

From: [Zenk, Jessica](#)
To: [Downtown West Project](#)
Subject: FW: FYI: Protocol article on Downtown West/SiteLab
Date: Thursday, December 17, 2020 2:52:11 PM

From: Klein, Nanci
Sent: Wednesday, December 16, 2020 7:42 PM
To: Rood, Timothy <timothy.rood@sanjoseca.gov>
Cc: Walesh, Kim <Kim.Walesh@sanjoseca.gov>; Hughey, Rosalynn <Rosalynn.Hughey@sanjoseca.gov>; Burnham, Nicolle <nicolle.burnham@sanjoseca.gov>; Manford, Robert <Robert.Manford@sanjoseca.gov>; Wessling, Cheryl <Cheryl.Wessling@sanjoseca.gov>; Moniz, Lori <Lori.Moniz@sanjoseca.gov>; Zenk, Jessica <Jessica.Zenk@sanjoseca.gov>; Eidlin, Eric <eric.eidlin@sanjoseca.gov>; Clements, Kristen <Kristen.Clements@sanjoseca.gov>; VanderVeen, Rachel <Rachel.VanderVeen@sanjoseca.gov>; Mendez, Zacharias <Zacharias.Mendez@sanjoseca.gov>; Sanderfer, Larissa <Larissa.Sanderfer@sanjoseca.gov>; Handler, Elisabeth <elisabeth.handler@sanjoseca.gov>; Ruano, Jose <Jose.Ruano@sanjoseca.gov>
Subject: Re: FYI: Protocol article on Downtown West/SiteLab

Loved it! Thx Tim!

Sent from my iPhone

On Dec 16, 2020, at 2:19 PM, Rood, Timothy <timothy.rood@sanjoseca.gov> wrote:

I provided background for this profile of SiteLab's Laura Crescimano (Google's master plan lead) and am quoted briefly.

<https://www.protocol.com/google-future-silicon-valley>

Tim

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Google is building the future for Google

Google is trying to make amends by investing in projects, including \$1 billion in affordable housing.



A rendering of Google's proposed Downtown West redevelopment project, featuring the historic San Jose Water Company building. | Image: Sitelab

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In a quarter century, when she's nearing retirement, urban designer Laura Crescimano might step off a BART train from San Francisco, make her way out of

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on in San Jose and stand in the heart of a city she might turn down the street as local shops prop open their awnings, kids are screaming on the playground across the way, and big crowds are heading to next weekend's outdoor dance festival.

On 5-era Autumn Street, there's no square foot of space she doesn't appreciate the little things, like the way the light hits her face over the historic Pattern Works and Foundry building. The path leads to a nature camp next to Los Gatos Creek. Passing cars don't stop to walk without looking both ways. New apartment buildings mixed in among the historic structures, many filled with affordable housing. She feels the quiet way the wind moves between the buildings.

She stops for coffee, taking a moment to appreciate the new mural on the building face across the street. Then she turns down the trail off of Autumn, heading for the creekside. On the path, the city recedes away from this tiny oasis at the heart of San Jose. For one deep breath, she is alone among the green and the echo of the river. As much as anything she can see, she appreciates what she can't: no towers up lining up against the edge of the sidewalk, no security booths,

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That's the dream. In the here and now — the last weeks of 2020 — all Crescimano

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document for the DowntownWest project in one hand of the world's largest companies in the other. Google and in the heart of San Jose, but it's mostly abandoned historic landmarks. There's a train station and a couple of places to rent, but for a city center, it's remarkably quiet that every working day (before the pandemic, at the Bay Area's most populous city than stay inside it. It wants to help change, even if it takes more than 20 years

