



PLANNING COMMISSION STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: January 21, 2020

TO: Members of the Planning Commission

SUBMITTED BY: Holly Smyth, AICP, Planning Director
Michele Rodriguez, AICP, LEED AP Adjunct Planner

SUBJECT: Workshop to Review of the Hill Town Project located at 4200 San Pablo Avenue which proposes to develop a 44 acre site to include approximately 598 multi-family homes and 4,200 square feet of retail with passive open space and recreational elements submitted by the Santa Clara Housing Group, Inc.

RECOMMENDATION Carrying out Workshop Session to include a presentation by the applicant and staff on the landscape and architecture modifications followed by a dialogue led by the Planning Commission

- a) Presentation by the Applicant on how the Planning Commission comments from the October 21, 2019 workshop was addressed.
- b) Presentation by Staff on key issues from plan review and status of CEQA.
- c) Questions and Direction from the Planning Commission to the Applicant.
- d) Input from the public on the Project.
- e) Schedule a Planning Commission public hearing on the merits of the Project.

1. SUMMARY OF PRIOR WORKSHOP

The last workshop was held on October 21, 2019 ([video link here](#)), with the staff report and minutes included as Attachments 5 & 6 to this report. In summary, the history of the Project and an overview of the Development and Owner Participation Agreement (DOPA) was provided, key issues were discussed and direction given to the applicant for the following plan modifications:

- Site Plan: Increase on-street parking, clearly depict parking locations and number being provided; clarify building types (townhome, condo, and apartment) and whether the units are for-sale or rental; identify use of the podium retail; refine location of cell tower.
- Civil Plan: Clearly depict existing and future land elevations.
- Landscape Plan: The Grand Entry tying into the Caltrans right-of-way may be removed in exchange for enhancements to the southern connector roadway leading to San Pablo Avenue to replicate the northern roadway entry design; create a pedestrian pathway and/or stairs thru the orchard connecting from the southerly entry street to the podium building area; depict the community center in the podium buildings available to all because the project has no yards, patios or parks; replace the proposed bocce court use with a use such as a half-basketball courts, dog park, or playground for ages 10-15.
- Architecture: Podium: all elevations facing the courtyard, San Pablo Avenue or I-80 freeway shall be modified to increase detail, quality of design including corners, edging,

eliminate long flat walls, and Site-wide changes to architecture to align with the DOPA Italian Mediterranean design theme.

No decision on the TSM, PDP, DRP, or CUP occurred at the meeting. Under a separate item on the Agenda, the term of the DOPA was recommended to City Council to be extended. The extension was eventually approved by the City Council.

The following are key topic areas discussed and plan modifications requested by the Planning Commission on building and site design, amenities, parking, and overall site grade:

A. Building and Site Design

Building Design and Architecture.

Planning Commission Direction: The Planning Commission preferred less of a modern design, and reiterated the need for the IPDP approved classic Italianate Mediterranean building style.

Townhome and courtyard units: More clearly differentiate between the unit types within each building. Suggested changes included adding stone veneer elements, window shutters, black steel window detail, rail or deck elements, recessed entry doors within arched openings; arches repeating along single-story facades defining narrow step-up porches; balconies and terraces adding pedestrian connection to outdoor spaces and red tile roof to contribute to distinctive identify of the buildings. The elevator towers should replicate the Compinale. Add a kitchenette to first floor bedroom of Plan 5 (Plan A3.5.5) for rentable accessory dwelling unit.

Podium buildings: Enhance long, monotonous walls facing the central courtyard and northeast and visible traveling northbound on I-80, John Muir Parkway and San Pablo Avenue (Plan A5.0.6 A). Include architectural detail, varied colors, window openings and entry doors. Particular attention to where large blank walls turn corners and include end or corner detail and articulation. Add a cornice to the large circular feature facing the courtyard to add depth and detail, and include an overlook above the retail with a balustrade.

A new rendering was requested for building view from I-80.

Plan Revision:

Townhome and courtyard units: Modifications were made to create three distinct styles and each with changes to building color, roof angle, and tower designs. Some circular elements were added, as was some black steel window detail and rail elements. The revised buildings elevations remain modern in design.

Podium buildings: Some color variations are added to the down-hill facing slope and draping landscaping to soften the large circular feature facing the courtyard.

Staff Comment: Staff has provided architectural direction to the architect on October 26; November 25; December 10, and January 14. Staff supports the sketch-up courtyard and townhome unit concept drawing contained in Attachment 2, as it aligns with the Planning Commission direction. The January 14 submitted version is missing the level of detail, and quality

of architecture expected by the Planning Commission, and staff particularly as visible from I-80, and San Pablo Avenue. At the concurrence with the developer, staff has provided a red-lined version of the January 13 architecture for Planning Commission discussion in Attachment 3. Due to time constraints staff did not redline every page throughout the packet.

KTGY stated the Fire District required a continuous roof line. According to the District varied roof heights are acceptable when roof ladders are added to provide fire access and movement between roofs. Further clarification was provided directly to the applicant by the Fire District, as their original discussions were more in the podium building discussions.

Site Design.

Planning Commission Direction:

Pedestrian Connection. Improve the pedestrian connection from the podium buildings to John Muir Parkway by creating a pathway thru the olive orchard, see Plan A1.1.0 Movement & Access Diagram and Overall Site Plan L1.0.

Alternative to Grand Stairway. The original IPDP Plan L-1 included a Grand Stairway from John Muir Parkway. The applicant says it is infeasible because the majority of lands, where the stairway landing is shown, is owned by Cal Trans. Staff reached out to CalTrans and they stated that only if the City were to enter into an encroachment and maintenance agreement would they be willing to consider the originally visioned staircase. The Planning Commission offered an alternative to enhance the southern project entry (“F” Street, Plan C2.00) from San Pablo Avenue and linking it to a pedestrian connection at the podium buildings.

