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City of San José | 200 East Santa Clara Street
via email: cassandra.vanderzweep@sanjoseca.gov, sent July 17, 2023

re: Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Report (DSEIR) on Milligan Parking Lot Project
File No. ER20-049

Dear Environmental Project Manager,

In response to the Notice of Preparation (NOP) of a Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Report (DSEIR) on “the Milligan Parking Lot Project,” File No. ER20-049, in September of 2021 I wrote to Thai-Chau Lee, Environmental Project Manager. I wrote as a private citizen to give comments that fell into four broad categories: site considerations, riparian setbacks, transportation, and historic resources. I write to you now regarding the DSEIR itself, again as a private citizen and again on the four categories.

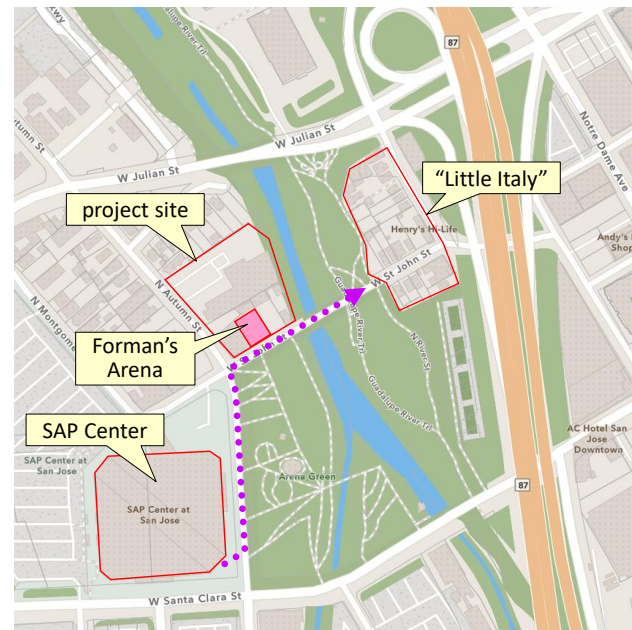
Site Considerations

I’d like to repeat some of my questions from the NOP:

- Is the planned parking lot consistent with the plans worked out with the Diridon Station Area Advisory Group (SAAG), and with the City-adopted Diridon Station Area Plan (DSAP) and the Downtown West Design Standards and Guidelines (DWDSG)?
- Does a walled-in surface parking lot make an area more livable, walkable, and/or vibrant?
- Does the City consider a surface parking lot to be “the highest and best use” of this site? Or is this a “temporary place-holding” proposal, and, if so, for what and for how long?
- What are the impacts to the future BART and potential High Speed Rail of having the nearby 2.5 acres used for surface parking rather than for high-density housing, commercial, or passenger-generating attractions? Will these impacts be considered in the Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) Analysis?

I would like to add the observation that, as is apparent in the diagram, the project site is on the direct path taken by patrons of the SAP Center who walk over to the “Little Italy” entertainment district after an event. Accordingly, I would like to also ask the following questions:

- Will the sidewalk in front of the project on the north side of St. John St. be improved so as to be inviting to pedestrians? Will it be wide enough to accommodate street vendors and food carts to help “activate” the street and make it a “vibrant” area?
- Will whatever wall, fencing, or other façade facing St. John St. be compatible with the planned activated, vibrant area?



- Can the Forman's Arena, which faces St. John St., be preserved, stabilized, and opened to the public on event nights to add to the vibrancy of the area?

Riparian Setback

I'm pleased to see that the plans have been modified from the earlier NOP version and now incorporate a setback for the riparian corridor, along with its restoration.

- Who will maintain the setback area, both during its establishment phase and long term: the City, the Sharks, or the Water District?
- The DSEIR has several sections on the control of "invasive non-native species," even including the washing of "ground disturbing equipment" to avoid the spread of invasive species. Given that this project is for a public parking lot, how will the project be designed to protect the riparian habitat area against the spread of invasive species once the project is opened to the public? Will rainwater that might wash seeds from parked vehicles be collected and filtered prior to discharge into the stream?

Transportation

I'm also pleased to see that the plans have been modified from the earlier NOP version to now include the construction of a segment of the Guadalupe River Trail: "A 600-foot-long future pedestrian trail or Class I paved bicycle and pedestrian trail would be constructed within the 35-foot setback area..."