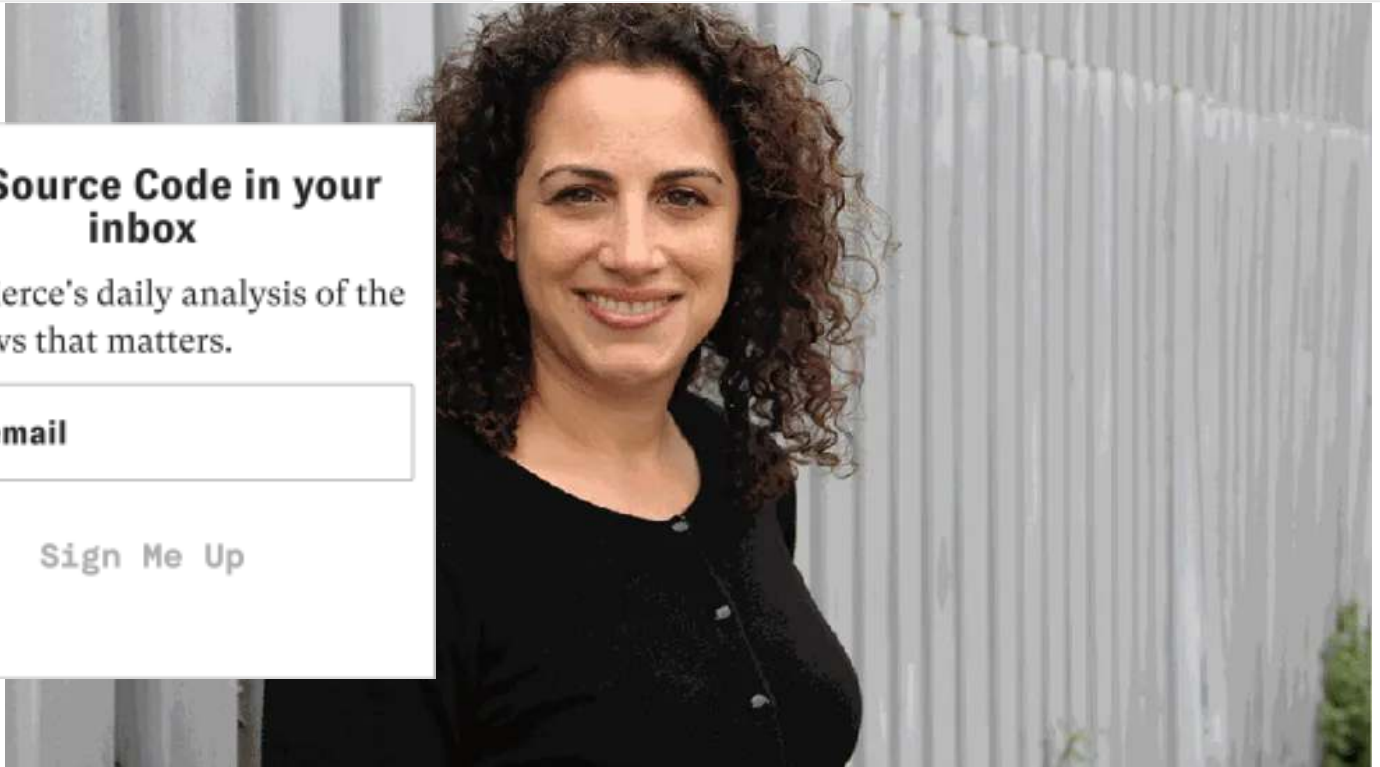
Google is trying to reinvent its physical self by building mixed-use neighborhood developments, and Crescimano's Sitelab urban studio is responsible for designing and planning both the DowntownWest project and the rebuild of the land next to the company's Mountain View headquarters (called North Bayshore). Under Sitelab's guidance, the designs for both have rejected the suburban office parks that defined Silicon Valley's past in favor of urban centers that make the "campus," and Google, disappear. There are innumerable ways the DowntownWest project could go wrong before construction is completed in more than two decades: It could fail to be approved by city council in the spring, create

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Laura Crescimano, the principal and co-founder of urban design firm Sitelab. | Photo: Courtesy of Sitelab

Rejecting tradition

Before she can get upset with me for saying she's the one guiding Google's future in California, you need to know something about Crescimano. She doesn't like to take credit. She doesn't believe in the master architect or the lead designer. She'd probably rather this story feature every community group involved in the San Jose development process than dig into how someone like her can wield so much influence over Google. She's the opposite of the Silicon Valley ethos — which is why the story of Google's future in the Bay is also a story about her.

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buses didn't qualify as a design thesis at all. Margaret Crawford, now the director of UC Berkeley's urban design program and Crescimano's longtime mentor, said half of the graduate school showed up to her thesis presentation. "It really pushed me to do it," she said. "It was a long time ago," Crawford explained.

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graduated, but she didn't win the prize. "I really couldn't win. She wasn't interested in pure architecture just for the sake of the art. She still sees the thesis as a defining moment in her career. She's been interested in the issues, not so much the topic or the form. She spent the next six years looking for a way to return to

After only a few years working for more traditional firms, she wanted something more, and she found it in the work of former SF-planner and local legend Evan Rose. "It was like meeting a kindred spirit. We had a very aligned view," she said. The two were quickly united by a radical vision: They would design urban development projects in response to the needs of the community, rather than for the sake of the developer or the art of the design alone. They would call the firm Sitelab. "It really flips that notion of the sole architect. The sole designer. It flips that notion that a leader has to be a sole person calling the decision," said Guneet Anand, a Sitelab designer who studied under Rose.

