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To: [The Office of Mayor Sam Liccardo](#); [Kline, Kelly](#); [Devalcourt, Joel](#); [Walesh, Kim](#); [Klein, Nanci](#); [Ferguson, Jerad](#); [Ho, Nathan](#); [Perez, Raul](#); [Davis, Dev](#); [Groen, Mary Anne](#); [O'Malley Solis, Jessie](#); ron.golem@vta.org; Jeremy.Nelson@vta.org; [Ricardo Benavidez](#); [Javier Gonzalez](#); [Ann.Wharton](mailto:Ann.Wharton@ava.bromberg@lendlease.com); ava.bromberg@lendlease.com; whanson@sitelaburbanstudio.com; fromsonc@samtrans.com; murphys@samtrans.com; boris.lipkin@hsr.ca.gov; [Hughey, Rosalynn](#); [Han, James](#); [Mendez, Zacharias](#); [Severino, Lori](#)
Cc: [Project Specialist](#)
Subject: Evaluation of Google's Downtown West Master Plan
Date: Friday, February 7, 2020 8:40:26 PM
Attachments: [CSV Letter re Google DTSJ Plan - 12-19 & 1-20 -- FINAL.pdf](#)

[External Email]

Google staff, consultants, & staff from the City of San Jose, VTA, Caltrain, & CHSRA,

We are grateful for your immense efforts to talk with, and truly listen to, community members about how San Jose is developing.

Please find attached the evaluation from [Catalyze SV](#)'s Project Advocacy Committee of Google's Downtown West Master Plan.

Especially with Catalyze SV's suggestions incorporated, this proposed plan has the ability to remarkably transform this part of town, the entire City of San Jose, and our region at-large.

We hope to be able to collaborate with the City of San Jose, other government agencies, and Google to ensure the best plan possible gets approved and built.

As this plan shapes up further in 2020, we anticipate one arm of our organization - our Project Advocacy Committee - will formally [score it using our standard criteria](#). As such, we welcome and invite Google and its consultant partners to provide an update on the plan to this Committee before it comes to the City Council for approval.

In the meantime, may we receive from Google a substantive response to our comments by May 8? That is 90 days from tomorrow. If that is not enough time, please let us know.

To make it easier and quicker for you to respond point-by-point to our suggested improvements, we've created for Google and its partners [a feedback form for this plan](#) to hopefully fill out.

Thank you so much for considering our members' views on this plan - Alex

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February 7, 2020

Ricardo Benavidez - Google
Woody Hanson - SiteLab
Ava Bromberg - Lendlease

RE: Google's proposed Downtown West Master Plan in San Jose

Dear Ricardo, Woody & Ava,

Thank you for presenting Google's proposal for Downtown West in San Jose to the Catalyze SV Project Advocacy Committee on December 11. Catalyze SV's members met and discussed Google's plan on December 11 and January 22. As we understand it, Google's plan includes the development of 84 acres of land with up to 5,900 residential units, up to 7.3 million square ft for office space, and approximately 15 acres of parks set aside for open spaces & setbacks. It also includes up to 300 hotel rooms, up to 800 overnight accommodations for corporate employees (which will be taxed like a hotel), 0.4 parking spaces per residential unit, and up to 500k square feet for active ground floor uses.

We would like to submit the following feedback on the project.

Positive Elements:

- **A Vibrant Mixed-Use Neighborhood:** Google's plan leaps over a crucial first big bar by proposing a neighborhood that will have a mix of office space, commercial retail, homes, public open & green space, and the infrastructure to support all this. We commend Google's commitment to making the ground floor of many of its office buildings - where its employees will work - activated for both Google employees and the broader community. The days of the insulated corporate campus need to be shelved in the past, and we're grateful Google agrees. From its proposal of greenways as riparian corridors to its suggestion of a food market, Google has suggested many creative yet successful ways to bring people and vibrancy to the area.
- **Commitment to Sustainable Modes of Transit:** By locating next to the region's largest, most diverse transit center, Google is already signaling to its employees that they don't have to drive alone to get to and from work. Google's commitment to a lower parking ratio in its office and housing buildings also exhibits a desire to cut down on greenhouse gas emissions. We also welcome the parking being located underground to encourage other modes of transportation, foster vibrancy, and maximize the number of jobs or homes that can be created. We anticipate Google will take outcome-oriented steps to encourage its employees to use transit to access their new offices and reduce the number of vehicle miles traveled.

