
The meeting convened at 7:30 pm in the City of San Mateo City Council Chambers and was called to order by Chair Massey who led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Those present were: Commissioner Bonilla, Commissioner Drechsler, Commissioner Whitaker, Chair Massey, and Vice-Chair Hugg was recused

Motion made by Commissioner Bonilla and 2nd by Commissioner Drechsler to approve the minutes of February 11, 2014.

Vote: 4-0 Motion passes

Chair Massey opened the Public Comment Period. No one wishing to speak, the Chair closed the public comment period.

ITEM 1

STUDY SESSION

PA13-066 Essex at Central Park

Julia Klein, Associate Planner, gave the staff presentation.

PC Questions to staff: none

John Eudy Applicant, gave the applicant presentation

Planning Commission Questions to applicant: none

Chair Massey opened the public comment period. The Chair explained the pre-application and that this is a very preliminary meeting. No studies for traffic, parking, have been done. This session is for all concerned to raise issues and voice concerns. The chair also explained that if an email was sent, it has been read and is a part of the public record.

Paul Krupka, San Mateo; Marjorie McCamey, San Mateo; Thomas Morgan, San Mateo; Mark Moulton, San Mateo; John Hershberger, San Mateo; Rhovy Lyn Antonio, San Jose; Bruce Rueppel, San Mateo; Jane Ervin, Oakland; Bertha Sanchez, San Mateo; Margot Colson, San Mateo; David Crabbe, San Carlos; Michele King, San Mateo; John About, San Mateo; Suzanne Vuko; Greg St.Clair, San Mateo;

- This is the right kind of project for the downtown and is in line with the Downtown Specific Plan. Site is well-served by transit, adjacent to Central Park and 4th avenue retail way. Linkage that the project provides is good for connecting the park and the downtown. I expect elements will be refined as the necessary technical studies are completed.

- Resident of San Mateo, speaking in opposition because of traffic and parking. Parking in my neighborhood is impossible. Loading spaces on-street blocks traffic. The entire block should be the project, not just the parking lot.
- Representing the Housing Leadership Council; looks like this project is trying to achieve a density appropriate for the area. Please ask developer to make an addition to the architecture of the downtown. Hold the development to high but not unreasonable standards.
- Concern over height and mass of the building.
- Project will add to the downtown with housing; people can visit the downtown, shopping, etc. Will also improve the surrounding neighborhoods.
- More housing downtown can actually reduce traffic. There are some traffic and parking issues to work through.
- This is a good project that is in downtown, close to Caltrain, SamTrans, etc. However, parking is a big concern. Should examine the use of car share systems, bike sharing and pedestrian infrastructure enhancements.
- The project is too high and too dense. Not opposed to housing but would like to see more commercial on 5th avenue on the ground floor. Can the garage go down 2 levels or explore the use of stacked parking? Measure P can consider increased height limits, however, there must be a large public benefit which does not cause detrimental impacts in the future. Is Essex buying just this parcel or the entire block? Should examine the use of solar panels. Green roofs and use of innovative storm water drainage techniques should be included in the project.
- Traffic, Thursday, Friday, Saturday nights from 4:30p on is bad parking-wise. Downtown San Mateo parking is virtually impossible. CalWater has concerns and we should, as citizens and residents, should be concerned as well. The historical value of San Mateo is important. I think this project will spoil the beauty of Central Park.
- Representing Sierra Club; this is a good location for housing, better because putting the people near the park puts them near open space. This type of location is better than developing in our watersheds.
- Public benefit options should include affordable housing, as much as possible, for low and very-low income, establishment of a Downtown Transportation Management Association, and enhanced pedestrian mid-block crossing at 5th Avenue. Parking and traffic a concern; not opposed to development but this project is an inappropriate size for this location. The voters approved height limits – don't want the huge buildings in the downtown. In favor of a development if it is of a more reasonable size and better parking.
- Essex is not a good property manager as evidenced at Hillsdale Apartments. Also concerned about more pets using Central Park. I agree that we need housing and downtown is probably the best place. It can maintain the growth of our dot.com business. We have a lot of people coming and going and having this housing for them is a good idea. Whatever we put on this parcel should shine along with the park – beautiful for the future. We don't want people to complain about what is built. The parking garage stands out and appears inappropriate next to Central Park.

Planning Commission addressed the questions raised by the public during the public comment period.

- Where is the loading zone? *Staff: Staff and the applicant will be working on where this location is during the formal planning application. The city's traffic consultant will also have input.*
- The applicant will clarify the parking. Right now they are discussing the overall intent.
- Visitor parking spaces. The applicant can wrap that up in overall parking intent.