The firm thrived immediately, landing massive design assignments like San

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to challenging what people think is possible that landed Sitelab more power than anyone would expect for such a tiny, independent shop. Between the two Google

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San Francisco's 5M housing project (currently under construction). Sitelab is now responsible for designing some of the largest

Google's reckoning

Google's real estate history in Silicon Valley is not a fairy tale. For Bay Area residents, the company is more famous for failing Silicon Valley neighborhoods than leading the charge for better ones. Its time in Mountain View has seen protests against Google buses in San Jose, families living in RVs next to the Googleplex, Sundar Pichai telling Googlers the company had no power to fix the affordable housing problem and service workers pushed farther and farther from the heart of Silicon Valley while gated houses went up in Mountain View and Sunnyvale.

But rather than cut their losses, pack up and invest outside a Northern California increasingly hostile to big tech companies, Google's leaders stuck to a different idea. While other tech companies flee the region to build new campuses in Texas and elsewhere, Google wants to create entire Bay Area neighborhoods by redeveloping its own land and new land to create mixed-use office space, housing

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requires a quick trip back to the Cold War. Most of today's tech campuses are built on top of the remnants of post World War II tech companies: 50% parking spaces, sprawled in what has become suburbia but was once a suburb. In a book with Sun Microsystems, Google's headquarters is in the former campus of Silicon Graphics. To urban designer and architect Peter Glanz, these suburban tech campuses were fortresses. "They were paying good wages, never leaving the building, never commuting and never becoming part of the community," he said.

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"We basically allowed the situation to get completely out of control," said David Meyer, the director of strategic initiatives for affordable housing nonprofit SV@Home. By "the situation," Meyer means housing. One 2019 [study estimates](#) that more than 1 million units were needed to meet demand from all the new tech jobs created between 2000 and 2018, and less than one-third of those were actually built. Tech companies created thousands of jobs and brought a flood of money to Northern California, but very little of that was reinvested into housing or healthy and equitable communities. Most housing experts lay more of the blame for this on regulatory failure than on tech company malice, but, over time, Bay Area residents started to fault the region's biggest employers for that crisis. Glanz wondered if subconsciously, the defensive suburban architecture of tech's physical spaces might have played a role.

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common housing commitment to "be a good neighbor" to the Bay Area. In the end, the North Bayshore proposal, designed by Sitelab, metaphorically rejected the physical architecture that helped create the techlash.

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North Bayshore is slowly making its way toward construction, though the approvals process is more complicated than the one in San Jose. At the moment, the DowntownWest project is both moving faster and more ambitious. Rather than redesign suburban land Google already owned, the company bought up a series of parcels that, put together, make up about one-third of the available land in downtown San Jose. The city had already launched a redevelopment and housing plan for the 250 acres at the center of the city in 2014; after Google put together enough of the land for itself, it offered to help make San Jose's vision a reality.

Google quickly tapped Sitelab to help pull all of this off. Alexa Arena, the Google lead for the project, said she first paid attention to Crescimano a decade ago, when the two worked on a controversial housing project in San Francisco that eventually made it through a rocky approvals process due to more than \$76 million in public benefits. Crescimano traced Sitelab's partnership with Google to a different beginning: a small Sitelab assignment on a relatively unimportant piece of the early North Bayshore planning. "Looking back, I think it was a test," she said. A test they clearly aced, because Sitelab was later hired to manage the

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For me to not criticize Google is really amazing, but I have been surprisingly in a good way," Berkeley's Crawford said.

It took so many years to build — there's not even a design plan — the design principles and maps created by Sitalab are permanent documents guiding the development. "They're not buildings now. Instead, they basically wrote a rulebook,"

said Timothy Reed, San Jose's planning division manager. "The idea is basically, you codify what you can commit to, and then you leave a lot of flexibility." Even if Google changes its mind about what buildings to construct when or decides it needs less office space, one constant will be the design set by Sitalab, which will be up for approval by the city in the spring.



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re likely to go wrong, the biggest concern is what Googlers move to the neighborhood. "There's a concern site. This is going to be a Google site, and property

values are going to go up," said Justin Wang, an advocacy manager for the Greenbelt Alliance, one of the members of the city's [Station Area Advisory Group](#). The funding for BART and high-speed rail, both necessary to ensure the new San Jose-based Google jobs don't bring too many cars to the city, could get delayed or canceled, causing an unsolvable traffic nightmare. (Rood of course assured me that none of this was likely to happen, and that the city and Google have a plan to address each issue). Almost none of that would be Crescimano or Sitelab's fault, but they'd still be tagged with the consequences.

