



## **STAFF REPORT TO THE PLANNING COMMISSION**

**DATE:** Regular Meeting of December 3, 2018

**TO:** Hercules Planning Commission

**SUBMITTED BY:** Holly Smyth, Planning Director  
Robert Reber, Adjunct Planner

**SUBJECT:** Workshop for the Sycamore Crossing project to develop a 12.88-acre site with approximately 29,600 square feet of retail space, a 105-room hotel, 120 multi-family residences, and 2.54 acres of creek, wetlands, and open space.

**APPLICANT:** Sycamore Land Developers LLC (represented by Sam Miller and Doug Mull) and Hercules Hospitality LLC

**LOCATION:** South side of Sycamore Avenue and northwest side of San Pablo Avenue east of Tsushima Street (Assessor's Parcel Numbers 404-020-057 and 404-020-058)

### **RECOMMENDED ACTION:**

No formal action is recommended at this time. The project applicants will present proposed parking, pedestrian, and landscaping plans for the residential area of the project in a workshop format, during which the Planning Commission should invite public comments and then discuss the proposed layout and design, including City staff's recommendations at the end of this report.

## **BACKGROUND:**

In October 2016, the Successor Agency to the Hercules Redevelopment Agency sold the two legal parcels composing the project site to Sycamore Crossing Land Developers LLC (Lewis Group) through a Purchase and Sale Agreement. In May 2017, the City approved a lot line adjustment (LLA #17-01) between the two parcels. Shortly thereafter, the Lewis Group sold to Hercules Hospitality LLC one of the redrawn parcels (Lot 1) that is intended for the development of a hotel and associated surface parking lot.

In September 2017, Lewis Group submitted applications to develop the entire Sycamore Crossing site as a horizontally mixed-use project that would include the following land uses:

- Retail/Commercial — approximately 29,600 square feet of retail space on 3.4 acres;
- Hotel — a 105-room, 4-story hotel on 1.77 acres;
- Residential — 60 single-family residences, since then revised to 120 multi-family residences on 5.17 acres;
- Open Space — creek, wetlands, and open space on 2.54 acres.

The proposed project will require the following planning approvals and entitlements:

- a) General Plan Amendment – Land Use (GPA #17-02) and Rezoning (RZ #17-02) to change western half of site from General Commercial to Planned Commercial–Residential, in order to accommodate residential uses and four-story hotel;
- b) Vesting Tentative Tract Map (to be assigned);
- c) Initial/Final Planned Development Plan #17-01;
- d) Design Review Permit #17-04;
- e) Conditional Use Permit #17-04 – for hotel, shopping centers, retail stores more than 2,000 sq. ft., drive-through services, restaurants with liquor service, and outdoor sales;

- f) Master Sign Program; and
- g) CEQA Addendum (Initial Study #17-02) – As required under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), an Initial Study checklist is being prepared to determine whether the proposed project would result in any new significant impacts or a substantial increase in severity of any significant impacts previously identified in the Hercules Updated 2009 Redevelopment Plan Environmental Impact Report (EIR) (State Clearinghouse #2008112049). The findings of the Initial Study will determine what, if any, additional environmental review may be required by CEQA.

At this time, the application is incomplete. The applicant/property owner has been working with City staff to respond to Planning Commission and community comments—including comments from the Planning Commission workshops held earlier this year on June 25, August 6, and September 17 as well as directions from City staff and other agencies (e.g., Rodeo–Hercules Fire District and WestCAT). Pending feedback from this workshop, the applicant anticipates submitting to the City in early 2019 a complete application with revised plans that respond to workshop comments, with formal project hearings beginning possibly in March or April.

## **DESCRIPTION / DISCUSSION:**

This item is conducted as a public workshop for presenting and commenting on the specific issues related to the pedestrian paths for the entirety of the Sycamore Project and the parking and landscaping/common area features for the residential area of the project. The Planning Commission previously held public workshops (October 16 and December 4, 2017) to discuss the developers' plans for the entire 12.88-acre project site. Planning Commission questions and comments at those first two workshops covered a broad range of topics but primarily related to the viability of the proposed uses and the nature of the residential component.

In response to Planning Commission comments, as well as feedback from City staff, Lewis and its partners—Woodley Design Group (architects) and the New Home Company (builders)—changed the residential concept and design from single-family residences to multi-family condominium residences. The revised residential plans

were presented to the Planning Commission at a workshop on June 25, 2018. Plans for the commercial center were presented at the August 6, 2018 workshop. The Planning Commission held a comprehensive workshop for the project on September 17, 2018.