- Concerned about parking and how we can encourage new residents to the project not to use their cars but use public transportation. *Staff: Transit Demand Management (TDM) – the city has a general plan for the downtown, near the Transit center and buses that serve the downtown. There is already a plan to contribute to the Traffic Management System and businesses contribute \$10,000 minimum. TDM will be reviewed by the traffic consultant.*
- Are these units rental or for-sale units? ; *Staff: Initially they will be for rent but they are getting a Subdivision Map for potential future sales as condominiums. Affordable housing will be required in both instances. Under the state density bonus there is a bonus for an increase.*
- What is the specific level of affordability being proposed? *We spend time with the applicant during the actual application process. We don't ask for a complete break-down at this point. Luxury will be market-level and not necessarily affordable.*
- Can an additional level of underground parking be added? *Staff: The applicant has some experience with stacking and can speak to this point.*
- What sustainability measures will be included in the project? *Staff: Green roofs, solar, water, will be addressed with an environmental analysis.*
- How will the discussion and determination of public benefit, (community benefits) be handled? *Staff: The General Plan includes language regarding public benefit, there are also general guidelines that have been adopted by the City Council. It is anticipated that staff will discuss with the City Council in study session an appropriate to evaluating public benefit for this project.*
- Is Essex buying the entire block or only that specific parcel? *Applicant: just purchasing the parcel in question and not the entire block.*
- Water issues: at what point in the process will water be addressed with Cal Water? *Staff: We will begin the outreach to CalWater, in conjunction with PW, as part of the environmental review in the formal application process.*
- What does applicant envision for the commercial space on the 5th Ave/San Mateo drive corner. How do they envision enhancing that corner? *Applicant: nothing specific yet, service-commercial, restaurant, food-service, general commercial.*
- That corner is about 3500 square feet; could it be divided up into 3 spaces? *Applicant: It is possible, we will examine the possibility.*

- Planning Commission asked the applicant about the parking arrangements that are envisioned. *Architect/designer for project: Generally, there is an on-ramp to the upper level of parking that will need to be maintained. One underground level for residents parking. Visitors will park on ground-level or go up the ramp and park above. Additional residential on the 4th floor of the garage – assigned spaces. We are thinking 166 spaces for residents. 23 resident visitor spaces.*
- Are the open spaces in the garage for general parking? *Applicant: we are replacing the existing 95 spaces.*
- Live/work units on the ground floor – potentially have customers, clients – what is the vision for these individuals? *Applicant: Their parking is part of the 23 spaces or they can park in the other 95 public spaces. We envision these as small home offices.*
- Live/work loft situation. When do you consider the parking for residential as opposed to live/work? *Staff: The city doesn't have a specific live/work unit parking requirement. We will examine as part of the formal planning application. Is the applicant being asked to replace the on street parking spaces that will be removed as part of the project? Staff: This will be addressed in the formal application process.*

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- The parking that is on-grade on the west half of the parcel, will that be visible to people walking along 5th? *Applicant: Yes, they will be able to look through. We plan to keep some openness on the area by Sleep Train. Architecturally screened on the garage along 5th Avenue. Not enclosed.*
 - State density bonus: applicant can ask/request for 1-3 concessions for incentives. Who determines the number to ask for? *Staff: It is a mathematical formula based upon the number of units and the level of affordability being provided.*
 - Is the alley an emergency vehicle access (EVA) and also used for loading? *Staff: primary purpose is an EVA but other businesses along the alley have been used informally for loading. As an EVA lane, it needs to be kept open and clear although that doesn't preclude a car from driving through.*
 - Concessions? Any discussion on exactly what concessions? *Applicant: We do not have a specific proposal at this time.*

Comments and discussion:

- Site Design
 - The corner plaza reinforces San Mateo Drive entrance to Central Park.
 - Pedestrian Master Plan designates a 16 foot – 20 foot overall sidewalk width. Would like to see closer to 20 feet rather than 16.
 - Paseo that makes the connection between the businesses along 4th and 5th Avenue needs to be kept open for those that want to go to the park.
 - Concerned that the paseo is not inviting for public use; it looks like an entrance to the building instead of a public passageway. The width of the paseo is also affected by the placement of stairs and elevators.
 - The live/work units along the alley do not appear appropriate; the alley is not a pleasant environment given the nature of the commercial activities taking place.
 - Examine provision of more ground floor retail facing 5th Avenue, would be preferable to parking facing onto the street.
 - Concerned about vehicular access being so close to El Camino Real, examine access off of North San Mateo Drive.
 - Building Design will need to have an environmental document to analyze the impacts of the building's height and bulk – traffic and parking, shadow, view and wind impacts need to be examined.
 - The garage and residential building do not need to be different colors. The project needs to read as a whole, not as a residential building and a separate garage structure.
 - The corner element at 5th Avenue and North San Mateo Drive does not seem compatible with the project design. There should be something to indicate we're at Central Park.
 - Design too harsh, too stacked. Don't like the screening along the garage on 5th Avenue. Softer, more imaginative design would be preferred.
 - The overall building architecture is good, however, look at the use of stepping back the building to decrease the building's apparent height and bulk. The overall building height and bulk results in the building being disconnected from the rest of downtown
 - The design needs to be stellar given the project's height and bulk.

