

Draft
Joint Planning and Transportation Commission/Architectural Review Board
October 24, 2012

MEETING SUMMARY

The comments/questions have been organized by the consultant into 16 topics, below:

Process

1. Best Palo Alto process in terms of transparency by considering project before an application

Evaluating the Proposal

1. Does approving this project preclude other desirable development downtown by using up street, park and school capacity?
2. Increasing density = more traffic = more ABAG housing = more school growth = unacceptable impact for most people?
3. Consider competing designer options, project is a campaign, show what can happen under current zoning and design guidelines
4. Model what 50 foot height across site looks like with city's guidelines for comparison to project
5. What is delta when you compare CC zoning with AID zone, what are the additional public benefits
6. Need to complete discussion on future of El Camino Real, and city wide height with PTC/ARB to evaluate the project
7. What is justification for significantly higher building heights here? Divisive community issue.
8. Is division NIMBY or historical? Need to persuade why only 15 feet above residential is good idea, so many different places are Palo Alto, downtown more suitable for higher buildings, proposal is midrise, not high-rise, not want to see miss opportunity because of reactions to a few bad 70's buildings
9. Not dissuaded from proposal, incredible opportunity

Site Plan

1. Why not switch office and theater, have theater in prominent location on University Avenue?
2. Mistake to have theater where it is
3. See value separating transit and theater plazas
4. Need to soften fly tower with trees along park edge
5. Respect city's history, keep Julia Morgan where it is, reduce building heights in scale with Julia Morgan and historic depot
6. Consider moving Julia Morgan to Arboretum, since Stanford is the primary beneficiary, see if a nexus with Stanford Shopping Center, City
7. Don't move Julia Morgan very far away, better if incorporated into El Camino Park
8. Consider moving transit center out of University Circle to other underutilized sites, such as the Caltrain parking on Alma Street

9. Not seeing holistic approach to planning for the site
10. Plan for best guess covered trench Caltrain alternative
11. Consider how to better integrate Historic depot into design
12. Assuming the undergrounding of the Caltrain tracks, how would that change the design or create new opportunities?
13. Density
14. Don't conflagrate density with height CC district's 2.0 FAR is appropriate
15. This site is part of downtown per policy L-8, being a separate "subarea" is not following legislative intent
16. Need to calculate FAR properly, and not include park space, however consider theater in park OK like Lucie Stern, vs. gerrymandering
17. Excellent site for project, dis-service not planning for growth, fail to compete with neighboring cities, density downtown benefits the public – 7 yogurt shops
18. Height
19. Offices are way too tall and out of scale
20. Why not build theater below grade to reduce height?
21. OK with higher buildings at this site
22. No better location in city for density and height, have transit, transitional area, theater exciting opportunity
23. Want height numbers for tallest buildings in PA – 525 University, 101 Alma etc
24. Concern city is getting full with build out with height limits, rather see significant height where feels to be possible, city can tolerate it in some places, stay low in residential areas, want to see explored further
25. Tall building here makes sense as punctuation of ends of University Avenue, 525 on one end, 27 on the other, like university circle
26. Project to high, don't want Manhattan
27. Height needs to solve problems, reward height with mixed-use, want to really buy something that we can't achieve with a little more height with buildings downtown
28. Open minded on height, tall can be beautiful architecture, suburban city is an oxymoron, need view corridors, open space, don't want suffocated city
29. Transit
30. Look at SF temp bus circulation to avoid pedestrian crossing problems
31. Fix transit route powerpoint slide, has route from bridge, left turn onto Quarry Road
32. Transit center design mixed with cars seems like black diamond ski run

Traffic/Access/Parking

1. Vehicular entrance to site divides site
2. Need to completely mitigate traffic impacts, project will attract incremental traffic and parking
3. Can boundary of parking footprint be extended to have more parking
4. PAMF entrance to below grade parking is not nice, not want to see that here, needs to be special
5. Over build subterranean parking to minimize neighborhood parking impacts
6. Generally agree less parking at transit stop, however need to alleviate some of the parking deficit
7. Need adequate parking, including parking for visitors
8. Move parking access north
9. Auto access from University Ave.?

