

From: [Severino, Lori](#)
To: [Downtown West Project](#)
Subject: FW: SAAG and Park Commission and Letter
Date: Thursday, August 20, 2020 2:37:39 PM
Attachments: [Advocates Letter Google 2019Sept10 comments.pdf](#)

-----Original Message-----

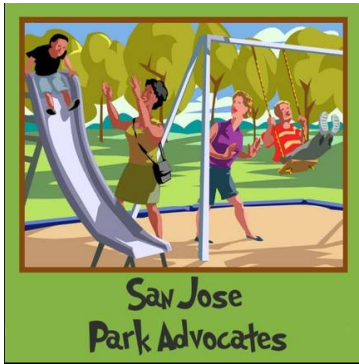
From: Jean Dresden [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, September 11, 2019 1:29 PM
To: Hurley, Melrose <Melrose.Hurley@sanjoseca.gov>; Severino, Lori <Lori.Severino@sanjoseca.gov>
Subject: SAAG and Park Commission and Letter

In another email, you were copied. Please distribute the attached letter to the members of SAAG and the members of the Park Commission.

It is attached here too.

Thanks

Jean Dresden



San Jose Parks Advocates

September 10, 2019

To the Google Design Team:
Via email

Thank-you for sharing your conceptual framework for Diridon Station Area design with the community. Your outreach day was very helpful in understanding the direction for your project.

San Jose Parks believes parks are the heart of the City. Healthy parks help create healthy people. We are comprised of about 150 neighborhood leaders and Adopt A Park volunteers. We seek to raise awareness of city-wide park concerns in our advocacy work.

Thank-you for considering green features from the Diridon Station Area Plan. The unifying thread of linear green space will do much to create a sense of place and neighborhood. Your consultant from the SF Estuary Institute was very informative about the types of plants and habitat that are under consideration. We appreciate the emphasis on California natives since they contribute so much to a healthy biodiversity that will make the Diridon Station area interesting to visit for its natural elements as well as whatever architecture Google builds.

However, we have several concerns:

--It is unclear what entity will own what and how the green space will be managed. How much of this space be POPOS (privately owned, public open space) and how much will be dedicated to the City of San Jose? What portion will be part of your "Community Benefits" agreement and which will be part of your obligation to replace the Fire Training Center? Parkland should be dedicated and deeded in fee simple to the City. By way of example, in the recent past, City leaders have cancelled easements and sold land that community members were using for gardens and open space through a single vote at a Tuesday hearing. About three years ago, there was a movement to sell a large swath of open space until we demonstrated the grant monies underlying the property put onerous restrictions on re-sale. The community should be confident that the parkland that comes from your project will be parkland for generations to come and not subject to the political vagaries of a large city.

In addition, the landscaping between the older buildings you propose using as community centers should not count as “open space.” All buildings in San Jose have some level of landscaping and none of it gets credit as park or open space. We are aware there has been between Google and the community in other jurisdictions where you have built; they also took the position that landscaping between buildings is not open space or parkland. We look forward to seeing the calculations as your project moves forward.

--How will the linear space be maintained? San Jose’s park system is woefully underfunded with downtown parks maintenance budgeted at about one person for one hour per week to care for one acre. (1 Person: 1 hour: 1 week: 1 acre).¹ The system does a very poor job of maintaining native habitat and depends extensively on volunteers for native habitat which does not always work out well.² Landscaping has been removed or not replaced throughout the system in order to reduce maintenance cost.

--If you want complex landscaping to look nice and habitat to thrive, you’ll need to identify ongoing funds to pay for it, given San Jose’s weak funding for parks. The City of San Jose’s low funding level for parks ensures that maintenance will fail to meet expectations Google may have from other jurisdictions. Are you thinking of a Business Improvement District? A park maintenance district? A new conservancy? Or will you be expecting the Guadalupe River Conservancy or the San Jose Downtown Association to take this on?

--Will any of the green space be used for stormwater management? We are opposed to the use of new public parkland for private or city stormwater management. Stormwater reduces the recreation benefit and generally looks un-aesthetic throughout the year due to the poor maintenance by the underfunded city park system. Although the City may be forced to use its existing park system to meet new state mandates, there is no excuse for newly redeveloped areas to use this sub-optimal solution. If you choose to place your stormwater facility on POPOS, we recommend a one-for-one reduction in “Community Benefits Fund” credit. San Jose Parks Advocates would be deeply disappointed if your project’s “Community Benefits Funds” were high-jacked to pay for a large municipal stormwater project.

