

Summary: ARB session November 1, 2012 27 University Ave Potential Project

ARB members:

Alexander Lew
Lee Lippert, Acting (Vice) Chair
Randy Popp

Staff:

Amy French, Chief Planning Official
Russ Reich, Senior Planner/ARB Liaison
Steve Emslie, Deputy City Manager
Bruce Fukuji, Consultant to Staff
Dan Garber, Consultant to Staff

Staff and Consultants Presentation

Amy French, Chief Planning Official, addressed the ARB members, noting the topics of the staff report and the goal of receiving additional comments from both the ARB and the public on the potential project, following the presentation to ARB/PTC on October 24, 2012. She noted public comments received via email were put at places, and a speaker that had to leave the meeting had provided written comments for ARB to view. She noted consultants Bruce Fukuji and Dan Garber were going to present the potential project.

Bruce Fukuji, Consultant, presented the main features of the potential project.

Dan Garber, Consultant, presented power point slides showing information regarding existing tall buildings in Palo Alto, as to their heights and footprints in comparison with the proposed project.

Public Speakers

Mark Weiss, noted he had attended the October 24, 2012 meeting; stated he thought it to be a convoluted process, without all of the information needed on the process; stated that in August 2011, around the same time as process began, the City had an opportunity to utilize the Varsity Theater for theater productions.

Mary Carlstead, noted that there were few members of the public present, and that there is an uproar in the neighborhoods about the project; noted a recall of Council is possible if the project is not put to a vote; noted she feels betrayed and there is rage; stated she feels project is in the wrong place; noted Palo Alto could have been the Santa Barbara of the North but now there are ugly buildings, prison buildings; hopes City consider's feelings of the neighborhoods

Beth Bunnenberg, as an individual, not as an HRB member, because no study session has been conducted yet with the HRB. Gave a summary of the situation, noting that Hostess House is a category 1 structure, the highest category on the Palo Alto Inventory and that HRB is to report to the ARB on category 1 buildings; noted the history of the Hostess House, the first community center in 1919 in the United States; stated that it is known as Landmark 895, on the National Register of Historic Places; requested the ordinance process happen with the HRB involved.

Carla MacLeod, born and raised in Palo Alto, noted her remembrance of when the height limit was instituted, noted she was in Theatreworks shows, remembers fights about statues on Embarcadero and fountains on California Avenue; noted that we are not talking about the Manhattan-ization of Palo Alto as it is just a small area; stated the project will provide public benefits and will provide lovely public open spaces, excellent solutions and good there is an opportunity to vote on it; noted the City should take the chance and appreciate the benefits.

Carol Kenyan, noted concern about traffic congestion in an area already congested; noted issue with parkland; noted using theater as incentive for office is wrong way to go. Stated that we are looking at this only to create more office space, which is not the right way to go; especially concerned that moving a historic building will create a lot of anguish. Stated she is hoping it is just the beginning of discussion of a project that will truly affect livability.

Elaine Meyer, can only guess at hidden improprieties of public officials; noted that to read the agenda, one would not know there is no project, no traffic study or EIR; public wouldn't know MacArthur Park building is to be moved. Stated that this is most unusual, scheduling reviews while the community is engaged in the national vote and said, "just because a bully millionaire says jump, you don't have to say how high."

Libby Lucas, Los Altos resident, noted she considers this site to be a community resource; FEMA and Red Cross in San Jose are in a flood plain and stated that this location is still important. Noted that she wants to know how much right of way is there for the train and for Stanford, noted the vista to Stanford from downtown Palo Alto may have been important in the original plan, and that the traffic to the hospital by emergency vehicles is a concern. Noted the concept of theater and plaza is another hazard; that should not clog traffic with people casually walking across University Avenue. Noted she wonders about sound of train impacting theater productions, and high speed rail taking four rails, which should be considered.

Jennifer Landisman, noted the location and height are hugely symbolic, that she has lived here 10 years, spent time in Vienna, grew up in many urban cities worldwide and has travelled widely; noted that she encounters people abroad who say they want to live in Palo Alto, since the City manages to combine progress along with a relatively small and green town; noted that the 50 foot limit makes Palo Alto what it is.

Lenora Simes, grew up in New York, noted Palo Alto is not a city but a large town; stated the project is too big, urbanization won't work, it is congested, crowded, and tall buildings would eliminate views of the hills; noted it is meaningless to construct at the train station; the area doesn't have space for the project. Stated she truly hopes for transparency in the process. Noted the Edgewood Center issue, that the developer did not do what he agreed too. Cited recent buildings constructed close to sidewalk (e.g. Alma Plaza) and noted the CJL is the ugliest building.

Bob Moss, noted that this is the most bizarre project he has been involved in for the past 40 years. Stated his first question is why the ARB is discussing a project that isn't a project. Noted

this is an attempt by Arrillaga not to pay for the ballot and project reviews. Noted the developer is in public pocket, the project is out of scale, scope and context; other than that, it is a fine project. Noted his submittal, that only 9 buildings are near 100 feet. Most were built before 1965. Discussed the public revolution that included setting the 50 foot height limit, now in place more than 35 years. Asked "why can't Arrillaga live with it?" Noted that we have an arts center, have for decades (the Art Center). Noted we have Innovation Centers on West Bayshore, Stanford Research Park, Embarcadero. Advised proposing only one building of no more than 70 feet on this site, to make it rational.

ARB comments and questions of staff:

Alex Lew: Requested staff clarification on process.

Amy French: Noted the status of project as not a filed application, and planning further outreach.

Alex Lew: Asked consultant Garber to clarify the 2000 theater study.

