



SPUR

San Francisco | San Jose | Oakland

December 11, 2015

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

Re: Agenda Item 3.6 (City Council Priority Setting Session)

Dear Honorable Mayor and Councilmembers:

This letter is to express SPUR's support for the following two items that have been nominated as part of the priority-setting process: the Downtown Active Storefronts initiative (Peralez, Nov. 18, 2015) and the San Jose Urban Agriculture Incentive Zone ordinance (via Rules Committee).

Activation of Ground Floors (Downtown Active Storefronts Initiative)

As we laid out in our 2013 report *Getting to Great Places*, part of the pivot towards a more urban future includes making streets attractive, safe and interesting so that people want to linger. Retail has a unique role in activating places and attracting people. The San Jose Downtown Association and others have documented downtown's struggle to attract and retain retail, temporary and permanent. Strategies that can address market and policy barriers to bring life to empty storefronts, create destinations and draw people to spend time downtown are vital. **We encourage the Council to prioritize the proposed Downtown Storefront Initiative because it supports the activation of ground floor spaces.**

We think that the Downtown Storefront Initiative memo starts to address a broader challenge in downtown, the need to create streets that are safe, attractive and walkable. SPUR appreciates that Councilmember Peralez's nomination provides flexibility for staff to "[explore] new tools and recommendations that will require new development in the PBID to activate ground floor space or storefronts". Activation of new ground-floor spaces goes hand-in-hand with the activation of vacant, existing ground-floor spaces and design of those spaces is a key piece of ultimate success.

In prioritizing the Downtown Storefront Initiative proposal, we encourage City Council to direct staff to implement code revisions that will activate the ground floor of new development. In our research paper *Cracking the Code*, SPUR proposes changes to the baseline, enforceable standards for urban design in the municipal code, largely under the planning and zoning code. We believe our recommended changes to the codes impacting ground-floor design would raise the level of design quality to one fitting of our downtown and are the first step in activating new ground floor spaces.

Urban Agriculture Incentive Zone Ordinance

We urge the Council to prioritize the urban agriculture incentive zone ordinance. As we highlighted in our 2012 report, *Public Harvest*, urban agriculture provides numerous benefits to cities. However, access to land and land tenure are significant obstacles to its expansion in San Jose. An Urban Agriculture

Incentive Zone ordinance, by implementing state Assembly Bill 551 and allowing property owners in the city to receive a property tax reduction in exchange for committing their land to urban agricultural use for at least five years, will help address both those obstacles by providing landowners with an incentive to allow urban agriculture projects on their land for set periods of time.

With Santa Clara County having recently passed its urban agriculture incentive zone ordinance, and model legislation also available from San Francisco and Sacramento, San Jose will have the benefit of building off the experience of these jurisdictions. These existing models will also reduce the amount of staff time necessary to complete implementation. Numerous organizations, including Garden to Table and La Mesa Verde, are actively pursuing opportunities to activate vacant lots with urban farms and gardens. Prioritizing this implementation of an Urban Agriculture Incentive Zone would help San Jose expand urban agriculture and all the benefits that come with it.

Thank you for your review and consideration of these comments. If you have any questions about our support for these nominations, please reach out to 408-638-0083.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Laura Tolkoff', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Laura Tolkoff
San Jose Policy Director

cc: Harry Freitas, Rosalynn Hughey, Kim Walesh, Jenny Nusbaum