

November 12, 2020

San José City Council
City of San José
200 E. Santa Clara Street
San José CA 95113

Comments for November 16, 2020 Study Session - Diridon Station Area Plan/Downtown West Mixed-Use Development

Dear Mayor Liccardo, Vice Mayor Jones and Councilmembers:

SPUR believes strongly in San José and embraces a dynamic, forward-looking vision for the city that reinforces downtown as its economic and social hub. Downtown development is not only an opportunity to grow San José's jobs base and housing supply, but also to build a great city that provides economic opportunity, cultural amenities and open spaces and recreational areas that directly benefit all residents and improve our quality of life.

We thank the Council for holding this timely study session to receive updates and public comment as staff continues to work on the final Development Agreement and Community Benefits Plan as the project moves forward for consideration by the Planning Commission and Council in Spring of 2021.

Over the past decade, SPUR has published key policy reports that have urged San José to develop a more dense, walkable, transit-connected, dynamic urban community (Getting to Great Places, 2013); build a downtown reflective of the largest city in the Bay Area and create a world-class transit hub at Diridon Station (The Future of Downtown San Jose, 2014); and, bolster the city's fiscal condition to deliver high-quality public services to its residents (Back in the Black, 2016). In SPUR's report, "Rethinking the Corporate Campus" (2014), we outline principles for how to better locate and design large corporate campuses to decrease sprawl, prioritize public space, and provide opportunities for increased social connections.

We supported the partnership between the City of San José and Google from its inception - including the sale of City-owned land at fair market value – as a critical step in bringing to fruition the City's vision of a large, world-class, fully integrated and transit-oriented mixed-use development in our city center.

The Downtown West Mixed-Use Plan and accompanying Design Standards and Guidelines include many of the policy recommendations SPUR has made and embody the dreams and aspirations expressed by the community over the past nearly three years and we support them.

With billions of public dollars already invested and billions more to be spent on major public transit projects and infrastructure in the downtown and at Diridon Station, we must maximize the buildable area and building heights for both commercial and residential development in the station area and take full advantage of the uniquely large amount of vacant and underutilized parcels in the urban core. **To that end, we strongly support the staff's proposed DSAP amendments to increase building height limits and building capacity that also include a thoughtful "transitional" building height (65-90 feet maximum) for compatible mid-rise**

buildings near existing low-rise and single-story residential neighborhoods in order to address neighborhood concerns.

Environmental Sustainability

The City of San José has won national accolades for its climate and resiliency programs. The adoption by the Council of Climate Smart San José in 2018 demonstrates the recognition that climate change is a critical threat which must be addressed with substantive policy change. In our view, the proposed development reflects in its physical form, layout and design, a real commitment to environmental sustainability. These sustainable design standards and features should be extended throughout the station area and beyond.

We are excited that the State of California has approved this as an Environmental Leadership Development Project under the Jobs and Economic Improvement Through Environmental Leadership Act of 2011 (AB 900), which, among other criteria, requires that the project be on an infill site and achieve a 15-percent greater standard for transportation efficiency than comparable projects, be net carbon neutral, LEED Gold certified or better and create high-wage and highly-skilled jobs.

Parking

While parking is often a point of contention, in our view, the Diridon Station Area must maximize access for people, not cars. We have repeatedly recommended that the City prohibit new surface parking lots, adopt strict parking maximums and ensure new development is designed to promote access and connectivity to public transit.

SPUR's vision includes the transformation of the SAP Center environs into a truly pedestrian-friendly Downtown Entertainment District. Taking a cue from models like LA Live, Sacramento's Golden 1 Center and Brooklyn's Barclays Center, the home of the Sharks should embrace its urban location and context as a value proposition and substantial benefit to hockey fans and other guests, emphasizing use of public transit and the arena's convenient location right next to Diridon Station. We also recommend the closure of N. Autumn Street between Santa Clara Street and W. St. John Street in order to create a real pedestrian mall seamlessly connecting the east side of the arena with Arena Green West.

While the arena provides significant economic and community benefits, the physical structure is closed off from the surrounding area and there is significant space allotted for parking that should be repurposed for other community uses and to increase walkability.

Community Benefits Plan

Having a development partner that has committed to making direct investments in sustainable and resilient infrastructure, transit- and downtown-supporting jobs, thousands of housing units - 25% of which will be affordable -, complete streets, and inviting public spaces is too important to not put our full weight behind.

As noted in the staff memo, community engagement and outreach – including to under-represented populations and populations of color - have been extensive and unprecedented including dozens of Station Area Advisory Group (SAAG) meetings and discussions, community meetings and events, online surveys, and online access to project information, updates and timelines.

The work done by City staff and Google over the past three years has kept in view at all times the long-term

social and fiscal health of San José and its people. As we grapple with housing affordability problems and displacement of low-income households and the need for greater racial equity and inclusion in our city, the proposed development serves as a model for human-centered design and policies that elevate and reinforce San José's history, economy, culture and diversity and lead us toward a more equitable model of shared prosperity.

We fully support the Council's commitment to negotiating a Community Benefits Plan with Google that includes funding for affordable housing, displacement prevention and community stabilization programs, educational opportunities and job training. We also support the staff proposal to direct revenues generated from the newly-adopted Commercial Linkage Fee to affordable housing development in the downtown.

Equitable and Sustainable Urbanism

While Silicon Valley is world-renowned for great innovation breakthroughs, such innovation has, unfortunately, yet to translate into the urban landscape and physical design of our buildings, surrounding public realm and associated public benefits. The Downtown West Mixed-Use Plan represents not only an opportunity to grow San José's jobs base and increase the supply of housing, but also to build a world-class city by delivering more equitable and sustainable development that includes ample green and open spaces, parks and plazas.

Great urbanism does not just fall into place but is created through policies that set a high bar and development partners who are willing to meet the challenge. We called on the Council to be diligent in holding Google as well as all future development within the Diridon Station Area to the most ambitious principles of equity, smart growth and great urban design.

The Downtown West Mixed-Use Plan and Design Standards and Guidelines meet and surpass our expectations and the community can be proud of the project that is being proposed. It is responsive to community input, needs, priorities and visions and represents exactly the kind of development proposal we had hoped to see.

Sincerely,



Michael Lane, San José Director
SPUR