And then there's the fact that at its heart, it's still a Google project. Once the city's residents watch the first building break ground, they could decide that no matter what Google says, they don't want the tech giant in their neighborhood. "We're not going to let this development just sort of happen, and hope that it works out," said Maria Noel Fernandez, the president of Silicon Valley Rising, which represents tech industry service workers, many of whom live in San Jose. Fernandez herself was born and raised in the city with two service-worker parents. "We're going to exercise the power that we've shown we've got," she said. She's cautiously optimistic about the project now, but if Google falters in its affordable housing and community commitments, Fernandez will be the first to

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be full of nervous anticipation and careful revisions as teams prepare to seek approval for the design from the city with the development agreement and the environmental impact study. Once approved by the city council in the spring, it will streamline the permitting process so that design could begin immediately, and there should be no need for a public hearing review over each structure.

The approvals process will be complicated and finicky and will likely bleed into the summer. The finalized documents have to be published ahead of the city council deliberations. The San Jose city staff will post a report on the project, followed by a planning commission hearing, followed by another staff report, followed by a city council hearing on the project and the certification of the environmental impact review. There will be even more processes if the project is approved — building permits and design, a city review and public comments — but Google could start construction in a couple of years, Rood said. He estimated that about 70 people on the San Jose side of things have their hands on either this project or San Jose's broader redevelopment efforts every day.

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thriving, bustling city that just happens to have Google at its heart.

"Everyone involved acknowledges that there are a lot of uncertainties," Rood says it's almost like re-centering the map of the Bay Area but it's a big game changer for San Jose."

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Anna Kramer

Anna Kramer is a reporter at Protocol (@anna_c_kramer), where she helps write and produce Source Code, Protocol's daily newsletter. Prior to joining the team, she covered tech and small business for the San Francisco Chronicle and privacy for Bloomberg Law. She is a recent graduate of Brown University, where she studied International Relations and Arabic and wrote her senior thesis about surveillance tools and technological development in the Middle East.

TAGS:

[Google](#) [Sitelab](#) [San Jose](#) [Urban Design](#)

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Why becoming data-driven is a challenge for companies

Leaders from Google Cloud, PayPal and JPMorgan Chase talked to Protocol about how to build the data-centric organization of the future.

Data in the enterprise poses new challenges. | Image: Getty Images



By **Joe Williams** | May 11, 2021

Most CEOs believe becoming a data-driven organization is paramount for the success of their business. That transition, however, takes more than just a pronouncement from the top. And many think their organizations are failing at the effort. That's why it's now falling

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Increasingly, much of that information is being stored on the cloud, systems that often come with built-in features that help organizations manage their data and who has access to it.

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Joe Williams

Joe Williams is a senior reporter at Protocol covering enterprise software, including industry giants like Salesforce, Microsoft, IBM and Oracle. He previously covered emerging technology for Business Insider. Joe can be reached at JWilliams@Protocol.com. To share information confidentially, he can also be contacted on a non-work device via Signal (+1-309-265-6120) or JPW53189@protonmail.com.

TAGS:

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Financial firms lock down their data with confidential computing

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By **James Daly** | April 26, 2021

As financial firms face an endless and unrelenting array of digital theft and fraud, they are increasingly banking on a security approach based on confidential computing, a concept that has moved quickly from research projects into fully-deployed offerings across the industry.

Confidential computing works to plug a gaping hole in data security. Data exists in three states: *in transit* when it is moving through the network; *at rest* when stored; and *in use* as it's being processed. Data is often encrypted while at rest and in transit, but not when it's being processed. Confidential computing helps close this security hole during this third state by securing a portion of the processor and memory to provide a protected and isolated environment for the code and data, called a trusted execution environment.

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James Daly

James Daly has a deep knowledge of creating brand voice identity, including understanding various audiences and targeting messaging accordingly. He enjoys commissioning, editing, writing, and business development, particularly in launching new ventures and building passionate audiences. Daly has led teams large and small to multiple awards and quantifiable success through a strategy built on teamwork, passion, fact-checking, intelligence, analytics, and audience growth while meeting budget goals and production deadlines in fast-paced environments. Daly is the Editorial Director of 2030 Media and a contributor at Wired.

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ANTITRUST

How to wage an antitrust war

After years of keeping silent, disgruntled competitors and interest groups are sharpening their daggers and going after Big Tech.