- **Engaging & Supporting the Community:** Google has launched extensive efforts to talk with the community about its ideas on the plan, including the community's input on the public spaces proposed in the plan. We acknowledge and appreciate Google's genuine and ongoing efforts. Google is also supporting numerous community-based organizations and has even financially supported the building of an important housing project called The Kelsey Ayer Station for which we have been advocating.¹

Elements to Improve:

- **Housing Volume, Affordability, & Location:** We understand that Google's primary goal with this plan isn't to build housing for San Joseans. Yet housing is one of our city's and region's greatest needs, especially with the ongoing housing crisis. Now that Google has control over 80 acres in a neighborhood that will be built practically from scratch - 15 acres of which the City sold - it has an opportunity to build thousands of housing units in the center of San Jose next to a major transit center. As such, we'd request the following changes to the current plan:
 - We'd like to see the number of housing units proposed to increase to more than 5,900. As Google does this, we encourage it to erect tall buildings that maximize the opportunities here. If Google can't build more residential units on the land within the 84-acre footprint because of space constraints, then perhaps Google can continue to help fund additional homes nearby, especially affordable ones.
 - We also ask Google to ensure a high percentage of them are affordable - reaching at least the 25% affordable commitment in Google's MOU to the City, especially for our middle and low-income residents.
 - Also, we'd like as few of the homes/beds as possible set aside for corporate accommodations. We worry that the current proposal of 800 rooms where Google employees or its corporate partners can occasionally stay is not good for building a sense of community. Having homes or buildings empty at times without any continuity between occupants won't create the vibrant, housing-rich neighborhood we need. We're also concerned about these corporate accommodations being managed by Google. This concentrates extra control into the hands of Google in who stays where and when. Thus, outside companies may not have the same freedom to use these places to stay to adapt to fair market conditions. At the very least, convert these accommodations into hotels.
 - We'd also like to see an innovative proposal that allows for public use of the 800 corporate rooms explored if they are not converted to hotels. This could come as a partnership with Airbnb, or creating a new type of shared living space. If corporate rooms were integrated into a mixed-use building that also included rental units and commercial space, we believe this could improve the quality of the neighborhood.
 - Finally, we'd like to see the residential buildings with active ground floors located closer to the new transit center and hotels farther. The corporate

¹ Note: Catalyze SV's current policy is to not accept financial support from the development community, including Google.

accommodations should be farther away from the transit station because they don't need station access as much as residents or office workers.

- **Sustainability:** We are grateful Google has discussed pursuing LEED Platinum certification for its office buildings and LEED Gold for Neighborhood Development. Yet with the creation of a new, modern neighborhood from scratch designed by one of the most innovative & forward-thinking companies in the world, what more can Google do to make this a sustainably built & functioning neighborhood? Some ideas we propose include:
 - Pedestrian-first blocks or streets that are free from cars. This should include greater access to bike lanes and trails to accommodate biking & walking.
 - On site production of solar and/or wind energy that can power the area.
 - Promote sustainable transportation through a TDM plan that provides transit passes for workers and improved local service as an alternative to Google's own bus fleet.
 - Regenerative agriculture in the form of an urban farm, orchard and/or a community garden.
 - More trees & landscaping, especially native and/or drought-tolerant plants.
 - Bird-friendly architecture to protect the riparian corridor that runs through the site.
 - Provide world-class bike parking for commuters, residents, and visitors, that includes repair stations and space for larger cargo/ebikes.
 - Provide a greater number of parks & green space, such as a sports field and/or dog parks. If not possible onsite, Google could look at funding improvements to the Guadalupe River Park, which would also provide an active transportation connection between the Downtown West development and Google's own properties in North San Jose.
- **Legacy, Community Benefits & Placemaking:** This point can't be overstated: Google, the City, and their partners have a once-in-a-century opportunity to remake an entire neighborhood in the heart of San Jose. The buildings they erect could last 50 years - the street grid and public spaces even longer. Whatever gets built, it should be a place to which people gravitate for a variety of reasons.
 - It should include at least one eye-catching, crowd-drawing, Instagram-worthy, distinct, iconic landmark that people come to visit from around the city, region, and world. This could be a building or a public space. It could draw upon the history of our region, from its roots as a home to indigenous Native Americans, to its transformation into an agricultural hotbed, or to its current incarnation as Silicon Valley. It could draw upon the topography and climate of our area.
 - Our members also want to see the area be activated throughout the morning, evening, and night, especially the places closest to Diridon Station. Though already being discussed, we want to underscore the importance of having Google employees and visitors frequent external businesses within the neighborhood.

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- Google could sponsor low-cost artist studios and maker-spaces to encourage local art and creative pursuits within the community.
- Moreover, we're concerned about Google's current plan to place office buildings directly adjacent to the future transit center. As one of the main entry points for visitors to San Jose and an opportunity for a new center of civic life and pride in our area, we would suggest that private uses reserved for Google be moved slightly farther away from the most public-oriented part of the plan. This will activate and excite the broader community as well as Google employees.
- Along those lines, will there be civic or public buildings such as schools, libraries, museums or the like as part of the plan? What is being considered as part of the plan to provide space or funding for uses such as schools and daycare to accommodate the new residents of the development?

As part of our effort to track this project and its improvements over time we ask that you (Google) respond to this letter within 60 days so we can keep our members updated. An additional feedback document accompanies this letter to make responding easier.

This plan is the most important opportunity for one of the world's largest companies and a generation of civic leaders to transform San Jose. We look forward to seeing how Google and the City of San Jose incorporate community input to design the best possible plan for our community.

Sincerely,
Catalyze SV's Board, staff and Project Advocacy Committee members

CC:

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About Catalyze SV

Catalyze SV's Project Advocacy Committee is comprised of community members who identify, vet and lead advocacy efforts around specific development projects. It runs parallel to Catalyze SV's community engagement work.