

Civic Center Station Area Plan Advisory Committee
Meeting Notes: Wednesday, April 11, 2012; 6:30 – 9:00 pm
Guide Dogs for the Blind, 350 Los Ranchitos Rd.

REVISED

Attendance

Civic Center Station Area Plan Advisory Committee

Emily Dean	Rich McGrath	Roger Smith
Mike Fryer	Larry Paul	Jean Starkweather
Elissa Giambastiani	Kate Powers**	Tammy Taylor
Nicholas Kapas	Jeff Schoppert	Craig Thomas Yates
Casey Mazzoni	Judy Schriebman*	

*Ex officio, non-voting member

**Ex officio alternate

Absent: Barbara Heller*, Bob Huntsberry*, Brigitte Moran, Andrew Patterson, Gayle Theard

Observers: Whitney Merchant, Bill Carney, Elaine Lyford-Nojima

Staff: Katie Korzun (Economic Development Coordinator, City of San Rafael), Rebecca Woodbury (Management Analyst, City of San Rafael), John Eells (Consultant to TAM)

Welcome, Announcements and Introductions

Co-chair Jeff Schoppert opened the meeting at 6:35 p.m. noting a quorum present. He said the purpose of the meeting was to come to consensus on the recommendations in the Administrative Version document and direct staff with any revisions for the Draft Plan.

After suggesting a revision to the minutes (change “move” to “approve” on page 1), Schoppert asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Jean Starkweather made a motion to approve the minutes with the change noted. Rich McGrath seconded and the minutes were approved, with one abstention from Craig Yates.

Emily Dean announced that there is a creek cleanup organized by Las Gallinas Watershed Council on April 21 from 9-12 noon.

Rebecca Woodbury noted that the Committee received correspondence from Las Gallinas Valley Sanitary District and the letter was included in their agenda packet. Jeff Schoppert also noted that the Committee received an email from Judy Schriebman.

Open Time

Schoppert asked if any members of the public would like to speak on items not on the agenda. There were none.

Review of Recommendations – Items with No Consensus

Staff explained that the administrative version of the Plan to be considered at this evening's meeting was provided to committee members at the March committee meeting to go through with instructions to the committee members to provide preliminary votes for or against each recommendation. Staff presented a spreadsheet that compiled committee members' preliminary votes and comments on each of the Plan's recommendations. Jeff Schoppert explained that the process for the review of the recommendations would focus around the items the committee did not appear to have consensus on. After hearing a staff presentation and public comment on each item, the committee would deliberate and vote. There were three items with no consensus.

Recommendation #22: Increase building height and density to allow five stories of residential/mixed-use on the level lots near the station.

Public Comment: Bill Carney said he was pleased with this recommendation and that it seems like a reasonable place for extra intensity. He said it should include design guidelines to minimize building impacts. Whitney Merchant said five stories would work in those places and the impacts from height could be addressed with stepbacks and massing. She said taller buildings can achieve more units and therefore lower the costs of the units.

Committee Deliberation: Tammy Taylor agrees with the idea of stepbacks, but said the height didn't match the area. She said she would be amenable if the buildings could be designed to fit the context of the area. Jean Starkweather said articulation is needed, but buildings that high on the east side of Civic Center Drive would add a feeling of density, which is inappropriate for the area. She is also concerned about bay mud.

Rich McGrath said the buildings would disrupt the views and ambience in the area. He said four stories would be better. Emily Dean asked for clarification about what views the buildings would disrupt. McGrath responded that the views of the hill from the Civic Center campus would be blocked if buildings filled in the parcels along McInnis Parkway. Larry Paul said that due to narrow parts of the parcel, it is likely that buildings could not fill in the entire parcel and would likely just replace the current building footprints.

Mike Fryer said he was concerned with any heights over four stories, citing concerns about traffic capacity and the character of the area. Starkweather added that she is concerned the area will have a city center ambience. Larry Paul said that even if the area is zoned for five stories, if traffic capacity doesn't allow for a development, it will not be approved.