Antitrust complaints against Apple, Google, Amazon and Facebook have become an industry all their own. | Image: Apple



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Kosta Eleftheriou's began with a tweet.

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Ben Brody

Ben Brody (@BenBrodyDC) is a senior reporter at Protocol focusing on how Congress, courts and agencies affect the online world we live in. He formerly covered tech policy and lobbying (including antitrust, Section 230 and privacy) at Bloomberg News, where he previously reported on the influence industry, government ethics and the 2016 presidential election. Before that, Ben covered business news at CNNMoney and AdAge, and all manner of stories in and around New York. His still loves appearing on the New York news radio he grew up with.

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How Google interns fought for more cash — and won

After a petition and help from the Alphabet Workers Union, Google BOLD interns convinced the company to give them a \$5,000 stipend for housing and other needs.

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Google BOLD interns successfully petitioned for a stipend for housing and other needs. | Photo: Future Publishing/Getty Images



By **Anna Kramer** | May 7, 2021

Tyrese Thomas and Jacob Ngai were thrilled when they learned that they'd been offered places in the Google BOLD internship program for summer 2021. The program would place them at one of the world's most famous companies, giving them a summer job that pays an intern salary equal to more than \$50,000 a year full-time. They were less excited to realize that their salary wouldn't include one of the most famous Google perks — a relocation stipend up to \$11,000.

Ngai and Thomas took the internships anyway. Negotiating changes in an intern contract at a world-famous company is just not something most students do. And Google BOLD is a renowned internship program: It's designed to expose undergraduates to careers in tech who wouldn't normally have access to the industry, and it provides tons of perks and benefits, including health benefits, hardware, a \$1,000 technology stipend and the all-important, extremely common "return offer" to a full-time job post-graduation.

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Anna Kramer

Anna Kramer is a reporter at Protocol (@anna_c_kramer), where she helps write and produce Source Code, Protocol's

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ANTITRUST

What are Roku and Google fighting about?

Now that Congress is paying attention, expect a lot more public squabbling like this.

Roku is accusing Google of anticompetitive behavior. | Image: Igor Golovnirov/SOPA Images/LightRocket via Getty Images



By **Janko Roettgers** | April 26, 2021

Roku and Google are at it again: In an email to its users and in a statement sent out to media Monday, Roku accused Google of anti-competitive behavior. The statement suggests that the

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Janko Roettgers

Janko Roettgers (@janko) is a senior reporter at Protocol, reporting on the shifting power dynamics between tech, media, and entertainment, including the impact of new technologies. Previously, Janko was Variety's first-ever technology writer in San Francisco, where he covered big tech and emerging technologies. He has reported for Gigaom, Frankfurter Rundschau, Berliner Zeitung, and ORF, among others. He has written three books on consumer cord-cutting and online music and co-edited an anthology on internet subcultures. He lives with his family in Oakland.

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In a quarter century, when she's nearing retirement, urban designer Laura Crescimano might step off a BART train from San Francisco, make her way out of the bustling Diridon Station in San Jose and stand in the heart of a city she envisioned in 2020. She might turn down the street as local shops pop open their doors, and the kids are screaming on the playground across the way, and big colorful signs advertise next weekend's outdoor dance festival.

As she wanders down 2045-era Autumn Street, there's no square foot of space she can't explain. She notices the little things, like the way the light hits her face over the top of the redesigned historic Pattern Works and Foundry building. The distant sounds of children at a nature camp next to Los Gatos Creek. Passing cars so infrequent she can jaywalk without looking both ways. New apartment buildings mixed in among the historic structures, many filled with affordable housing. She feels the quiet way the wind moves between the buildings.

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Oh, right. Minor detail: All of this San Jose is a Google campus. Sure, it's a neighborhood instead of an office park, but at the end of the day, Google still owns most of the land. Seven million square feet of office space and thousands of Googlers fill some of the new high-rise buildings, but Crescimano can't really feel their presence here, at the edge of the river, surrounded by community parks.

That's the dream. In the here and now — the last weeks of 2020 — all Crescimano has is a 473-page design document for the DowntownWest project in one hand and the ambition of one of the world's largest companies in the other. Google owns about 80 acres of land in the heart of San Jose, but it's mostly abandoned buildings and a few historic landmarks. There's a train station and a couple of buildings with

affordable places to rent, but for a city center, it's remarkably silent. It epitomizes the fact that every working day (before the pandemic, at least), more people leave the Bay Area's most populous city than stay inside it. That's what Crescimano wants to help change, even if it takes more than 20 years to do it.

