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Submitted Electronically

April 6, 2015

San Jose Mayor and City Council
San Jose City Hall
200 East Santa Clara Street
San Jose, CA 95113

Re: April 7 Council Agenda Item 4.1, Friends of Levitt Pavilion Exploratory Committee

Dear Mayor Liccardo and Councilmembers Herrera, Jones, Kalra, Peralez, Matthews, Carrasco, Oliverio, Nguyen, Rocha, and Khamis:

SPUR is writing to support the acceptance of the Friends of Levitt San Jose Exploratory Committee's *Building Community Through Music* report. We also support the recommendation to advance efforts to identify the feasibility of implementing the Levitt model at James Park. SPUR is a member-supported nonprofit organization that promotes good planning and good government through research, education and advocacy. We believe St James Park is a great asset to downtown San Jose, and that it can and should be a thriving, active urban park.

We are very supportive of recent efforts by the Department of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services to engage local partners to activate and revitalize St James Park. A lack of city resources and park users has resulted in the park's current degraded condition and use primarily by San Jose's homeless population. However, many cities have turned around parks in worse condition than St James Park. The efforts underway represent a valuable first step toward a focused long-term strategy to revitalize St James Park.

With the support of the Knight Foundation, SPUR has been working with consultants, city staff, civic organizations and community stakeholders to develop recommendations for the long-term governance of St James Park. We identified best practices from around the nation for park stewardship, including management, operations and maintenance, programming, and funding. We believe that any comprehensive transformation of St. James Park must be built on a focused, effective stewardship strategy with broad city and community support.

The stewardship recommendations SPUR is developing suggest an institutional framework that can bring energy and focus to the park for the long term. This framework is being conceived to work whether or not the Levitt Pavilion goes forward. If it does, it is important that it be integrated into whatever management model the city pursues for St. James Park. **The broad-based enthusiasm for revitalizing St James Park will only be effective if coordinated into a comprehensive approach. Otherwise it could result in proliferating management entities, redundant efforts, or cross-purposes. The Levitt model is intended**

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to catalyze and support broad-based revitalization efforts, and its seamless integration into a comprehensive stewardship entity would make that possible at St. James Park.

We are supportive of establishing the Levitt Pavilion Steering Committee as an integrated element of activation and programming efforts for St James Park. The Levitt Pavilion model offers an innovative approach to park programming, using free, family-oriented concerts as a core attraction. It requires that the local government and community create a local entity to manage its programming, and that it be embedded in a larger strategy for park revitalization.

We are aware of two major concerns about a Levitt Pavilion at St James Park: The first is noise impact on surrounding neighborhoods. This should be manageable through the careful design and orientation of the concert stage, but more importantly, noise should be limited by the nature of the programming, which will be aimed at a family audience, with very moderate amplification. Large, heavily-amplified concerts are not consistent with the Levitt approach. **We suggest that the Levitt Steering Committee trial a limited number of family-oriented concerts early in the process to assess noise impacts and reassure concerned neighbors.**

The second concern is about the design and size of a pavilion or bandshell. We view this as an exciting opportunity to bring first-rate design into Downtown San Jose. It is possible to achieve design that is in thoughtful dialogue with the park landscape, without being imitative or derivative of historic elements nor inconsistent with the scale of the park. This approach is laid out in the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Historic Preservation. **The Steering Committee should work together to bring thoughtful, high-quality design that honors the history and scale of St James Park. One way to do this is to ensure that the Steering Committee include design professionals who are experienced in designing public gathering spaces in historic, urban settings.**

We believe that the Levitt Pavilion Steering Committee must become integrated into a management entity charged with comprehensive, long-term stewardship for St James Park. In the meantime, we encourage the City Manager to identify funding for environmental analysis and a fundraising feasibility study. The fundraising feasibility study should consider SPUR's recommendations for St James Park, including management and funding strategies, so that the Steering Committee serves and supports an overall stewardship strategy for the park.

Thank you for your review and consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,



Benjamin Grant
Public Realm and Urban Design Program Manager
cc: Leah Toeniskoetter, Laura Tolkoff