Roger Smith said that the impacts are being exaggerated and that a few new buildings would not lead to a city center feel. The purpose of the committee is to help the train station succeed and density will help achieve that. He spoke in favor of the five story height.

Craig Yates said he was concerned about health impacts of development near freeways and impacts to residential views.

Elissa Giambastiani said she feels similar to Roger and that there should be more housing for people near the train station. She said that five stories are appropriate and that design restrictions would control the shape of buildings. She said that density helps achieve affordability of units.

Emily Dean spoke in favor of the five story height limit.

Jean Starkweather said that creek setbacks could be increased due to policy changes.

Tammy said she changes her no vote to a yes, in favor of the five story height. Nick Kapas said he is considering changing his yes vote to a no, citing the need to address the concerns.

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Larry Paul noted that the current hotel is five stories high and it doesn't make sense to downzone. He said a fifth story could be a bonus in exchange for a community benefit such as additional affordable housing or a public plaza. McGrath asked if the restoration of a creek could be considered a community benefit. Katie Korzun said that creek improvements could be called out in the Plan.

Judy Schriebman said that she is concerned about any development there, citing impacts of sea level rise. She also said that mitigations are not always environmentally sensitive.

McGrath said he would consider changing his no vote to yes if a fifth story could be attached to a "significant public benefit in the planning area." Giambastiani added that this area is the best property for homes for people using the train.

Schoppert asked for a vote:

Yes – 8

No – 3

Consensus – No

Kapas said he agrees with having residents near the station, but said there are other goals including protecting the neighborhoods and creeks. Larry Paul said that five story buildings and creek protections can be achieved simultaneously and those goals should both be stated in the vision. Roger Smith said that the design guidelines in the Plan will not allow for walls of buildings.

Jean Starkweather said she is concerned about the effect tall buildings will have on creeks in terms of shading. Emily Deans said that shading probably won't be a factor due to the location of the creeks and the movement of the sun.

Casey Mazzoni asked staff to explain the approval process of development. Katie Korzun described the process to include administrative and environmental review, review by the Design Review Board, and review by the Planning Commission. Larry Paul added that community input is a major element as well.

Schoppert decided to move to the next recommendation and come back to this one for a vote later.

Recommendation #24: Allow development of the Christmas Tree Lot at the same density as nearby lots, should the County seek to develop the site.

Public Comment: Whitney Merchant said the location of this parcel is perfect for development, but added that any development would require a countywide vote. She said the site needs design guidelines to ensure that any development relates well with the Civic Center campus. She said an overlay zone could help achieve affordable housing by allowing higher density. She added that Marin is a difficult place to develop because environmental review is extensive and process tends to favor neighborhood concerns.

Committee Deliberation: Rich McGrath said this recommendation is beyond the scope of the Plan. He said he thinks the committee should consider input from the County and that it is a very contentious issue. Nick Kapas also said that this topic is not part of the committee's charge. Tammy Taylor said the topic was inappropriate because the parcel is not within the City's jurisdiction.

Schoppert said he understands that the County asked the committee not to talk about that parcel, but he added that it has come up on many occasions. Starkweather said the parcel should have been part of the committee's charge. Giambastiani agreed.

Kapas said he is concerned about creek protections.

Mike Fryer said the language in the recommendation is appropriate in that it is similar to the Plan's discussion of the Guide Dogs property. Larry Paul said it is a good housing opportunity. He said that even

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though the City has no control over the parcel, it is still appropriate to have language from the committee because development will benefit the station and everyone in the area.

McGrath said that he would consider changing his no vote to a yes if the wording said “encourage” instead of “allow.”

Roger Smith said this parcel is important because it is the only vacant parcel near the station and development there will add to the success of the station. Judy said the parcel had not been vetted through the public process, and neither had the Northgate Mall.