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- New residential development on this site a good addition to the downtown. Good location. However, skeptical of 75 foot building height; this building will tower over everything else.
 - Public Benefit.
There needs to be very substantial public benefit to allow a building of this height.
 - Big change to what is a beloved park on the peninsula. Need to see some public benefit that does something positive for the park.
 - Don't consider the paseo as public benefit since it already exists.
 - Not all public benefit should be devoted to Central Park, examine public benefit related to downtown parking.
 - Staff: Overall comments from the Planning Commission (in addition to individual Commissioner comments):
 - Concern about proposed building height and mass.
 - Design needs to be superior, of high quality, particularly given the site's proximity to Central Park.
 - Public benefit to allow additional height and density as described by the General Plan needs to be substantial.
 - Traffic and parking are major issues, as well as shadows, wind and shading. All of these issues need to be studied as part of the formal application

The Commission took a 10-minute break.

ITEM 2

STUDY SESSION

PA13-077 Hillsdale Terrace

Tricia Schimpp, Contract Planner, gave the staff presentation.

PC questions for staff:

- The Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) reference. While I am glad to hear it stated, the site is not zoned TOD but C3-1/R4. Is there a hierarchy among the various 'plans' as to what takes precedence? *Staff: The hierarchy begins with the General Plan. The General Plan states that development within various areas should follow the guidelines of the designated plans; this includes the El Camino Real Master Plan, Rail Corridor Plan and Hillsdale Station Area Plan. All plans were adopted considering the consistency with the General Plan (GP). While the site is not zoned for TOD, the various plans for this area encourage TOD development due to the proximity to the Hillsdale Station.*

The Chair opened the public comment period. The following individuals spoke: Jack Rose, San Mateo; Leo Burns, San Mateo; Cristina Heinz, San Mateo; Carl Nahm, San Mateo; Joyce Burns, San Mateo; Ali Hasiri, San Mateo; Walter Schwartz, San Mateo; John Weege, San Mateo; Simone Baer, San Mateo; Dan Crocker, San Mateo;

Their comments included:

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- There is basically no parking around the blocks west of El Camino. I believe this project has 1.3 parking spaces per unit, and is not a friendly building. Building is way too tall. Nice if it didn't tower on the corner. Can we get rid of the top floor, increase parking. Encourage public transportation. Increase parking to 2 spaces per resident in the building.
 - Other development along El Camino and Bay Meadows are usually 4 stories. Why is this one 5 – 5.5 stories? Can the developer remove one story to resolve height problem, parking problem.
 - Not against any housing being added to the city, my main concern about this project is the parking. My property is a 6-unit with 3 bedroom units. This building gives us 2.3 parking spaces which is generous. 2.3 spaces per unit should be considered for this project or reduce amount of residential units.
 - This project will impact our neighborhood. We want to make sure it is an asset to San Mateo. The immediate 1500 feet from the El Camino Real (ECR) towards the west are filled with school, fire station, and businesses. 27th Avenue is narrower than 28th Avenue. Fire Station 23 needs quick access to the ECR. Allow right turns only on 27th. Use 2.0 parking ratio. Lacks visual appeal that San Mateo deserves. 5 stories block the 3 stories directly behind it. 5 stories is unmatched along ECR all the way to Belmont. Limit structure to 3-4 stories. Reduce the middle of the building.
 - Owner of mattress store. Don't advertise because city won't allow pole sign for my business. I am concerned about the height of the building, it will block my view. Big problem with parking. Some cars are parked all weekend.
 - El Camino Real (ECR) needs improvement and it is great that something is being done. This project is way too big; cause too many parking problems that will domino into the residential areas west of ECR. 28th Avenue will probably become access to SR 92 and SR 280 – not good. The size of the building blocks air, sun, and visual for the buildings west of it.
 - I understand the city is part of a greater plan and has the desire to develop areas for younger, growing families. Safety and traffic are important. Please meet the expected parking ratios, reduce 27th Avenue traffic. 28th will become more dangerous just as 31st did when Hillsdale opened up.
 - Many people use 27th Avenue to access the ball field on Alameda de las Pulgas at Beresford. Parking is an issue.
 - Traffic and congestion on 27th is increased. Training at the fire station creates additional traffic problems. Like to see the architect redo the visual of the building.

No one else wishing to speak, the Chair closed the public hearing.