Cell Tower Site. Two alternative cell-tower sites were shown, Plan C1.03; was revised to reflect Cell-Tower Site Alternative 2 as the only site so the tower is not visually prominent from key locations along San Pablo Avenue.

Plan Revision:

Pedestrian Connection: A pedestrian stairway has been added connecting the Podium buildings to the southerly entry drive (Plan L3.0).

Alternative to Grand Stairway: The Grand Stairway has been removed (Plan L1.), and the secondary driveway to the site has been enhanced with pavers on concrete as a pedestrian feed from the site to San Pablo Avenue (Plan L3.0).

Cell Tower Site: One cell tower site is shown to the back of the site, and least visible from the surrounding right-of-way (Plan L1.1).

Staff Comment: *Alternative to Grand Stairway.* The Grand Stairway approved in the IPDP was unknowingly located partially in Cal Trans right-of-way. According to Cal Trans there are two options for making improvements on State right-of-way including an encroachment permit which is usually reserved for utility company improvements, and/or applying for decertification of ownership and purchasing the land from Cal Trans which is unlikely because Cal Trans maintains land ownership for future expansion needs.

B. Amenities – Landscape Plan

Planning Commission Direction: Design does not include yards, patios, or community area.

Site-wide: Replace low-demand bocce ball courts with basketball courts, and add a dog park, playground ages 10-15, and BBQ gathering area.

Podium: Dedicate common space for a community center.

Plan Revision:

Site-wide: The bocce ball courts have been replaced with a nature-themed tot-lot play area (Plan L4.0), passive open space gathering area (Plan L1.1), and a BBQ and picnic table area (Plan L5.0).

Podium: No changes made.

Staff Comment: The applicant in consultation with their landscape architect decided a basketball court would create noise and disturb adjacent residential units. A dedicated dog park, and community center for common use is not shown but if desired could be a condition of approval to the merits review of the Project tentatively being calendared for February 18, 2020.

C. Parking

Planning Commission Direction:

Site-wide On-street. Location of on-street parking should be shown shaded on a site plan for easy reference, and included in the Project Summary, Parking Totals (Plan A0.1.2).

Courtyard and Townhome Tandem. Consider adding drive-thru parking garages to encourage use.

Plan Revision:

Site-wide On-Street. According to the applicant an additional 20 on-street parking spaces have been provided (Supplemental Exhibit – Parking), no new Project Summary Chart was submitted. The Supplementary Exhibit – Site Plan (page 3-21) shows on-street parking on at least one-side of the street on the main road.

Courtyard and Townhome Tandem: The applicant did not feel a drive thru would enhance the site or building design.

Staff Comment: On-street parking deserts exist for the cluster of buildings on the southwest portion of the site (buildings 2A – 2D, 2M – 2L, and 2J-2L), and the four units on the north side (1T). This can be addressed during the merits of the project review.

D. Overall Site Grades

Planning Commission Direction: Add shaded contour lines showing before and after elevation.

Plan Revision: A supplementary exhibit – proposed earthwork cut and fill was added (Plan page 21-21) showing graphically the existing and proposed topography.

Staff Comment: In order to best understand the changes to soil, and building heights the Planning Commission can review existing and future soil grade, and building finished floor and roof ridge. On this site, reductions in soil height of between 30-60’ are proposed which translates to heavy equipment soil movement along with retaining walls, shown as red lines, up to 17’ high shown by bottom and top of wall height (Plan Supplementary Exhibit – Grading Plan, and Building Elevations).

2. ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION

The Project: The Hercules Updated 2009 Redevelopment Plan Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) (SCH #2008112049) dated January 2009; and subsequently amended in April 20, 2009 was prepared to provide an assessment of the potentially significant environmental effects of the proposed Updated 2009 Redevelopment Plan. Included in that EIR is the Hill Town project. As required by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the then Redevelopment Agency was the lead agency for the project evaluated in the draft EIR; the City has the principal responsibility for approving the Project. As such, a new environmental analysis is underway to compare the 2019 Project and its impacts to the 2009 EIR. The draft of the CEQA document has been reviewed by staff and a public review draft should be available in February. The DA requires the Applicant pay the sum of \$100,000 as their proportionate share of the EIR. All payments tied to the DA have been satisfied with further charges anticipated for the processing of the entitlements as part of their deposit account.

3. ISSUES FOR PLANNING COMMISSION’S CONSIDERATION

Working Session: Staff to review the IPDP architecture, the December sketch-up drawing and the red-lined architecture. Applicant to make a presentation on architectural modifications. After hearing the Applicants presentation, the Commission should collect any public input and provide staff direction on the specific modifications to the plans needed before the public hearing, and schedule a duly noticed public hearing on the merits of the project, along with review of the CEQA document (tentatively targeting Tuesday, February 18, 2020).

4. ATTACHMENTS:

- Attachment 1-- Hill Town Architecture, Civil, and Landscape Plans (Rcvd 1/13/20 and 1/16/20)
- Attachment 2- Hill Town Hand Sketch-up Plans from (December 2019)
- Attachment 3- Staff’s Partial Redlining of 1-13-2020 Architecture
- Attachment 4- Original 2007 Initial Planned Development Plan (IPDP 07-01) civil, landscape, and architecture plans and Conditions.
- Attachment 5 - October 21, 2019 Staff Report for Hill Town Workshop
- Attachment 6 - October 21, 2019 Meeting Minutes