Dan Garber: Described the partnership in 2000 with Stanford on a study about need for theater venues in the area, for performing arts, dance center, concert hall; Stanford was considering re-purposing existing facilities. At that time, the theater was shown on top of where the reservoir is now located, in the study. Theatreworks programming was such that Stanford was studying other venues on Stanford campus. El Camino Park was not considered due to the asset of the playing fields.

Bruce Fukuji: Described why the theater and offices are located where they are in the concept (and not the reverse). Noted he could prepare an exhibit to explain better.

Dan Garber: Noted putting the office next to park issue – plaza next to park enhances the park setting, helped connect dots between shopping center and downtown. Noted Transit Ring will be very active and the current center would not meet capacity and that there is a tremendous need that would need to be addressed.

Alex Lew: Noted if theater was where office is now, only a 50 foot tall building (primarily) would be viewed down the corridor of University; it is a Palm Drive issue, doesn't like a building that tall next to the historic train depot. Concerned about the fly space facing El Camino Park; perceived benefit is downgraded by a big blank box looking down Quarry road. Not crazy about site lines. Back alley behind theater, the road around theater – don't see the description of the road in the plan. Likes access to the theater plaza but plaza is not quite fitting in here. Plaza in front of city hall is empty in Mountain View most of the time. If the theater is next to University, Caltrain traffic at commute time, plaza could serve as transit center during daytime and serve the theater crowd at night. He likes sharing parking among uses and likes Palm trees to make concept cohesive. Consider additional height in specific places. Committee for Green Foothills concept – increase height and density to reduce sprawl and density; supports that but

doesn't like any of the massing he sees so far. Axonometric views are not flattering, inherently, but the project raises so many issues, it would be hard to meet compatibility findings for ARB as is.

Randy Popp: Has four areas discussed in last week's joint meeting, restating for the record. First is site organization; views from El Camino from Menlo Park and from the South and from downtown – this is an iconic gateway project with significant opportunity and responsibility too. Level of graphics, bird's eye view; watercolors are helpful, but seeing the theater from park site is a concern. Internal views are comfortable, but massing of the buildings is challenging. Relative to site organization, he is struggling to accept the position of office not being on the park and theater not being on University. The theater fly is divisive, would separate the park. Opportunity is for the office to look across the park. This is not the right set up. Moving MacArthur Park – what is being done – what is the future of the building? Connectivity – how does it connect to downtown? Study whether Lytton Avenue can extend through the site; not advocating rigorously extending downtown grid to El Camino Real, but some connection as the site feels apart. Shopping Center extending to the site – Bloomingdales coming to ARB - need to strengthen the connection. Challenge of traffic; look at how to mitigate demands – look at parking entry on site – better to put on the end rather than the middle – put on the corners, more spread out and therefore doesn't break up the site. Height – site organization, how office buildings placed makes dark internal courtyard. Let southern exposure into project, light go through the project. This is a tremendous opportunity to do something interesting; skill and knowledge to create sustainable, set the character for this part of town. Building design – in favor of pushing up and preserving open space, just in the right places on the site.

Lee Lippert: Thanked the public for speaking to the board, noted purview today is giving feedback to Council. How process will go? Issues here are more than site specific. Regardless, Development Agreement is the more appropriate process. Must look at impacts to El Camino Real and Downtown. Opportunity should not be overlooked; question is whether this is asset or blemish – trade-offs: height and mass in return for theater. Process needs to be established.

Layout is appropriate; office/mixed use next to transit makes appealing to commuters from SF and SJ. Arrillaga's plan to turn over to Stanford – great opportunity for Stanford to locate their offices under one roof – good nexus for business functions in Palo Alto. Stanford as a tenant can enforce a TDM program that will have employees taking public transit. Not a proponent of height; office architecture doesn't punctuate University Avenue well; courtyard and bridges make building one large mass. Eliminate bridges to see through plates and see the courtyard. Or push masses together to eliminate courtyard. Fill in courtyard to reduce mass and height of building and reduce visual impacts. Theater fly – why not increase capacity in the theater, disguising fly, maybe have one theater on top of another, put dance studios above theater, to play with the building mass. Royal Albert Hall on edge of Hyde Park, surrounded by open space; attractive theater in England, with housing around it. Project needs to rise to that level/expectation. He is not dissuaded by height. This is only a little bit above 101 Alma, less than Forest Towers, like Palo Alto Square – we don't see them as blemishes or detrimental to

community. Architecturally, this building needs to exceed level and quality of those projects if that height.

Circulation plan – not supportive – ingress/egress of underground parking is of concern. Bringing Quarry Road across and into facility – have parking come from Quarry; don't look at Urban Lane as continuation. Keep impacts of traffic off University Avenue.

Relocation of Julia Morgan Building; HRB input is important, but he is encouraged to know it is not the original site of the building, feels better about moving to a new site. As a civic building, preserve and use again as a civic structure in Palo Alto. Rinconada Park – looking at replacing building there – a possibility. Surface parking for El Camino Park – put into the underground parking of this development, put Julia Morgan where existing parking is in the park, so it becomes a field house for the park.

Alex Lew: San Francisco regulations about shading public parks – other city standards?

Bruce Fukuji: Shadow studies already done; will come back with that, and further study.

Lee Lippert: Urban Lane - reclaim look at underground parking there and maybe some of the office uses proposed at this site. El Camino Park, underground pedestrian linkage at Everett should be considered as part of the project.

Randy Popp: Terrible parking problem downtown; not enough CalTrain parking available, so folks park in the neighborhoods. Seeking Council discussion around obligating, a study, of how to alleviate parking problem resulting from CalTrain parking demand; looking at the domino effect; just noting this for Council discussion.

Lee Lippert: Nexus between parking downtown and transit center; if processed as a development agreement, maybe parking for transit will become part of the project.