Schoppert asked for a vote:

Yes – 10

No – 1

Consensus – Yes

Recommendation #26: Increase retail FAR and residential density on the properties near the station (Public Storage and Marin Ventures).

Elissa Giambastiani said that retail would not be viable at the end of the road and it makes more sense to have residential there. She noted that in the spirit of consensus, she’d be willing to change her no vote to a yes. Mike Fryer said that he thinks the recommendation allows for too much density, but thinks it is a good place for some retail due to its proximity to the station.

Roger Smith said that properties are almost always downzoned due to restrictions like setbacks. He said possibilities allow for projects to happen.

Public Comment: Bill Carney said these two parcels are prime sites because of their location to the station and their size. They are opportunities for creating a nucleus and transit-oriented development. He said the Plan should include an additional height bonus in exchanged for public benefit. Whitney Merchant said there is a limit to how much retail can be sustained and is concerned about blanketing the area with mixed-use. She said some sites should be housing only. She said there is an undersupply of low-income housing in Marin and an overlay zone may help achieve affordable units.

Committee Deliberation: Jean Starkweather said she is concerned about preservation of the creeks and trees in the area. Jeff Schoppert said he agrees with Elissa’s comments about retail. Judy Schriebman asked if the entire first floor must be retail and staff responded that it does not. Larry Paul said that it can be hard to get financing for mixed-use. He said that by allowing and encouraging it, developers can figure out how to make it work.

Schoppert asked for a vote:

Yes – 8

No – 1

Consensus – Yes

Schoppert asked the committee to revisit recommendation #22 again and asked the committee for a vote, with the suggested language about public benefits added:

Yes – 8

No – 1

Abstain – 1

Consensus – Yes

Review of Recommendations – Other Items of Concern

Jeff Schoppert asked if any members had any other items they wanted to discuss. Committee members said they wanted to discuss recommendations 1, 3, 10, 12, and 20.

Public Comment: Whitney Merchant said she is concerned that the three story height proposed on Merrydale will not result in much affordable housing. She said increased heights and an overlay zone will help achieve affordable units.

Recommendation #1: Provide “Complete Streets” treatments throughout the Study Area, but particularly on Merrydale Road (both north and south of the tracks), Merrydale Overcrossing, and McInnis Parkway.

Emily Dean would like to see more improvements recommended for Merrydale Road, south of the tracks.

Public Comment: Bill Carney said a lot could happen there and that the creek could be restored. Whitney Merchant said there should be bike lanes on Merrydale Road.

Katie Korzun said that City staff and the consultant can work with Emily to revise this section.

Recommendation #20: Restore and enhance the area’s natural resources (e.g., creeks, wetlands, and hillsides).

Casey Mazzoni said that the discussion of sea-level rise is not appropriate because the City will address this concern as a regional issue.

Kate Powers said the creek is not delineated in the Plan and should be added to maps.

Public Comment: Bill Carney said reference to the Climate Change Action Plan is important and should be listed earlier on in the Plan under list of relevant plans. He said the City needs to step up even though it is a regional issue.

Craig Yates said that the west side of Merrydale does not have sidewalks because there is a creek.

Schoppert asked the committee if anyone wanted to change their vote. No changes were made.

Recommendation #3: Complete the sidewalk network, as shown in Figure 8 of the Plan.

Nick Kapas wants the Plan to do more and have a stronger message about walking and biking paths.

Schoppert asked the committee if anyone wanted to change their vote. No changes were made.

Recommendation #12: To supplement the 130 parking spaces provided by SMART, consider additional supply at other locations in the area, as summarized pm Figure 14 of the Plan, and coordinate with other jurisdictions to determine if other locations may also be suitable.

Roger Smith said that parking is vital to the success of the station. He is not comfortable with the language to ensure that parking functions well. He said the City should regularly report on the adequacy of parking in the area.

Public Comment: Whitney Merchant said that surface parking is the enemy of walkability and that the train needs ridership to succeed. She said Roger’s idea to monitor the area’s parking is a good one and suggested that the City define a trigger for the need for more parking.

