



Memorandum

TO: COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

FROM: David Sykes

SUBJECT: NORTH SAN JOSE
URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES

DATE: February 10, 2014

Approved

Date

2/12/14

COUNCIL DISTRICTS: 3 and 4

RECOMMENDATION

Accept the update on the North San Jose Urban Design Guidelines.

BACKGROUND

On June 8, 2010, the City Council accepted the North San Jose Urban Design Guidelines. The Guidelines provide North San José–specific guidance to assist with the implementation of the North San José Policy (Policy), which has created the opportunity for up to 26 million square feet of new office/industrial development, 32,000 residential units, and 1.7 million square feet of new commercial development. The Guidelines promote a more “urban” type of development than what has historically occurred in North San Jose, with respect to the design, orientation and placement of buildings, streets, parks, plazas, and trails.

The Guidelines were based on the North San Jose Neighborhoods Planning Taskforce’s Guiding Principles, which Council accepted on April 22, 2008. The Design Guidelines were prepared by an urban design consultant under the direction of staff from multiple City departments and the Redevelopment Agency, with opportunities for review, comment, and modification by the Taskforce, North San Jose property owners, business owners, and developers.

Specifically, on November 13, 2008, Mayor Reed, Councilmember Chu, and Councilmember Liccardo held a charette on the North San José Draft Urban Design Guidelines. Business representatives, property owners and consultants with an interest in North San Jose were invited to participate in a general discussion of development trends within the North San Jose Policy area followed by a charette exercise in which the participants tested the draft North San Jose Urban Design Guidelines. For the exercise, participants were divided into three groups, corresponding to either higher density industrial (Core Area), lower density industrial (outside Core Area), or residential development scenarios. Each group, facilitated by a professional architect, was asked to design a project consistent with the Urban Design Guidelines as a means

of testing the impact of the Guidelines upon the form of future development. Following the exercise, each group reported back to the others on lessons learned. This input was incorporated into the Urban Design Guidelines before the City Council accepted the Guidelines in 2010.

Since the acceptance of the Design Guidelines in 2010, the City has granted zoning entitlements for approximately 9,000 residential units. Of particular interest has been the Guidelines recommending additional “grid streets” to break up the existing large blocks in North San Jose to facilitate pedestrian as well as vehicular travel through the area. All of the approved residential developments are consistent with the grid street objective either with streets or pedestrian paseos.

In terms of new industrial construction, the Samsung Headquarters, currently under construction, followed the Design Guidelines with its new, urban campus. Another major builder has expressed concern about the “grid streets” and due to this single guideline, this builder has chosen not to move forward with new office construction.

Recent Council Direction

On September 24, 2013, the City Council directed the Administration to modify the North San Jose Urban Design Guidelines to make the following clear:

- Major developments for driving industry companies will have substantial flexibility to design their projects to meet their unique requirements;
- We recognize the importance of allowing the company to decide how best to use their site to foster innovation, creativity and the well-being of their employees;
- We welcome, encourage and will facilitate major development with a broad range of building and site designs such as those of Brocade @First, Samsung (under construction), and the Peery-Arillaga North First and Brokaw project.

Policy Language Added

In response to the direction from the September 24, 2013 Council meeting, the following language was added by the Council in December 2013 to the North San Jose Development Policy Guidelines:

“Recognizing the need for campus style development in North San José and demands that specific tenants may have for “build to suit” development, the City Council intends that there be substantial flexibility given in the application of the North San José Design Guidelines to achieve those tenants’ unique requirements. This flexibility is given reflecting that those companies are focused on fostering creativity of their employees to spur innovation and that the City is encouraging a broad range of job opportunities.”

This additional flexibility has proven successful as discussed below.

ANALYSIS

The North San Jose Urban Design Guidelines, along with the General Plan, North San Jose Policy and Neighborhoods Plan, help the City achieve the vision for the North San Jose area as a vibrant, jobs-rich environment. The Guidelines provide clarity for developers and the public regarding the location, quality, and character of future public and private development.

With the additional flexibility added in December, staff has been working with developers to determine the appropriate design priorities to meet the unique business needs of each prospective tenant and/or future building user(s) with respect to pedestrian and vehicular travel through large office developments. In most cases, connections within the campuses are strong. In other cases, connections between the campus and the surrounding area are more limited to protect the interests of the prospective tenant(s). For this reason, the additional flexibility is working well for corporate campuses.

Staff is also currently working with other business customers on pending developments (e.g., Bay 101 and Hyatt Hotels). These proposals are still going through the development review process and are evolving to meet the intent of the North San Jose Guidelines. As a matter of practice, the Planning staff work with applicants towards design solutions that meet the operational and functional needs of the development as well as its contribution to enhancing the area through street or other improvements.

In December 2013, SPUR published a report entitled, "Getting to Great Places: How better urban design can strengthen San Jose's future." The report identified many of the same principles that are in the Envision San Jose 2040 General Plan, North San Jose Design Guidelines, Downtown Design Guidelines, and other documents. Staff recognize that development review of Planning applications is a balancing act of satisfying sometimes competing needs. The Council has clearly stated its goals of economic development and the priority for new campus development, particularly in North San Jose. This clarity is reinforced with the flexibility language recently added to the Design Guidelines.

The Guidelines are a framework to foster creative projects; unique and attractive environments for those who live-work-play in North San Jose. Their goal is not to impede development, but to facilitate high quality buildings and public areas in a timely manner. As new development trends emerge, the Council's action in December clarified the flexibility originally intended to ensure design review processes evolve and operate at the speed of business to facilitate development solutions. Therefore, staff recommends that the Committee accept the update on the North San Jose Urban Design Guidelines. No additional revisions to the Guidelines are necessary at this time.

COORDINATION

The preparation of this memorandum and the associated work was coordinated with the Department of Public Works, Office of Economic Development, Department of Transportation, Department of Housing, and the City Attorney's Office.

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/s/
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Planning, Building and Code Enforcement

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