10. Need to mitigate intra-city travel

Connectivity

1. Consider how to connect other side of Alma Street, extend retail along Alma and Lytton?
2. Connect to Stanford Shopping Mall with a meaningful walking experience, not want dead ground floor space
3. Will this be a barrier or will it be better for cyclists, for both local and regional bike trips?
4. Improve pedestrian network connection to Stanford Shopping Center
5. Want to see pedestrian bridge across El Camino Real

Public Space

1. How to make park/plaza lively?
2. Need great civic space oriented to the downtown

Massing

1. Put fly in middle of building so massing and building uses surround fly
2. Can we see other building massing studies, lower adjacent to depot, higher along el Camino?

Views

1. View project on all 4 sides -- design needs to consider view from Alma Street, not block views to hills, not be wall, have view corridors, step massing up from Caltrain depot and 50 foot tall buildings to see what you can, can't see with tallest buildings on El Camino Real
2. Don't want to see blank fly tower wall from park and entrance to city from Menlo Park
3. Consider view corridors to see views, sculpting buildings to have view corridor spaces from downtown to hills
4. Need 3-d views, need view from Alma Street

Parkland

1. Park land dedication is gerrymandered, if reducing park land say that is what you are doing, Zuccotti Park is not what we want, building setbacks are not park space
2. Existing park in not that great, not significant issue to reduce or replace, want public spaces like the Highline in NY, space where people can contemplate, gather, explore outdoors and connect to nature in urban area
3. Want a popular walk

Use

1. Consider mixed-use as public benefit, where retail is semi-public space
2. Ground floor uses at office need to be active pedestrian uses
3. Jobs near transit makes sense, can trade flat for tall
4. Consider top floor of office buildings have a semi-public use, such as restaurant
5. Project not big enough to be a campus, most likely multiple tenants, need design to reflect that
6. HQ building concept wrong concept, need multiple tenant building
7. Multi-tenant building better for innovation
8. Need tech space

9. Need to include retail with restaurants, café in retail space in the ground floor office space between transit and the theater plaza

Aesthetics

1. Need to go forward, not back with roof/skyline design, not flat roofs, more curved, see difference between SF downtown and South of Market
2. Sculpture density, no better location with transit and along El Camino Real to have this
3. PA named after twin redwood trees, do we want PA named after twin towers?
4. Reach for stars on aesthetics

Theater

1. Consider Santa Barbara theater entrance sequence of courtyard, lobby and seating, people ready for experience by time sitting down
2. Can theater be used for convention and community uses?
3. Consider theater roof for events, such as movies projected onto the fly tower
4. Have theater serve multiple community uses
5. Fly space as big blank wall, mural of 2 redwood trees?
6. Worried that theater is too ambitious in size, over reaching not good for city
7. Need transition plan for Robert Kelley

Wind

1. Study wind impacts so outdoor space is comfortable and usable

Follow-up Questions

Following the PTC meeting of October 24, 2012, PTC member Panelli forwarded these additional questions:

1. Could the Theatre be a compatible use in the PF district? It does not seem to be incompatible, but it was not clear to me from reading the code whether it is or is not. Also, such a designation could alleviate the perception of parkland gerrymandering to make the numbers work.
2. Can you explain the push to create a new Arts and Innovation district? If we used an existing designation for the office portion of the parcel, it seems that we could accommodate most of what the applicant will likely request. The rest (primarily the height) could be handled through the variance process.
3. If we delineated the parkland portion as everything north of underground garage entrances, what would be the remaining parcel size? And therefore what would the maximum allowable density be for this portion of the parcel based on a 2.0 FAR?
4. Are there any provisions in the existing code to provide density bonuses in exchange for including publicly available parking, over and above the minimum amount of parking required by the code for the designated uses?

Regarding above questions, Commissioner Keller noted:

“It is worthwhile to see whether the office parcel would be eligible for a variance under the standard criteria. To the extent that the 50-foot height limit is kept elsewhere in the City, and the

proposed project exceeds the 50-foot height limit, then it is important to have explicit and clear distinctions between this project and other projects that would not get to exceed the 50-foot height limit. It is not clear to me that the variance process provides sufficient distinction to avoid replication elsewhere.”