Katie Korzun said City staff can incorporate this idea into the Plan.

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Recommendation #10: Construct traffic improvements to support area growth, as previously identified in the General Plan 2020.

Judy Schriebman said these improvements need to be explained further and that a map would be helpful.

Schoppert asked the committee if anyone wanted to change their vote. No changes were made.

Public Draft and Review Process

Rebecca Woodbury explained that staff would make changes to the Plan per committee direction and bring a Draft Plan to the May committee meeting for their approval. If the committee approves the Draft in May, the Draft will be released for public review. She asked for the committee's help in scheduling presentations of the Draft Plan with community groups. The Draft Plan is scheduled to be presented to the Planning Commission on 5/29 and the Design Review Board on 6/5. She encouraged committee members to attend as many of the presentations are possible so they can hear public comments first hand. Staff will present a summary of all public comments to the committee at their June meeting and seek direction for revisions to the Final Plan.

Public Comment

The meeting was opened to general comments by the public on items not on the agenda. There were none.

Meeting Evaluation

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Excellent meeting facilitation.	

Closing

Schoppert closed the meeting at 9:12 p.m.

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Attendance

	2010			2011							2012										
	9/22	10/13	10/16	11/10	12/8	1/12	2/9	3/9	4/13	5/11	6/8	7/13	8/10	10/12	11/9	12/14	1/11	2/8	3/14	4/11	
Damon Connolly* (CC)	E	√	(tour-optional)	√	(Brockbank)	(Brockbank)	√	√	(Brockbank)	-	√	√	√	√	-	-	Reappointed				
Emily Dean	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	
Michael Fryer	√	E		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	E	√	√	√	√	
Elissa Giambastiani	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	
Barbara Heller* (CC)																	Appointed		-	√	E
Bob Huntsberry* (DRB)	-	√		-	√	√	√	√	√	-	-	√	E	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Nicholas Kapas	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	
Stanton Klose* (GGBPAC)	√	√		√	-	-	√	-	√	E	Resigned										
Greg Knell	√	√		-	√	√	√	√	-	-	√	-	E	-	-	E	-	Resigned			
Klif Knoles	-	√		-	-	Resigned		-													
Marcus Lee	E	-		√		√	E	√	E	E	√	-	√	√	E	-	-	Resigned			
Preston McCoy* (BPAC)	(Powers)	-		√	√	-	√	√	√	√	-	(Powers)	√	E	√	√	√	√	√	(Powers)	
Casey Mazzoni						Appointed		√	-	√	√	E	-	√	√	√	E	√	√	√	√
Rich McGrath	√	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	
Brigitte Moran	√	E		√	√	√	E	√	E	√	-	E	√	(Ann Hussman)	√	-	√	√	-	E	
Larry Paul* (PC)	√	-		-	-	E	√	√	E	(Wise)	-	-	√	√	-	√	√	-	E	√	
Andrew Patterson	√	√		√	√	√	√	E	√	√	√	√	√	E	√	√	√	-	√	-	
Jeff Schoppert	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	
Judy Schriebman* (LGVSD)	√	E		√	-	-	√	√	√	√	√	√	(Loder)	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	
Roger Smith	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	E	√	√	√	√	√	E	√
Jean Starkweather	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	E	√	√	E	√	√	√	√	
Tammy Taylor	√	√	√	√	√	-	√	√	E	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	
Gayle Theard	-	√		-	√	√	√	√	√	-	-	√	√	E	-	-	-	-	√	E	
Craig Thomas Yates	√	-		E	√	-	√	-	√	-	-	-	√	√	√	-	√	-	E	√	

*Ex officio, non-voting member
E: excused
BPAC: Bicycle/Pedestrian Advisory Committee

CC: City Council
DRB: Design Review Board
LGVSD: Las Gallinas Valley Sanitation District

PC: Planning Commission
GGBPAC: Golden Gate Bicycle Pedestrian Committee