- This trail segment will serve to connect the Los Gatos Creek Trail to the Guadalupe River Trail and is a key connection in the region's trail network. If the trail is limited to pedestrians only, how would cyclists make the connection? (There were once plans for the connection to be made by on-street bike lanes on a future Autumn Parkway extension, but I understand those plans have been dropped.) The trail segment here is critical for recreational and commuter cyclists alike as it connects residential areas to Downtown, the Diridon area, the airport, employment districts in north San Jose, and the Alviso Baylands.
- Given its central location and proximity to numerous attractions and amenities, I would imagine that the trail will be well used. Is "12 feet wide, with two-foot-wide shoulders" adequate? Should the shoulders be wider so as better handle the anticipated usage and also to help alleviate pedestrian/cyclist interactions?
- A well-designed trail is a joy to use. Please involve the various user communities in the design process so as to avoid hazards such as blind curves and sharp turns.
- Please construct the trail to high standards, with an appropriate base and pavement and with other appropriate measures to reduce settling or tree-root intrusion so that the trail will last for years with minimal maintenance.

Historic Resources

I am truly disappointed by how San José treats its historic heritage, and now here it wants to demolish two century-old structures, one of which is worthy of National listing, just to build a surface parking lot?!

- **the House**

"The house located on the rear northeast quadrant of the property was constructed around 1915, as seen on the Sanborn Maps." The historic report (Appendix D) says the house didn't appear on the 1891 map, and therefore it must be newer.

- If the dating is based solely on those two maps, couldn't the house have been built as early as 1892?
- I have heard it said that the house was actually built earlier (in the 1860's?) and then moved to the site sometime between 1891 and 1915: was that possibility explored?
- Per the report, the house "holds some importance within the pattern of residential development of 'Little Italy'..." – could the house be relocated there to add to the ensemble?
- The report continues, "but there are other better examples." But if only the best examples are preserved, won't that give a biased view of the past?

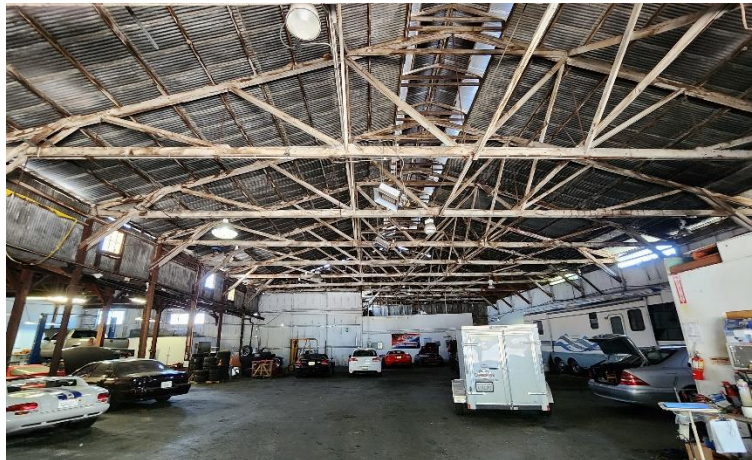
- **the Arena**

"Implementation of the proposed project would result in the demolition of the historic Forman's arena building and a significant impact to the historic resource", which, according to the NOP, is a "building [that] is listed in the City's Historic Resources Inventory as Eligible for [the] National Register ..."

The arena building may not look like much from the outside, but it's a fascinating space inside. It is sort of like an old rustic barn: scenic, but maybe not all that practical. One wouldn't want to "restore" it, "rebuild" it, "modernize" it or try to "bring it up to code" – don't, for example, retrofit it by adding insulation or double-pane windows – because then it would lose much of its charm and character: use it "as is."



- Can the arena structure be "stabilized" by, say, installing a steel frame inside to protect for earthquakes, installing fire sprinklers, and encapsulating contaminants by painting exposed surfaces with latex paint?
- Can the arena structure be made useful? It could never be upgraded enough to be housing or office space, but it could serve as shelter for the staging of food trucks and outdoor dining venues during events at the nearby SAP Center. I feel that it definitely would add to the desired "vibrancy" of the area, and also help encourage foot traffic to nearby Little Italy.



Additional Questions

- For those portions of the parcel that are to be converted to surface parking, how about providing solar-panel shade structures, and use the land for both parking and power generation?
- What's the rush? Given the change in the post-Covid work environment, I've heard that Google may be stretching out its development schedule, and that it might be many years before it

would need to use the land under the parking lots west of SAP Center, and so it also might be many years before the City of San José would need to provide parking here as recompense for the western lots. Why not let the site continue to operate in its present configuration in the meanwhile?

The DSEIR considers “Analyzed Alternatives” in Section 7.4.2. If the City does have to proceed with this project at this time, I urge it to implement the **“Forman’s Arena Building Retention Alternative”** and to “Retain existing historic Forman’s Area building and utilize it for parking.”

I look forward to reading the response to the various public comments.

~Larry Ames

Dr. Lawrence Ames – longtime creek-, trail-, environmental-, and community advocate.

cc: Liz Sewell, City of San José Trails Coordinator
Dana Peak, SJ Historic Preservation Officer
Ben Leech, Preservation Action Council of San José (PAC*SJ)
Bill Rankin, Save Our Trails
Jean Dresden, SJ Parks Advocates
SJ District 6 Neighborhood Leaders Group (D6NLG)