Google is trying to reinvent its physical self by building mixed-use neighborhood developments, and Crescimano's Sitelab urban studio is responsible for designing and planning both the DowntownWest project and the rebuild of the land next to the company's Mountain View headquarters (called North Bayshore). Under Sitelab's guidance, the designs for both have rejected the suburban office parks that defined Silicon Valley's past in favor of urban centers that make the "campus," and Google, disappear. There are innumerable ways the DowntownWest project could go wrong before construction is completed in more than two decades: It could fail to be approved by city council in the spring, create an endless traffic and construction nightmare, drive up property prices and drive out local residents, or become yet another metaphor for Google taking over the world. Whether it's the fantasy or the nightmare or a more likely in between, Crescimano's name will be on the outcome.



Laura Crescimano, the principal and co-founder of urban design firm Sitelab. Photo: Courtesy of Sitelab

Rejecting tradition

Before she can get upset with me for saying she's the one guiding Google's future in California, you need to know something about Crescimano. She doesn't like to take credit. She doesn't believe in the master architect or the lead designer. She'd probably rather this story feature every community group involved in the San Jose development process than dig into how someone like her can wield so much influence over Google. She's the opposite of the Silicon Valley ethos — which is why the story of Google's future in the Bay is also a story about her.

In 2006, in graduate school at Harvard, Crescimano's architecture thesis caused a debate. Instead of a building, she designed a series of adaptable red Winnebagos for Moveon.org. She was both nominated for Harvard's thesis prize and told that buses didn't qualify as a design thesis at all. Margaret Crawford, now the director of UC Berkeley's urban design program and Crescimano's longtime mentor, said half of the

graduate school showed up to her thesis presentation. "It really pushed the boundaries, and this was a long time ago," Crawford explained.

In the end, Crescimano graduated, but she didn't win the prize. "I really couldn't stay in my lane," she said. She wasn't interested in pure architecture just for the sake of the art, and she still sees the thesis as a defining moment in her education. "I've always been interested in the issues, not so much the topic or the discipline," she said. She spent the next six years looking for a way to return to that.

After only a few years working for more traditional firms, she wanted something more, and she found it in the work of former SF-planner and local legend Evan Rose. "It was like meeting a kindred spirit. We had a very aligned view," she said. The two were quickly united by a radical vision: They would design urban development projects in response to the needs of the community, rather than for the sake of the developer or the art of the design alone. They would call the firm Sitelab. "It really flips that notion of the sole architect. The sole designer. It flips that notion that a leader has to be a sole person calling the decision," said Guneet Anand, a Sitelab designer who studied under Rose.

The firm thrived immediately, landing massive design assignments like San Francisco's still-ongoing Pier 70 waterfront rebuild. Rose was already five years into a battle against a rare form of cancer when they co-founded the firm in 2012, and then, three years after Sitelab's launch, Rose died.

It was then that Crescimano's work took on a greater purpose: to carry out Rose's legacy. Depending on who in the Bay Area's design world you ask, it's Rose's San Francisco ties or Crescimano's optimism or the firm's unshakeable commitment to challenging what people think is possible that landed Sitelab more power than anyone would expect for such a tiny, independent shop. Between the two Google projects, Pier 70 and San Francisco's 5M housing project (currently under construction), the group is now responsible for designing some of the largest projects in the Bay.

Google's reckoning

Google's real estate history in Silicon Valley is not a fairy tale. For Bay Area residents, the company is more famous for failing Silicon Valley neighborhoods than leading the charge for better ones. Its time in Mountain View has seen protests against Google buses in San Jose, families living in RVs next to the Googleplex, Sundar Pichai telling Googlers the company had no power to fix the affordable housing problem and service workers pushed farther and farther from the heart of Silicon Valley while gated houses went up in Mountain View and Sunnyvale.

But rather than cut their losses, pack up and invest outside a Northern California increasingly hostile to big tech companies, Google's leaders stuck to a different idea. While other tech companies flee the region to build new campuses in Texas and elsewhere, Google wants to create entire Bay Area neighborhoods by redeveloping its own land and new land to create mixed-use office space, housing and community parks in San Jose, Mountain View and Sunnyvale (to start). Executives have framed their plan as helping to address the Bay Area's affordable housing crisis; the region's housing leaders described it as a reckoning with a decade of increasing backlash in cities and towns where Google has invested too much to give up.

Understanding why the company is choosing a different path for its land now requires a quick trip back to the Cold War. Most of today's tech campuses are built on top of the remnants of post World War II tech companies: 50% parking lots and 50% concrete boxes, sprawled in what has become suburbia but was once cheap farmland. Like Facebook with Sun Microsystems, Google's headquarters was built on top of the former campus of Silicon Graphics. To urban designer and Stanford lecturer Dehan Glanz, these suburban tech campuses were fortresses. "All of these people making good wages, never leaving the building, never supporting local stores and never becoming part of the community," he said.

