



Mountain View Coalition for Sustainable Planning
Mountain View, CA 94041

March 4, 2014

Mountain View City Council
City Hall, 500 Castro Street
PO Box 7540
Mountain View, CA 94039-7540

Re: Item 3.1, San Antonio Center Phase II project proposal, March 4 agenda

Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council:

The Mountain View Coalition for Sustainable Planning, a coalition of Mountain View residents interested in promoting a sustainable future for our city, would like to comment on this study session item.

To put this item in context, in addition to the description in the staff report, we recall that Council requested that Project for Public Spaces or a similar expert firm be hired to consult on "placemaking" for this project. The applicant, Merlone Geier Partners, then insisted on paying for this work, so that "it will fit into our schedule" and also commented that they wanted PPS to work with their development team on proposals. Mountain View planning staff, who have vast experience interacting with both developers and consultants, strongly opposed this approach (having the developer pay for the consulting).

As we write this letter, we have seen only the staff report and the PPS-submitted drawings, so we don't know what will emerge in the live presentation on March 4. Therefore, we will comment based on what we have seen.

We applaud some of the innovations that have been proposed, such as a nicely-buffered bike lane near part of the project and some of the low-key activity proposed for part of the Hetch Hetchy greenway.

You will not be surprised to hear that we have an initially negative reaction to some of the other PPS proposals. In general, removing proposed landscaping, introducing more hardscaping, and otherwise making this project much less appealing to people who want to spend time with green plants outdoors, does not sound like an obvious way to go. Emphasizing hardscape and cutting back on major trees is totally contrary to the environmental sustainability embedded in our General Plan. Is PPS aware of this? It is also counter to recent Council direction regarding open space in the San Antonio Center and surrounding area.

Of course, whether or not landscaping should be converted to game areas on the greenway is a matter that nearby residents will want to address with you.

The specific proposal to have a large gathering-place include small-scale activities that promote personal interaction and creativity is very interesting. The introduction of a jumbotron, which would have the opposite effect, is 180 degrees off course. Is this really the type of “place” that Council envisioned?

In any event, we think that large trees are much more beneficial than a jumbotron, and a way must be found to include them in the development wherever possible.

As you know, we are strongly opposed to the promotion of bottled water, which would probably be included in a “beverage vending machine.” We would be happy to provide information to anyone interested about a water-dispensing unit that provides water for both humans and pets. We are told that this cannot be included in the dog park itself, which is unfortunate, but it could be nearby.

It is regrettable that PPS was apparently asked to disregard the existence of the Milk Pail Market, which for many decades has been the anchor store for the Phase II piece of San Antonio Center. It continues to appear that MGP is not interested in taking advantage of this store’s unique, established, placemaking and people-attracting attributes. This is a lose-lose-lose situation for everyone.

It is also regrettable that PPS was apparently not asked to consider the aspects of the proposed project that already make it a problematical addition to our community and could very well counteract all the “placemaking” efforts. These include

- the developer’s continuing reluctance to provide universally adequate setbacks (relative to very tall buildings) and universally sufficient width of mobility channels—we concur with Staff’s comments here, and hope that Council does too;
- the inclusion of a monstrous parking structure whose FAR is for some reason apparently not included in the computation of what is allowed for the project, with no indication of what the applicant will do to decrease the amount of parking “needed”—implying continuation of the oversupply of vehicles in and around the project and challenges for all types of mobility. It is also unclear to what extent this structure will fully implement the common-sense shared parking arrangements that have always been a part of this mixed-use area;
- a street (multimodal, we assume) that’s a tunnel, going through the parking structure;
- lack of attention to providing efficient, convenient access to public transit, leading to and from the buildings proposed, particularly the office buildings—“walking distance” is a very inadequate description of the situation (see also just below);
- need for assurance that there will be safe, convenient, edge-to-edge multimodal east-west and north-south routes in the MGP development area, making it possible for everyone, especially if not in a car, to get into, out of, and around the area quickly. The east-west routes need to connect with convenient routes through the eastern portion of San Antonio Center, so one can get between San Antonio Road and Showers Drive

(particularly its Transit Center) without having to divert to peripheral sidewalks. We are also not convinced that there are adequate multimodal north-south routes all the way from California Street to El Camino Real.

Thank you very much for considering our comments as you deliberate about the best course for this project proposal.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bruce England". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Bruce K. England
for the Mountain View Coalition for Sustainable Planning