved the study. But a Sept. 28 letter from the same official to the firm reversed the earlier letter.

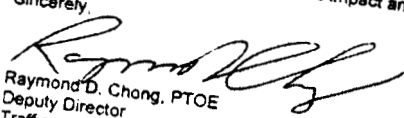
★★★  
 THURSDAY  
 OCTOBER 4, 2007  
**HOUSTON**★**CHRONICLE**  
 chron.com

Dear Ms. Alleman:

The City of Houston has reviewed your traffic impact analysis of 1717 Bissonnet. The proposed 23-story mixed use development will have no adverse traffic impact on the area street system nor the neighborhood. No mitigation measures are required for this development.

I am granting our approval of the traffic impact analysis of 1717 Bissonnet.

Sincerely,



Raymond D. Chong, PTOE  
 Deputy Director  
 Traffic and Transportation Division

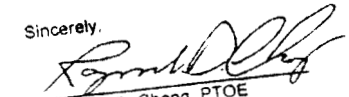
Dear Ms. Alleman:

As of today, I am withdrawing my approval of the traffic impact analysis for 1717 Bissonnet, contained in my September 4, 2007 letter.

Traffic Engineers, Inc. needs to further analyze the traffic impacts of the development on the area street system and on the neighborhood. In particular, you should carefully review the intersection operations of Bissonnet/1717 Bissonnet driveway. The westbound left turn movements into the development may increase delays for the westbound through movements. A westbound left turn lane may be warranted.

Additionally, I'm expressly concerned about the apparent inconsistencies between the defined level of restaurant development addressed in the report ("5,125 square foot fine dining restaurant") and the level of development identified in other documents (reference water/wastewater availability).

Sincerely,



Raymond D. Chong, PTOE  
 Deputy Director  
 Traffic and Transportation Division

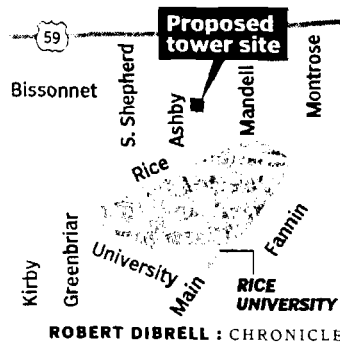
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# Mayor denies favoritism after city withdraws approval of Rice-area high-rise traffic study

By MIKE SNYDER  
and NANCY SARNOFF  
HOUSTON CHRONICLE

**T**WO days after Mayor Bill White pledged support for residents fighting a planned high-rise building near Rice University, city officials withdrew their approval of the developers' traffic impact analysis of the project.

This reversal of the city's position, the mayor's personal involvement and the announcement that prominent attorney Rusty Hardin would represent the opponents have reinforced concerns that affluent, politically connected



neighborhoods enjoy an advantage over others in Houston's frequent land-use battles.

"There is a terrible inequity here," acknowledged City Councilman Peter Brown, who lives a few blocks from



Extra: Watch video of the protest at [chron.com/metro](http://chron.com/metro)

the project site and joined at least 300 of his neighbors standing along both sides of Bissonnet on Wednesday afternoon protesting the developers' plans.

White and other city officials denied that the Southampton and Boulevard Oaks neighborhoods near the site at 1717 Bissonnet had received any special treatment. And neighborhood leaders said they hope the attention focused on their struggle will lead to policies

Please see **PROTEST**, Page B4

than affluent ones.

But Councilman Jarvis Johnson, who represents District B in northeast Houston, said residents of the poor and working-class neighborhoods he represents had a difficult time getting a sympathetic ear at City Hall when they complained about single-family housing developments with no parks or other amenities.

"The city said there were standards that we set that (the developers) followed," he said. "How can this community (Southampton) push the envelope so much?"

## Have leverage

At the protest Wednesday, Leslie Miller, who lives next door to the project site, agreed that Southampton and Boulevard Oaks residents have more resources and connections than residents of other neighborhoods struggling with new development. But this may simply mean they have the leverage to get something done for the whole city, Miller said.

"If we don't come up with some intelligent way to deal with density, we're going to have chaos," she said.

The developers, meanwhile, continue to say that their project meets all the city's requirements and will be an asset to the neighborhood. They hope to start construction next year and open the building by 2010.

While neither Morgan nor Kirton lives in the affected area both said they would have no problems living near their own high-rise or others in central Houston.

"Whether we develop the site or not, there will be other developments in close proximity that will be traffic generator in that neighborhood," Kirton said.

## PROTEST: Residents get mayor's ear

### CONTINUED FROM PAGE B1

that will benefit all of Houston's neighborhoods.

"Sometimes it takes a project affecting folks who can get things done to actually get things done," said James Reeder, a Southampton resident and a partner in the Vinson & Elkins law firm, who said he was surprised and grateful when the mayor returned his recent call to talk about the high-rise. "We are fortunate that we have residents who do have the ear of influential people."

Reeder said he wasn't familiar with the contradictory letters the city's Public Works and Engineering Department had sent to the firm that performed the traffic study for the developers, Kevin Kirton and Matthew Morgan of Houston-based Buckhead Investment Partners.

The first letter, dated Sept. 4, said the city had reviewed the study and found that the 23-story, mixed-use project would have "no adverse traffic impact on the area street system nor the neighborhood. . . . I am granting our approval of the traffic impact analysis of 1717 Bissonnet."

A second letter dated Sept. 28 and signed by the same official, Raymond D. Chong, a deputy public works director, said the previous approval of the traffic study was withdrawn. It cited several potential traffic problems the development could cause.

### Perplexed by reversal

Morgan and Kirton said they didn't understand why the city reversed its position.

"We're perplexed by it," Morgan said. "It would be speculation for us to try to suggest why exactly that happened."

Morgan and Kirton said they commissioned the study, which no city ordinance currently requires, because they expected that neighbors would be concerned about traffic and they wanted to know what the project's impact would be.

The study, Morgan said, showed the high-rise would have a "minimal impact on the neighborhood and area street system," a conclusion consistent with the Sept. 4 letter.

Chong's second letter was dated two days after White's letter to neighborhood leaders saying he believed the project would impair mobility on Bissonnet, a two-lane street. In the letter, now posted on the city's Web site, White promised to "use any appropriate power under law to alter the proposed project as currently planned."

Andy Icken, another deputy public works director who has been the administration's spokesman on the project, said the letter withdrawing approval of the traffic study was unrelated to the mayor's statement.

Icken said the second letter was drafted after he reviewed the traffic study and found inconsistencies in the level of activity expected at a restaurant included in the developers' plans for the building. The figures cited in the traffic study were different from those included in a previous request for utility work that was done in preparation for the development, Icken said.

White said he, too, had read the 59-page traffic study and found some of its conclusions questionable. His attention to this project was not unusual, he said, because city officials have closely scrutinized the traffic impact of new, dense development projects in parts of central Houston since early this year.

The mayor said he and other high-level city officials frequently step in to help neighborhoods resolve problems with new development, and that most of these cases involve low-income neighborhoods rather