"We basically allowed the situation to get completely out of control," said David Meyer, the director of strategic initiatives for affordable housing nonprofit SV@Home. By "the situation," Meyer means housing. One 2019 study estimates that more than 1 million units were needed to meet demand from all the new tech jobs created between 2000 and 2018, and

less than one-third of those were actually built. Tech companies created thousands of jobs and brought a flood of money to Northern California, but very little of that was reinvested into housing or healthy and equitable communities. Most housing experts lay more of the blame for this on regulatory failure than on tech company malice, but, over time, Bay Area residents started to fault the region's biggest employers for that crisis. Glanz wondered if subconsciously, the defensive suburban architecture of tech's physical spaces might have played a role.

The future for Google's physical space is a reaction to this past. When the company proposed redeveloping the land next to its sprawling, box-like corporate headquarters in Mountain View in 2015 (the beginnings of the North Bayshore project), it wasn't just offering some shiny new buildings, it was volunteering a neighborhood. Later, the idea that Google could use development projects to open up its land for affordable housing became part of its 2019 \$1 billion housing commitment to "be a good neighbor" to the Bay Area. In the end, the North Bayshore proposal, designed by Sitelab, metaphorically rejected the physical architecture that helped create the techlash.

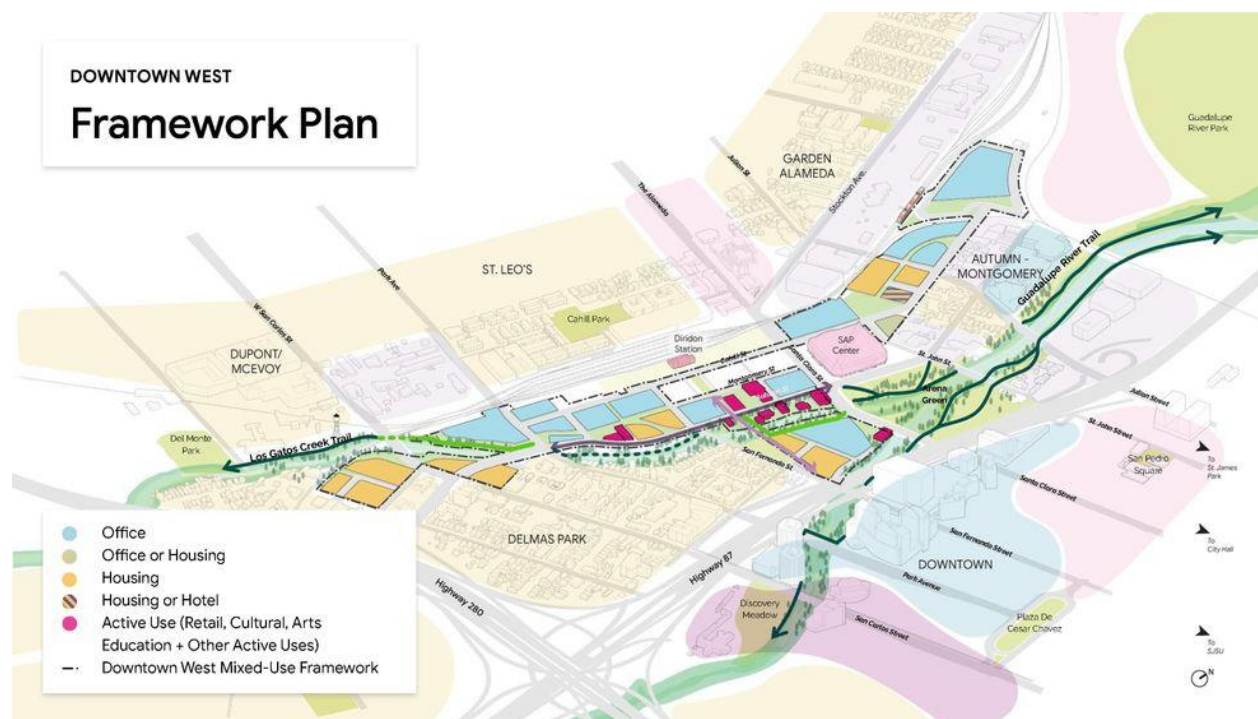
North Bayshore is slowly making its way toward construction, though the approvals process is more complicated than the one in San Jose. At the moment, the DowntownWest project is both moving faster and more ambitious. Rather than redesign suburban land Google already owned, the company bought up a series of parcels that, put together, make up about one-third of the available land in downtown San Jose. The city had already launched a redevelopment and housing plan for the 250 acres at the center of the city in 2014; after Google put together enough of the land for itself, it offered to help make San Jose's vision a reality.

