



**SPUR**

San Francisco | San Jose

June 24, 2014

Adam Van de Water  
City of San Francisco  
Office of Economic & Workforce Development  
City Hall, Room 448  
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place  
San Francisco, CA 94102

Re: Moscone Center Expansion Project

Dear Mr. Van de Water:

On behalf of the members of the SPUR Project Review Committee, we would like to thank your team for bringing the proposed expansion of Moscone Convention Center to our group for consideration and review at our March 2014 meeting. These comments are based on the materials presented in March as updated by the May 28 revisions posted on the project website.

The mission of the SPUR Project Review Committee is to consider projects that are of citywide importance and to evaluate them according to criteria related to land use, public realm interface, building design and environmental effects. In all cases, we are seeking a combination of excellent planning and design solutions that will ensure the positive contribution of each project to a safe, visually appealing, and vibrant urban setting for the people who live in, work in and visit San Francisco.

The SPUR Project Review Committee values the economic significance of Moscone Convention Center and the tremendous importance of the tourism industry in San Francisco. In addition, we also value its greater physical and social context. The Yerba Buena Gardens site is a significant civic resource, so the needs of the convention center must be balanced with the needs of the city as a whole and the immediate neighborhood. This approach is necessary to maintain the entire Yerba Buena Gardens neighborhood as a great place that works for everyone: residents, children, workers, conventioners and the public who visit and use the Gardens daily. We appreciate that the project sponsor team is working to ensure that the comments of the full range of stakeholders are being addressed. Thank you for sharing your more recent plans of May 28 with us.

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As a result of our review and discussion of the Moscone Center Expansion project, we provide the following comments for your information and action:

### **Land Use**

We understand that the project sponsor proposes a net 305,000 square foot expansion of the Moscone Convention Center, which shares two city blocks bounded by Mission Street to the north, Folsom Street to the south, Third Street to the east and Fourth Street to the west with the Central Garden, the Children's Garden, and various cultural and entertainment uses. Much of the existing Convention Center square footage and the proposed expansion is located underground, and one of the primary drivers of the expansion is to create a 515,000 square foot contiguous exhibition space (net increase of approximately 300 booths) by building under Howard Street.

The proposed expansion above ground includes expanded and improved lobbies and new meeting rooms and ballrooms in the buildings to the north (Moscone North) and south (Moscone South) of Howard Street as well as proposed site modifications along Howard and Third streets and at the Children's Garden. We welcome the proposed improvements to the Children's Garden, including a relocated and improved learning garden, a new tot lot for small children and the addition of restrooms and a community room.

### **Public Realm Interface and the Promotion of a Pedestrian-Oriented Environment**

We find that the proposed expansion will significantly improve the pedestrian environment in a number of ways. By bringing the facades of Moscone North and Moscone South closer to Howard Street, much of the space currently occupied by vehicle drop-off areas on both sides of the street will be reclaimed for pedestrians and a more urban scale will be established. The Third Street ramp to the underground loading docks will be reworked to lessen its impact on Third Street, opening up room for a retail space on Third near Howard.

The Committee is intrigued by the vision for the pedestrian paseo that leads from Third Street to the interior of the block and the Children's Garden. We welcome the better through-block connections and the emphasis on improving the corner at Howard and Third Street by building out to the sidewalk line. However, we are not sure whether this is a realistic vision and question whether there will be enough retail/café/pedestrian activity to make the space comfortable, inviting and safe. We are not sure how this will feel with a 60' tall building on one side and a 90' tall building on the other. It could have the potential to be dark and unpleasant, so we are pleased to

hear that the design team plans to continue focusing on selecting the right uses and visual elements needed to make the paseo a desirable and active place. If constructed, it will also require active management to keep it safe and welcoming.

The Committee also appreciates the proposed changes to the existing public pedestrian bridge across Howard near Fourth Street. We believe that the simplified bridge option proposed presents new opportunities to improve circulation and the pedestrian environment on Howard Street near the carousel.

### **Building & Landscape Design**

The committee applauds the project's overall design elements. The new and expanded Moscone South building has a civic presence that is appropriate for the convention center. The luminous roof "cloud" structure over Moscone South and the trellis over the Moscone North entrance are both grand yet graceful gestures.

We appreciate the changes made to the height, the massing, and the design of the southern façade of the Moscone South building in response to community concerns. Our initial comments included recommendations to increase the setback at the southern façade, increasing transparency at that wall and to generally consider the treatment of that wall more carefully. The recent changes address these comments, though we do have concerns about a design that relies upon covering a blank wall with greenery. We do understand that there are privacy considerations that others may have raised. The massing at this side of the building has been vastly improved through recent iterations, and we suggest that you continue to pay attention to the façade treatment through the design process. Perhaps this is an opportunity for a public art installation.

There were some questions about the location of the second enclosed bridge and whether it is the right move right at the main entry to the Moscone South building. However, we do understand that making a second floor connection between Moscone North and Moscone South is important functionally, so there may be unavoidable constraints. Given the pedestrian bridge's visual prominence, the committee suggests focusing attention on the bridge design to make it more than a glass box.

### **Environmental Effects**

SPUR believes it is essential for projects to build environmental sustainability into their design and function. In all instances, the Committee encourages project sponsors to incorporate sustainability early in the design process and we look forward to seeing more specific information regarding sustainable features as the project evolves. We

are happy that the project intends to pursue LEED Platinum status, and we encourage the exploration of all avenues for the highest certification possible.

## **Conclusion**

The SPUR Project Review Committee recognizes the importance of Moscone Convention Center and understands that expansion is key to retaining growing clients and maintaining Moscone's strong presence in the convention industry. The overall design is commendable and will improve the surrounding public realm significantly. Further, the committee appreciates the outreach that the project sponsor has undertaken with the neighborhood and other stakeholders to address many of the initial concerns that have been raised.

We thank you for committing your time and resources to the presentation at SPUR. We will follow further refinements of this project with great interest and invite you to keep us informed on its progress.

## **Consideration for Endorsement**

Should you intend to request SPUR to consider this project for endorsement, you should contact the Committee co-chairs at the appropriate time. Endorsement by SPUR is reserved for projects of the highest quality and significance to the city. Consideration for endorsement begins with a formal response by projects sponsors to this review letter, including an update on any significant changes to the project program or design since the project was initially presented at SPUR. The project is then taken up for discussion by an endorsement subcommittee of SPUR Board Members who serve on committees in the areas of project review, urban policy, housing, sustainability, and transportation. We normally require a month's lead-time to schedule a meeting of the endorsement subcommittee.

Please do not hesitate to contact us for questions/clarifications.

Sincerely,

Charmaine Curtis    Mary Beth Sanders    Reuben Schwartz  
SPUR Project Review Committee Co-Chairs

cc: SPUR Board of Directors