

## **Blossom Hill and Snell Community Meeting #2 Summary**

The second workshop for the Blossom Hill and Snell Urban Village planning process was held on Thursday, September 17<sup>th</sup>, 2015, at the Southside Community Center in San Jose. Approximately 45 community members attended. The meeting included eight City Planners from the City of San Jose as well as nine members from the American Institute of Architects (AIA), an organization that has volunteered a great deal of their time and energy to aid in the planning process. Also in attendance was representation from the District 10 and District 2 City Council Offices (since the planning area includes both districts).

The meeting began with a warm opening welcome from Councilman Khamis. Councilman Khamis stated that while there was no new development proposed within the Blossom Hill and Snell Urban Village, it is important to plan for the long term future of the area. Planning staff from the City of San Jose then re-introduced the Urban Village planning process to the attendees. Following this, the City did an overview of what staff heard at the previous meeting to give attendees an understanding of what was discussed at the last meeting and also for the City Staff to check with the community that all of the comments were heard.

The AIA then presented their initial site analysis work and spoke about best practices in neighborhood planning. The AIA also presented the work that City Planning Staff and the AIA have been working on since the previous community meeting. In addition to synthesizing comments from the previous meeting, the City and the AIA met in workshop-like sessions to come up with draft plan concepts. These concepts regarded land uses, height limits, and circulation strategies (especially changes to Snell Avenue). These draft concepts were refined over the course of several months to be presented to this second community meeting.

With this lead in, City Staff introduced these draft concepts on land use, height limits, and circulation strategies to the attendees. The City then had the room break into six smaller tables to more intimately discuss these draft concepts. Each table had at least two members of the City or AIA to facilitate discussion and take note of each comment from the community members.

At the end of this small-group exercise, a community member from each table presented highlights of what their table discussed to everyone else in the room. The meeting finished with an open floor for public comment and a brief mention of the next steps in the process by Planning Staff.

Thank you to everyone who participated. Throughout this meeting, the Blossom Hill and Snell community provided thoughtful comments on the planning process and on the draft planning concepts presented at the meeting. These comments are categorized below.

## **Draft Land Use Plan**

Blossom Hill and Snell community members who attended the meeting were generally supportive of the draft land use plan. Most wished for more mixed use development in the area and liked the type of buildings with retail on the ground floor with residential above. Some community members suggested that the commercial-designated area in the southwestern portion of the Plan could be more mixed use or residential in focus. Comments recorded at the meeting regarding land use are listed below:

- Residential could be closer to transit
- Need more gathering spaces
- Need for more retail options
- Some people like the land use plan as is
- Mixed use area should be the focus of new development first
- Valero gas station should stay- other gas stations could/should be closer to the freeway and moved off of the Blossom Hill and Snell intersection
- Urban Village Commercial area should have ground floor retail w/ residential above with an easy walk to light rail
- The land uses should be more mixed, don't segregate the residential and urban commercial – the whole village should be mixed use
- Have a greenbelt in the urban village that is wide enough for a farmers' market
  - Public access easement could contribute to the development of a greenbelt/open space
  - Need for development along the greenbelt – “eyes on the greenbelt” to maintain safety
- Need for greater mixed on uses on the urban village commercial site
- Need for plaza or other open space in the commercial area near the freeway
- Access through the big commercial areas to the residential areas would be good for accessibility
- The Plan has good density and variety, and good gathering spaces around food areas
- Parks should be adjacent to commercial
- 1 gas station on each of the 4 corners is excessive
- Keep the residential appeal of the neighborhood intact

## **Draft Building Height Map**

Nearly all of the community members were ok with the draft height maximums. While a few people wanted only a two story maximum in some places, most of the community was very supportive of buildings four to six stories in height so long as there are step downs to residential neighborhoods when they abut new development. Everyone believed that the highest maximum heights would be best in the southwestern portion of the planning area because it only abuts large roads and the highway- there would be no single-family residential impacts. Comments recorded at the meeting regarding building height are listed below:

- Many community members were ok with the draft height maximums
- Tall buildings are ok if they have character and are built at the pedestrian scale
- New development should not obstruct views of the hills
  - Lower scale is more suited to the area- “Tall” is downtown
  - Could step up back from the street

- Need gradual transition in height along street and from commercial to residential
- Some people like the height map as is
- Limit development to 2-3 stories in the residential land use area
- Don't build tall, square blocks; massing is important with height
  - Step buildings back from the sidewalk at a 45 degree angle
  - Careful of shadowing; highest building point should be in the middle
- 4-6 Stories with residential over retail is a good type of building
- Buildings should not be blocky
  - Buildings should look "village-like"
  - Buildings need to step back from residential neighborhoods
  - Low-scale buildings, not "looming" ones
- Keep height away from residential
  - Do not want height to effect mountain views either- preserve them

### **Urban Design Ideas**

While urban design was not specifically discussed at the community meeting, many residents made comments about the look and feel of their neighborhood and what characteristics should be incorporated into the Plan. Many of the ideas shared related to the creation of more comfortable environments for walking and gathering. Additional comments related to urban design are listed below:

- Businesses should be closer to the street – better visibility would be good for the businesses
- Restaurants with decks or rear courtyards away from the street would be nice
- South side of overpass has pleasant greenery, north side is stark
- Lots of trees should be in the Plan – make it truly "Blossom Hill"
- Need for benches, greenspace, pocket parks, play spaces, music areas, and gathering spaces
- Murals and public art spaces
- Area needs more movement and vibrancy
- Neighborhood could use banner and signage for marketing and unity
  - Signs could be "Distance to \_\_\_\_\_" style
  - Info kiosk
- Need for greater identity in the architecture and a unity in style
  - No garish colors
  - Varied facades and volumes, not blocky
- Do not want to walk through a parking lot to get to the store or coffee shop
- Need for more trees and landscaping
- Graffiti should be cleaned up
- Better lighting along the sidewalks and streets
- Avoid repetitive, square buildings

## **Draft Concepts for Snell Avenue and General Comments on Transportation/Circulation**

The community meeting included an activity and discussion on how to improve Snell Avenue. Community members were widely in favor in thinking about Snell as a future main street. The Snell “Mainstreet” concept people liked the most revolved around buffered bike lanes, wider sidewalks, more trees for shade, and pedestrian scale lighting. The discussion of transportation moved beyond Snell and facilitators captured comments regarding transportation and circulation ideas for other parts of the Urban Village area as well. These comments and the comments specific to Snell are listed below:

- The Snell Mainstreet concept is a good one
- Buffered bike lanes on Snell will help with safety
- Need wider sidewalks a good idea
- More trees along Snell are needed
- There is a need for pedestrian over-crossings in the area because traffic is so bad
- Option 3 of the Snell streetscape concepts was the most popular option
- Better transit is needed on Snell, perhaps even a circulator system
- Parking should be underground or structured and not big surface lot parking
- Make the area more walkable along Snell and include outdoor dining
- Streets should have protected bike lanes for everyone’s sake, especially kids
- Intersections should have good crossings for bikes and pedestrians
  - Special paving to slow cars – speed bump or speed table even
- Opportunity for dedicated bus along Snell for connections to Santa Teresa, Capitol Expressway, Branham, and Martial Cottle Park
- Parking structure at freeway ramp is needed – surface parking is a waste of space
- Traffic is an issue- more areas needed to park
  - Blossom Hill cannot handle more traffic due to more development
- Public transportation needs improvement
  - Shuttles to jobs from Caltrain
  - Urban Village needs shuttles that are free and frequent in order to get around
- Too many jaywalkers
  - Need for a walking bridge
  - Make Blossom Hill and Snell intersection safer
- Do not want dedicated bus lane on Snell
- Need to access light rail, including by car
- Increased bus service would be good here
- Freeway cuts off the neighborhood to the south
- The four corners of Blossom Hill and Snell are difficult to bridge
- Need for streets that can be closed for events
- Traffic at the 85 Interchange is terrible around commute hour
- Public garbage cans needed along the sidewalks
- Improved security throughout the area especially near light rail
- Lights should be synchronized

## General Comments

In addition to the comments above, Planning staff received many other comments that were more general in nature. One comment that mentioned often was that residents did not want their future Urban Village to be developed like the Village Oaks area on the former Hitachi site located just east of the Blossom Hill and Snell Urban Village area. There were also a lot of comments regarding how future development should retain the mom-and-pop retail feel in the area rather than allow big box and national chain retail. Other general comments are listed below:

- Residents do not want an Urban Village developed like Village Oaks on the former Hitachi site
  - Less density than the Village Oak site too
- Work to keep existing retailers (especially mom-and-pops) even when there is redevelopment
- Consider future of transportation (autonomous cars, Uber, etc.)
- Want incremental commercial development
- Want interesting and attractive buildings
- Area needs pedestrian points of interest:
  - Fountains, trees, places to talk to neighbors and sit
  - Continuity, permeability
  - Dining opportunities
- Need for tax incentives for businesses to locate in the Urban Village
- Area is not currently a destination but rather a corridor to get through to go
- Schools need to be carefully considered if there is new development
  - Fees for developers to schools should be more than currently required
- Construction of road improvements should be quick
- San Jose needs to get the quality buildings like San Francisco is getting at the Trans Bay Terminal
- Worried over growth in this area given IStar development on Cottle with a lot of urban development
  - Don't want construction for the next 5-10 years like IStar
  - No big box development- want more mom and pop shops and to preserve existing mom and pop shops
- Need for coherent planning and community coordination
- Need to take families more in consideration when planning
- Need for good, high-paying jobs at this site
  - Many people will not be able to afford to live in the neighborhood
- Wider sidewalks and landscape buffers needed along Snell
- Look to Santana Row, Santa Barbara, and San Carlos for examples of good development
- Public art space is needed – could rotate and showcase young artists
- Need to make this area a destination