The project applicants have requested this December 3 meeting as an anticipated final Planning Commission workshop to discuss the latest residential design iteration before proceeding to a formal project hearing. To help give the applicants clear direction for finalizing project plans, City staff have several recommendations for Planning Commission to consider and advise:

- **Residential Parking:** In response to prior Planning Commission concerns about the usability of tandem garages and the sufficiency of guest parking, the applicants have substantially increased on-site surface parking to an extent (361 total spaces) that now well exceeds the City's minimum requirements (1.5 enclosed spaces, plus 0.5 guest spaces for each of the 120 dwelling units, for a total of 240 spaces). The current proposed parking configuration (see Attachment 1) results in:
  - Guest parking congregated near Tsushima Street.
  - Main entrances that face the back ends of parked cars.
  - A parking-dominant focus and appearance near the intersection of Tsushima Street and San Pablo Avenue.

***Staff Recommendation 1 - Parking:*** Consider Parking Alternative Concept 1 (see Attachment 2) which relocates some of the parking from the southwest corner of the project to a more central area (results in a slightly lower but still sufficient number of guest parking spaces: 2.94/unit). This alternative also offers a larger common area at the center of the residences.

***Staff Recommendation 2 - Parking:*** Consider eliminating the three parking spaces facing the entrance at Tsushima Street and the five parking spaces facing the entrance at Ohlone Place. In combination with Parking Recommendation 1 above, this would result in 343 total parking spaces, still well in excess of the minimum required amount of 240 parking spaces. This would allow some more appropriate, appealing, and enhanced features to be

*installed at the two entrances, as well as open up additional common area space at the center of the residences (see Open Space & Amenities recommendations below).*

***Staff Recommendation 3 - Parking:*** *Applicants will need to demonstrate how parking meets current requirements for electric vehicle charging, accessibility, and loading spaces (1.0 per 25 units).*

- **Pedestrian Circulation:** Although the project does not have sidewalks on both sides of all internal roadways (as Staff would recommend) and does not offer a pedestrian bridge over Ohlone Creek (as the Planning Commission has previously expressed as desirable), the project does offer ample and convenient pathways throughout the entire site (see Attachment 3).

***Staff Recommendation 4 - Pedestrian:*** *Need to ensure that paths to rear of residential units do not lead to unsafe mid-block crossings.*

***Staff Recommendation 5 - Pedestrian:*** *Applicants will need to demonstrate how pathways satisfy accessibility requirements.*

- **Open Space & Amenities:** The Planning Commission has previously expressed concerns about the residential density. In response, the applicant has iteratively reduced the number of multi-family residences from 134 to 120 units. Another way to mitigate residential density concerns is to optimize common areas and amenities (see Attachment 4). The central plaza, with its outdoor tables, chairs, and umbrellas, shade structure, seatwalls, and BBQ area offer a promising gathering spot for residents. As the multi-family residences are proposed as two- and three-bedroom units, there will undoubtedly be children who will benefit from on-site recreation. City staff see several areas for improvement in the common areas:
  - The limited size of the central plaza (Attachment 4, AR-36) and the play area (AR-37) limit their individual appeal and usability. Furthermore, the parked cars that would face the central plaza on one side and the play area on three sides make the spaces less hospitable.

The tiny tot lot should be expanded to provide some recreational amenity for older children to enjoy.

- Chairs, tables, and umbrellas along Sycamore Avenue may attract vandalism and present maintenance challenges. These areas may not invite people to sit as much as the nearby but more active plazas at the center of the residences, across the street at the Aventine project, outside the hotel, and at the food court of the commercial area of the project.

***Staff Recommendation 6 - Open Space/Amenities:*** Concentrate the majority of open space/amenities in one central area (see Parking Recommendation 1 above). Expand and enhance the recreational amenities for multi-generational enjoyment, and add softscape to the enlarged common area to balance out the hardscape.

***Staff Recommendation 7 - Open Space/Amenities:*** Remove the tables, chairs, and umbrellas from the two residential corners adjacent to Sycamore Avenue. As an alternative to umbrellas, consider putting a large shade tree at the mini-plaza adjacent the corner of Ohlone Way and Sycamore Avenue.

***Staff Recommendation 8 - Open Space/Amenities:*** To provide a little more balance between the residential and hotel sides, install a monument feature on the hotel side opposite the residential plaza at the corner of Ohlone Way and Sycamore Avenue.

***Staff Recommendation 9 - Open Space/Amenities:*** Given the level of traffic and high visibility, the intersection of Tsushima Street and San Pablo Avenue provides an opportunity to give the residential project a strong presence. A prominent monument, berming, and landscaping would have the added benefit of screening the parking that faces San Pablo Avenue.

## **ATTACHMENTS:**

1. Residential Parking Concept – 11-21-2018
2. Alternative Parking Concepts 1, 2 & 3

3. Pedestrian Circulation Plan
4. Residential Open Space Design Concepts