

April 22, 2019
Submitted electronically

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

Re: GPT 19-001 & PP19-018 – City-initiated General Plan Test Amendment and San Jose
Downtown Design Guidelines and Standards

Dear Hon. Mayor Liccardo and San Jose City Council,

With the significant increase in interest in downtown development, now is the time to adopt and implement rigorous design guidelines and standards to ensure that our city presents a world-class façade in a way that is authentic to San Jose, promotes a vibrant streetscape and achieves our climate goals.

We are thrilled to see these new set of guidelines emerge and believe that they will help guide and shape the future of our downtown. **SPUR firmly supports the updated design guidelines and urges Council to adopt these guidelines as the leading document to support future planning in downtown and the Diridon Station Area.**

SPUR has been actively involved in the ideation and creation of these guidelines. We strongly urged the Council to move forward with updating the urban design guidelines and hiring a chief urban designer as part of our 2014 report Getting to Great Places and the council's 2017 priority setting. In addition, we have always advocated for these guidelines to be codified, rather than merely a set of optional recommendations. The transformation envisioned in the General Plan will not occur without codifying the city's ground rules for good urban design. **With that said, we appreciate that this new document includes both guidelines and required standards which will allow the city to achieve its design goals.** We further recommend that the planning staff be empowered to hold future development to these standards and that proper staff be allocated to allow for such oversight.

These guidelines and standards have been thoughtfully crafted in partnership with key stakeholders, community members and design experts. SPUR's Urban Catalyst Team was invited to participate in a focus group to help provide feedback and additional ideas for this document.

While we fully support this document, we propose the following recommendations for consideration:

4.2.3: Civic Icon Adjacency – Currently this item does not include a set of standards. We suggest moving item A. under guidelines *“Use a streetscape and landscape design that helps to unify the new and existing structure”* to be a required Standard. Additionally, the definition of civic icon should include parks, paseos, and trails as many of our civic icons, such as the Guadalupe River, should be integrated with any physical infrastructure built.

4.4.7b: Green Roofs and Decks (Building Open Space) – Through Climate SmartSJ, the City has done an excellent job setting forward goals and policies to reduce the city’s ecological footprint. One way to do so is encouraging green infrastructure within new development. We agree with the set of guidelines to encourage developers to build green roofs to capture storm water runoff and save energy. Building ecologically resilient structures is imperative. We encourage city staff to explore other design elements that enhance a buildings resiliency.

4.4.8 Pedestrian Bridges – The public realm largely depends on ground floor pedestrian activity. While there is some merit regarding the functionality of pedestrian bridges, especially for commercial and office campuses, they dissuade people from engaging on the street level. Local businesses in the downtown have suffered for decades from a lack of foot traffic. Any and all new growth should add vibrancy to the streetscape. We strongly encourage staff to provide prospective developers alternative design solutions so that buildings do not use pedestrian bridges in their plans.

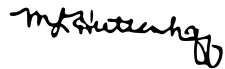
5.3.1a Ground Floor Treatments and Uses, Active Frontages. – Our downtown is lucky to be home to many independent and family owned restaurants and businesses. However, many of their storefronts are not designed in an inviting or welcoming manner. It is critical that ground floor storefront windows be transparent and clear to the pedestrian. This not only enhances the vibrancy of the street but also connects individuals with establishments that they might perceive as closed or out of business. We recommend that non-residential buildings use transparent materials for their windows and do not allow opaque and translucent windows along the ground floor.

5.4 Surface Parking Lots – We do not encourage the construction of any new surface parking lots within the downtown. This is not the highest and best use of downtown property nor supports the goals the city has put forth to encourage the use of public and multi-modal transit options. We recommend that the guidelines include a provision that new parking structures be designed for maximum flexibility and future conversion.

Additionally, the Downtown Design Guidelines should be the guiding document for any future design plan within the district. As an example, strategy five within the downtown retail strategy recommended that staff prepare a downtown developer's manual which would look at the buildout and design of ground floor use. Should staff move forward with creating this manual it should fall in compliance with the design guidelines to ensure uniformity.

We want to thank City Staff, especially Tim Rood, Rosalynn Hughey and Leila Hakimizadeh for their effort in producing these guidelines. When put into action they will have a significant impact on the overall vibrancy within downtown.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michelle Huttenhoff". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Michelle Huttenhoff
San Jose Policy Director