CATALYZE SV

Dear members of San Jose's Envision San José 2040 Task Force & Planning staff,

I'm writing on behalf of Catalyze SV. Our Community Engagement Committee met on November 21 with Catalyze SV staff to discuss the community engagement portion of the City of San Jose's "Signature Project" provision of the Urban Village concept in the General Plan.

Catalyze SV wants to ensure Silicon Valley cities have the most inclusive, collaborative & productive community engagement practices, processes, and policies when it comes to development.

City staff informed us that the proposed revision to the community engagement provision would read that a "Signature Project" shall:

> *"Document [substantial] feedback from Village area residents regarding design of the project to reflect character & identity of Village. Provides a minimum of two public meetings to collect feedback from village residents of the design and quality of the project."*

Our committee members and staff had the following comments about this proposed language:

- Why use the term "area residents"? Why not "stakeholders" instead? Or language that discusses the various reasons a stakeholder might be invested in an Urban Village, such as "live, work, workship, play or commute through"?
- What does "character & identity" mean? Perhaps you could substitute in "cultural history & direction," instead of character & identity.
- In terms of reaching the area stakeholders, could you include language about the demographics of the area and ensuring the engagement reflects the fact that the engagement has reached a diversity of the area's demographics?
- Building off that point, is there language that balances past, present & future? The current language seems to be focused more on the past & present, whereas planning is about the future. For instance, what if everything around a Signature Project is 2 stories & the developer wants to put in a 3-story building?
- The current proposed language is focused on the physical quality of the design of the community. Maybe add in something about what residents want from their neighborhood. The current language may have a slightly defensive posture to it.
- Design can be very subjective. Can the requirements focus more on the characteristics/benefits of the design? For instance, a workshop with small break-out groups that focuses on the singular question "What do you want from this development?" could better get at the purpose of community engagement.
- Can we look at form code-based zoning as a framework for having this discussion with the community?

- Are there ways to reach/meet the community where they are at, as opposed to simply at a city-organized community meeting? Would it be beneficial if the City added a requirement about plugging into say 2 existing community events? Can plugging into existing groups, including faith-based ones, be helpful? What about asking an existing community group to host a meeting on behalf of the Signature Project under consideration?
- Piggybacking off that point about access & inclusivity, how can the City get people to participate who aren't available at night? That could come from varying the public meeting/engagement schedule, such as holding a weekend meeting.
- An important component of great public engagement is to demonstrate what the decision-makers heard from the community and what ways the design is informed by said input.

Reflecting back on the committee members feedback, I'd make the following two overarching points about the proposed revised language:

1. <u>Change Framing to Be More Inclusive, Constructive</u>. The framing of the policy seems to reflect only one model of engagement (the one that has traditionally dominated the dialogue in San Jose around development and partially led to the current housing and development issues plaguing our city).

    From the proposed language, one sees the legacy of this model: Homeowners who currently live closest to the development are the true protectors of our community ("area residents" and "character & identity"). They should have a larger say on future development than other stakeholders and shall ensure that their neighborhood changes only in the ways they seek (which usually are minimal). They shall evaluate the project based on what the developer presents before them, not what they want from their neighborhood ("feedback from village residents of the design and quality of the project"*)*.

    Instead, the framing should include a broader array of stakeholders who are invested in how our Villages develop that balances the past, present, *and* future vision. Feedback should focus on how can Villages provide the most good for the greatest number of people. Developers should hear these ideas. Signature projects should include significant ideas from the community.

2. <u>Quality not Quantity</u>: The focus of the policy should not be on the number of community meetings (two seems to be fairly standard for the city), but instead on the:
    a. diversity of people engaged in the process;
    b. quality of feedback received from the community;
    c. transparency of the City in daylighting this feedback;
    d. extent to which the developer incorporates this feedback into its (re)design(s).

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Because Signature Projects can operate outside the implementation of Urban Villages, and because they are often early developments in an urban village, they should include community engagement that goes above and beyond the City's standard practices. To be clear, good community engagement can be done efficiently, as long as it is well planned and executed.

Catalyze SV stands ready to work with the Task Force and staff to fashion a community engagement policy that achieves the four outcomes above or others the City seeks. We are open to your ideas on how we can do so. In the meantime, in case it is helpful, I've drafted possible language on the policy that you might consider:

"A signature project shall:

1. Using the [American Community Survey data on San Jose](), ensure the individuals involved in the engagement process are within 20% of the demographic characteristics of the City or Census Tracts within 2 miles of the proposal based on 4 categories in the fields of:
   a. Age & Sex,
   b. Race & Hispanic Origin (other than white),
   c. Population Characteristics,
   d. Language other than English spoken at home,
   e. Health, and/or
   f. Persons in poverty.
2. from a public workshop, compile at least 15 distinct ideas from 10 different community members on maximizing the quality of the project.
3. include a complete list of all community ideas/input updated weekly on a project-specific website in English, Spanish & Vietnamese.
4. ensure the developer maintains an updated "matrix" of responses to every idea suggested and why it was or wasn't incorporated into the signature project's design."

We appreciate Jennifer Piozet & Jared Hart meeting with us in November to discuss this matter. I heard the staff's desire to make the new policy less subjective and more objective, so hopefully, we put forward ideas that reflect that goal. How can we help the City further in this process? Thank you for considering our perspective.

Alex Shoor, Executive Director, Catalyze SV

Catalyze SV's mission is engaging community members, developers, and city leaders to envision and create sustainable, equitable, and vibrant places for people in Silicon Valley.