Google quickly tapped Sitelab to help pull all of this off. Alexa Arena, the Google lead for the project, said she first paid attention to Crescimano a decade ago, when the two worked on a controversial housing project in San Francisco that eventually made it through a rocky approvals process due to more than \$76 million in public benefits. Crescimano traced Sitelab's partnership with Google to a different beginning: a small Sitelab assignment on a relatively unimportant piece of the early North Bayshore planning. "Looking back, I think it was a test," she said. A test they clearly aced, because Sitelab was later hired to manage the entire urban

design for North Bayshore, and then came on to do the same work for DowntownWest when Google bought the land in San Jose.

"Look, as an academic, for me to not criticize Google is really amazing, but I have to say, choosing Laura is surprising in a good way," Berkeley's Crawford said.

Because the project will take so many years to build — there's not even a proposed end date, really — the design principles and maps created by Sitelab will be one of the few permanent documents guiding the development. "They're not designing all the buildings now. Instead, they basically wrote a rulebook," said Timothy Rood, San Jose's planning division manager. "The idea is basically, you codify what you can commit to, and then you leave a lot of flexibility." Even if Google changes its mind about what buildings to construct when or decides it needs less office space, one constant will be the design set by Sitelab, which will be up for approval by the city in the spring.



A map of the proposed DowntownWest project. Image: Sitelab

Still, even with Crescimano on board for most of the rest of her professional life, there's no guarantee this project won't go up in flames

at any point before it's finished. "There's a difference between planning this stuff and actually building it," Meyer said.

Of the many things that are likely to go wrong, the biggest concern is what happens when legions of Googlers move to the neighborhood. "There's a concern about displacement at the site. This is going to be a Google site, and property values are going to go up," said Justin Wang, an advocacy manager for the Greenbelt Alliance, one of the members of the city's Station Area Advisory Group. The funding for BART and high-speed rail, both necessary to ensure the new San Jose-based Google jobs don't bring too many cars to the city, could get delayed or canceled, causing an unsolvable traffic nightmare. (Rood of course assured me that none of this was likely to happen, and that the city and Google have a plan to address each issue). Almost none of that would be Crescimano or Sitelab's fault, but they'd still be tagged with the consequences.

And then there's the fact that at its heart, it's still a Google project. Once the city's residents watch the first building break ground, they could decide that no matter what Google says, they don't want the tech giant in their neighborhood. "We're not going to let this development just sort of happen, and hope that it works out," said Maria Noel Fernandez, the president of Silicon Valley Rising, which represents tech industry service workers, many of whom live in San Jose. Fernandez herself was born and raised in the city with two service-worker parents. "We're going to exercise the power that we've shown we've got," she said. She's cautiously optimistic about the project now, but if Google falters in its affordable housing and community commitments, Fernandez will be the first to make them regret it. "We've made it not OK for Google and the city of San Jose to move forward without us."

The next few months will be full of nervous anticipation and careful revisions as the Sitelab and Google teams prepare to seek approval for the design from the city. If their plan, along with the development agreement and the environmental impact review, is approved by the city council in the spring, it will streamline the rest of the process. Building design could begin immediately, and there should be no need for years of agonizing review over each structure.

The approvals process will be complicated and finicky and will likely bleed into the summer. The finalized documents have to be published ahead of the deliberations. The San Jose city staff will post a report on the project, followed by a planning commission hearing, followed by another staff report, followed by a city council hearing on the project and the certification of the environmental impact review. There will be even more processes if the project is approved — building permits and design, a city review and public comments — but Google could start construction in a couple of years, Rood said. He estimated that about 70 people on the San Jose side of things have their hands on either this project or San Jose's broader redevelopment efforts every day.

"I'm 55, so I certainly hope to be around. I hope to probably be retired by the time it's totally all done," he said. He described a dream much like Crescimano's, a fantasy world where he can step out of the rail station and witness the years of work and planning come to life. And in his vision, it's much more than the Google project he sees. It's the entirety of downtown San Jose, reshaped into a thriving, bustling city that just happens to have Google at its heart.

"Everyone involved acknowledges that there are a lot of uncertainties," Rood admitted. "But in some way it's almost like re-centering the map of the Bay Area ... That's a little dramatic, but it's a big game changer for San Jose."