



San Francisco | San Jose | Oakland

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

June 19, 2017

Re: Item 4.1 on June 20th City Council Agenda (“Agreement with Google for Acquisition and Development of Properties in the Diridon Station Area”)

Dear Mayor Liccardo and Councilmembers:

The announcement of the exclusive negotiations between City of San Jose and Google is the next major step in San Jose’s ambitious goals for transforming the Diridon Station Area. The scale of the potential Google development provides a city-building opportunity that will shape San Jose and Silicon Valley for decades to come.

SPUR has been a leading voice for creating a compact and walkable community and a major concentration of employment in the station area supported by high quality, integrated transit options that are fast, frequent and all day. In our vision for Diridon:

Diridon becomes a great urban train station and the gateway to the Bay Area. People can be transportation omnivores because rail, buses, bikes, and technology enabled vehicles act as one intuitive and attractive system that gets them where they need to go in San Jose and beyond. The station is a public space that connects people seamlessly to the neighborhoods around it and is part of a greater downtown San Jose. New growth is concentrated around the station and is designed to take advantage of unparalleled accessibility, making Diridon a major generator of economic activity. Diridon shapes and showcases the diversity of the south bay and is welcoming to all. People can walk to meet their daily needs without thinking twice about it. Diridon is a place where life is lived in public. This is the direct result of a clear and comprehensive vision, leaders who took risks, and a governance structure that was setup for success.

- Based on SPUR Principles for Diridon, March 2017

Transit

Google's decision to come to this location, next to what could become the most transit-rich place west of the Mississippi, is no accident. We are within ten years of unparalleled transit connections to the region and the state. There is much to be addressed to get the transit right and accommodating the thousands of employees who will be utilizing these services.

SPUR has and will continue to research, publish and advocate on key decisions related to Diridon Station's governance structure, station and station area design, and transit service.

Housing

Another critical issue that must be addressed to fully capitalize on this opportunity is for San Jose to remove barriers to building housing in the urban villages. The Diridon Station Area Plan includes over 3,000 units of housing and there 6,000 in the pipeline for downtown, within a short walk of Diridon.¹ Many more are planned in urban villages that are within a short walk, bike ride or transit trip to Diridon (e.g., The Alameda, East Santa Clara, Little Portugal/ Brookwood Terrace).

Now more than ever, it is critical to make it easy to build in these locations. Adopting urban village plans is the first step, but there are many more ways that the city can loosen restrictions to allow housing to move forward in a timely fashion. These include:

- As new urban villages are approved, adopt the zoning needed to implement the plans, for both housing and commercial properties.
- Where possible, increase the number of housing units allowed in these urban villages. Some of these areas can accept more density than is currently proposed.
- Revise the mixed-use designations to make sure they are all economically feasible to build.
- Move light rail urban villages into horizon 1.

¹ <http://www.spur.org/news/2017-05-11/what-s-going-downtown-san-jose-our-take-three-trends>

Jobs

SPUR has been a vocal advocate of putting a significant amount of jobs near regional transit, particularly around Diridon and the downtown BART station. The prospect of Google coming to the Diridon station area, in addition to the thousands of new housing units being erected, may be the needed catalyst to spur the commercial development missing from downtown for a long time.

Urban design

Finally, what's built at Diridon Station has to be unlike anything we've ever built here. In many global cities, Google has shown that they can deliver transformation both within their walls and outside of it—in the public realm. We must do that here too.

SPUR has many specific recommendations for achieving this including minimizing the supply of parking, using a phased development approach to deliver the long-term vision and creating binding standards for urban design.

For now, we hope the Council will unanimously support entering into an Exclusive Negotiating Agreement with Google and we look forward to continuing to be a part of this exciting city-building effort.



Teresa Alvarado
San Jose Director