We believe trees are critical to providing a quality park experience as well as for carbon sequestration. Parks and POPOS are the only place that we can be certain that they can thrive and grow to full size to do their work of cleaning the air and reducing the heat island effect. Trees in open space are associated with most of the research on the health benefits: increased cognition, memory, lower depression, lessened anxiety. San Jose’s Stormwater Management plan shows large swaths of treeless biofiltration swales and bio-retention ponds. Existing facilities are roasting hot in the summer. You can do better.

¹ Current maintenance staff levels are roughly about half of 2000 when the dot com bust forced layoffs. There were additional layoffs in 2009 that have been recently recovered. Only St. James Park is funded for more maintenance and current funds will run out in about 6 years unless future developments near the park elect to make a one-time payment to the fund.

² For example, due to inadequate supervision, a volunteer removed trees and bushes in a large native planting.

--How will you provide security for your POPOs? If the property will be owned and managed by the City of San Jose, do you intend to provide funding for security? The City is understaffed for rangers after laying off most of its rangers more than a decade ago and it has been unable to rebuild the department. Similarly, the police department is understaffed. Phone calls for “quality of life issues” in parks are referred to park rangers, who are stationed miles away, with many service hours not covered. Due to low police staffing, quality of life issues on private property receives a very low priority and rarely rates a response. How will you design for security? What will Google fund? Will you expect a future management group to solve this?

--How do you intend to integrate the additional park land that will be required as part of your planned construction of housing? Will it be one large piece near the housing, or do you intend to distribute it as smaller parks? We support pocket parks that have high percentage of square feet dedicated to hard-working natural habitat and green living plant life. We oppose pocket parks that are primarily pavers or hardscape.

--The idea of retaining some of San Jose’s older buildings near Diridon Station is a nice nod to the history and fabric of the area. However, it was not clear from your presentations how you envision using them and their relation to the park system. There was mention of “community centers” and space available for “non-profits.” Are you planning to fund the operations and maintenance of these buildings? Are you expecting to have the city operate these centers?³ Will these be buildings be available to the public for a nominal fee or will they be operated as a profit center? They are not a “community benefit” if they are operated as a private business available only to the well-to-do or if the park system must cut some other program in order to manage and operate them. We would want to see the financial details in order to determine whether they would be a community benefit. We prefer spending City resources in targeted residential neighborhoods that are already suffering from decades of inequitable spending.

--On August 6, the City of San Jose passed on ordinance that will charge a fee on commercial buildings in the Diridon Station Area that will fund plazas. How do you expect to integrate those plazas into your overall conceptual design?

--The alternate linear trail you proposed would be expected to be an important bicycle commute path to Diridon --an employment and transit center. This limits the usefulness for recreational users. By way of example, we see a substantial amount of weekday user conflict between bicycle commuters and recreational users along the Los Gatos trail near eBay and Netflix and would expect the same here. We recommend an approach similar to Los Alamitos trail where there are two parallel, but quite separate trails. Originally designed to separate horse riders from dog walkers, the two trails now separate walkers from bicyclists. We believe that for both safety and enjoyment, there must be two separate pathways. Further, we hope that a final design will include better connections over Park Avenue and West San Carlos. We have observed that bicyclists and scooter riders commonly do not conform to using signal light crossings that are far from the trail. A good solution would be bridges along Caltrain’s bridge at

³ The City operates 11 community centers and about 30 additional centers are rented to non-profits at far less than market rate. These centers were previously operated by City staff who were laid off as a budget strategy during one of the downturns.

Park and under the new West San Carlos viaduct that must be replaced. Please design so these ideas remain possible.

--The design shows no apparent area for active play. The linear design and large proposed habitat areas in non-creekside locations appear to preclude active recreation and play. We believe there must be a balance between passive and active recreation. While this area may not be appropriate for a large sports field, there is a need for space to burn off energy. San Jose's gender gap for ages 20-35 is a ratio of 134 to 100, with men outnumbering women. In Diridon Station Area, we can expect many young, energetic men who would benefit from active exercise during the day or after work. While you might build indoor private gyms, these employees also need exposure to nature for their health; time outdoors increases serotonin levels and provides Vitamin D. The design should include active play areas including spaces for small-group versions of sports popular among young men.

Thank-you again for tours of the site, the preview night Aug 17 at Guadalupe Conservancy, the wonderful Saturday Aug 24 outreach meeting in beautiful Arena Green West and the opportunity to comment. We look forward to working with Google as your design further evolves.

Sincerely,
/s/
Jean Dresden
Executive Director

Cc
Dave Sykes
Kim Walech
Nanci Klein
Rosalynn Hughley
Jon Cicirelli
Nicolle Burnham
Board, SJ Parks Advocates
San Jose Parks Commission c/o Melrose Hurley
SAAG c/o Lori Severino
Guadalupe River Gardens Park Conservancy
SJ Downtown Association
SPUR