- Traffic Circulation. We have not done a traffic study on this project yet, this will be done as part of the environmental document on a formal planning application.
- Why are tower elements not considered, why are they exempt from the 55' height limits? *Staff: typically we do not include utility (elevator shaft) part of the height as per the definition of building height.*

Planning Commission had the following comments:

- Preliminary Design
 - Very angular building, sharp edges. Can the building be made to look softer? Are there any step-backs on the upper floors? Are the people in the buildings behind this one going to be looking into residences in this building? I would prefer 4 stories. Need to

- re-examine the materials on the building. Not excited about the colors shown. Go warmer. Colors blend into neighborhood better. Perhaps right turn only onto 27th. Some circulation concerns. Three subterranean levels of parking is difficult to maneuver.
- Elevator to the roof is providing access to the roof garden. Why do you need two stair towers to the roof?
- Support the construction on these 3 parcels as two parcels have businesses no longer there and one parcel is an unimproved lot. Skeptical of 55' height.
- Building is TOD influenced even if the site is not TOD zoned
- Minimize some of the roof towers as possible, look at moving the elevator towers back. Roof corners as they hang out over the ECR – perhaps cut them back.
- 5th floor step back all the way around, front and back. 4 floors might be more appropriate for this building.
- Back of the building deserves more attention.
- The west side 2nd story deck seems more like a carport.
- Step backs as the building goes up. One elevation actually appears to show stepping forward as opposed to stepping back.
- Need more information before making comments. Formal planning application should include more information. Support mixed use at this location.
- Hard to make the findings for additional height to 55 feet as required in the General Plan.
- 4 stories may be more appropriate as the building height sticks out in comparison to other buildings along El Camino Real.
- Like green roof.
- Concern about 27th Avenue access to parking garage.
- Look of building is okay. Massing is of a concern as the building appears very blocky.
- State density bonus plays into the size and mass of the building.
- Aesthetics of the design – no real problem with the look of the building. Perhaps it speaks to the future of El Camino as opposed to the past.
- Key Intersection Corner Feature Design
 - We need to see some very fantastic art on the plaza area at 27th.
 - Corner tower feature, if functional, but not used to create a style or image per the El Camino Real Master Plan document.
 - Do not like corner towers.
 - Corner feature needs more detail.
 - City has an arts ordinance that applies to the provision of public art, such as proposed here. City approval process to approve the art that is proposed. Anything about the art is governed by the city. We have the Civic Arts Committee to review proposed art.
- Adequacy of Onsite Parking
 - Need to have a comprehensive traffic and parking study. Look at TOD zone and potential trip reduction. Examine the impact on neighborhood parking.
 - The traffic study will address current and future traffic patterns and levels of service, also the queuing of traffic.
 - Parking – access is on side street and not ECR. Need to consider loading zone area(s). Appears to be a tuck-in zone along 27th. Can some type of vehicle treatment be done?

Will be looked at in the traffic study. Because ECR is a state arterial, we would need to acquire encroachment permits.

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- Other
 - Trees proposed would regularly cause problems for every bus going up and down the ECR. Need to provide not necessarily tall trees, but appropriate trees. Greenery on El Camino Real would be nice. Appears to be room in the back for a bit more greenery.
 - Increase overall width of sidewalks. Through-zone is 10' wide. Frontage space is 4' but site plan shows that over half the length of the building along ECR shows permanent planters.
- *Staff: Overall comments from the Planning Commission (in addition to individual Commissioner comments):*
 - *Concern about 55 foot building height and mass particularly given the surrounding buildings. Examine the use of building step backs.*
 - *There may be difficulty in making the General Plan findings to allow additional building height from 40-55 feet given the present project design.*
 - *Concerned about the roof top elements given their height and bulk, even if they are not counted in the definition of building height, they do affect the appearance of the building.*
 - *Traffic and parking are major issues, as well as circulation given the proximity of a driveway to the intersection of El Camino Real and 27th Avenue. All of these issues need to be studied as part of the formal application*

Announcements/Communications

1. From staff
 - a. Some commissioners were present with the city council goals meeting. David Lim and Robert Ross will be looking into the items relative to the audit as the Council ad hoc committee.
 - b. March 3rd, 5:30 PM, joint City Council and Planning Commission Study Session on the Housing Element.
 - c. March 11th Planning Commission meeting - Reasonable Accommodation Ordinance
 - d. March 25th Planning Commission Study session on CVS Pharmacy at Norfolk and Fashion Island Blvd.
2. From the Commission
 - a. Will be discussing an idea about the Hillsdale/101 Pedestrian/Bicycle Bridge Crossing with staff.

The Chair adjourned the meeting at 11:30 p.m. on Tuesday evening, February 25, 2014.