

PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES OF SEPTEMBER 26, 2011
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2. FILE #:	2010-7090
Location:	Lawrence Station Area Plan (SAP) study area which includes properties within 1/2 mile radius of the Lawrence Caltrain station
Council Study Issue	Lawrence Station Area Plan: Final report on the completion of Phase 1 of the SAP which includes the overall framework of the plan, land use alternatives and parking strategies.
Environmental Review:	This action does not meet the definition of a “project” under CEQA and no additional review is required.
Staff Contact:	Surachita Bose, 408-730-7443, sbose@ci.sunnyvale.ca.us

Surachita Bose, Associate Planner, presented the report.

Comm. Chang asked staff about the concept for the mixed use and residential uses, and if the percentages stated in the report included Costco.

Michael Smiley, BMS Design Group, replied yes that the square footage includes Costco and clarified mixed use.

Comm. Chang asked about the Floor Area Ratio with this concept. Mr. Smiley replied that there are two goals they are attempting to achieve, one is to deal with the current and projected market for retail, and the other is to envision a pedestrian-oriented retail area.

Comm. Chang asked if this Phase 1 study includes the uses in the City of Santa Clara. Ms. Bose noted that they are not suggesting any land use changes for the City of Santa Clara, however, she noted that Santa Clara recently updated their General Plan to accommodate Sunnyvale’s Station Area Plan. The exact square footage for retail in the Santa Clara portion of the area was not provided by Santa Clara.

Comm. Sulser, asked when will the City select a land use concept.

Trudi Ryan, Planning Officer, replied that this would occur in the next phase and suggested the options the Commission may take if they would like to suggest any preferences.

Vice Chair Larsson noted that he did not see plans to connect the north and the south of the train station with a pedestrian and bike friendly path. He expressed his interest regarding this and asked if it would be covered in a later phase of the project.

Mr. Smiley stated that there are significant constraints with the tracks and a fair amount of cost involved for a pedestrian enhancement noting they studied a potential crossway on Lawrence Expressway; which would be further discussed in the next phase.

Chair Hendricks stated that the study area is a circle, with the east half located in Santa Clara. He asked if the northwest area of the study is the focus.

Mr. Smiley replied that the study includes the larger area to understand context. He stated that the

area with the greatest opportunity for land use changes is north of the established residential neighborhoods, which they want to protect, and are located on the other side of the train tracks.

Chair Hendricks asked if the study would have changed if the train station were not there.

Mr. Smiley replied yes, as an urban designer it would be different if there were not a train station there because one of the purposes of the study is to create a relationship between public transit and the surrounding community. If you take care of your transit station, then it will support the surrounding area.

Chair Hendricks asked if there is any data about residents in the townhome development directly south of the transit station that actually use the train station.

Ms. Bose replied that the community outreach meetings included attendees from the residential area and that their primary concern was if they would be impacted directly. She noted that they did not receive any hard data that they actually use transit, but they asked to see more amenities that are pedestrian friendly like retail stores and a grocery. She also noted that a feasibility study in 2009 showed that bike and pedestrian paths were lacking, and the employees in the offices in the area depend on the train station for their commute.

Chair Hendricks asked about car access in the northwest quadrant, and asked if the area will still have car access.

Mr. Smiley replied that it would be a multimodal access, which would accommodate cars, bikes, and pedestrians.

Ms. Ryan noted that the same multimodal framework applies to the northeast quadrant as well.

Mr. Smiley confirmed and clarified that the framework of streets also applies to the north quadrant, which includes the multimodal framework into Santa Clara.

Comm. Dohadwala said she found the concepts impressive and believed that offices would create more ridership than residential.

Mr. Smiley responded that it has to do with the source of the ridership, and how people move through their course of the day. He stated that trip generations are close when comparing residential and office uses.

Chair Hendricks opened the public hearing.

Jim Davis, resident, noted his interest in the Lawrence Station Area study. He stated that the Lawrence Station area is a perfect buffer zone between the residential and industrial communities. He further noted that the Lawrence SAP is pushing residential into an industrial area, which does not make sense. He noted the work the City has done in the Moffett Park area, and suggested that the Lawrence area should be like the Moffett Park area. He further stated that building residential uses in the area would send people out of the City to look for jobs. He then stated that industry should move in the area to provide income. He also noted that high density residential uses into the area require residential amenities, such as sidewalks and parks. He asked if they were aware about the cost of concrete. He noted that the last park left to be built in Sunnyvale is Morse Park, and it took 25 years to fund it. He urged the Commission to look at the plans and see if the natural barrier should stay there and to bring in more industry to the area than residential.

Ray Crump, Sunnyvale resident, noted his support for the housing in the southern area. He asked what would happen to this plan if Caltrain stops service to the station. He noted traffic congestion along Lawrence Expressway if this was all developed.

Robert Sweirk, Sr. Transportation Planner with the Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) stated their participation in the Study as the Transit Agency, Congestion Management Agency, and the Joint Powers Board for Caltrain. He noted the direction of the study is in line with the goals and policies of VTA to see improved pedestrian and bike friendly transportation for congestion management. He noted a related study in regards to Chair Hendricks inquiry about parking utilization, and stated that the study showed that parking was underutilized and that commuters are getting to the station without a car. He stated VTA's support for the Lawrence SAP.

Chair Hendricks stated that rail looks like a point-to-point transit mode; he asked if there is only one bus line that services Lawrence Expressway.

Mr. Sweirk replied yes, the Caltrain service is a line haul, which does not service Sunnyvale very well. He noted that studies show that employment areas in Sunnyvale are not supportive of transit, and may help ridership if Lawrence Station intensifies.

Chair Hendricks asked how far would someone walk or bike to and from a station. Mr. Sweirk replied that more people walk greater distances from a residence and less from their employment.

Chair Hendricks closed the public hearing.

Vice Chair Larsson asked what the timeframe is for the potential changes.

Ms. Ryan replied that typically it takes about 10 years to see significant land use change from a new plan, and that infrastructure changes depend on financing usually from developers. She further mentioned the possibility of nothing changing, and concluded that once there is a plan, then there is a better opportunity to obtain funding.

Comm. Dohadwala commented on the staff report and she expressed concern about what is factual and what is opinion on the report. Ms. Ryan clarified.

Chair Hendricks referred to page 1.1 of the report regarding reduced parking standards and asked if the Commission would be approving fewer parking spaces.

Ms. Ryan clarified that this is not a decision to approve; however, the plan is suggesting fewer parking spaces to promote other modes of transportation.

Chair Hendricks asked if there would be enough people to support the businesses with reduced parking. Ms. Ryan noted the potential for parking plan options, such as shared parking.

Chair Hendricks noted that open space was not addressed in the report. Ms. Bose replied that it would be addressed in the next phases of the study.

Vice Chair Larsson followed up on open space. He asked staff if they knew what Santa Clara is planning for open space as he viewed points on a map depicting open space areas.

Ms. Bose responded that the Santa Clara portion of the study area is post-2015, and they did not identify any specific square footage for open space.

Mr. Smiley said that Santa Clara is using numbers between five and 10 percent depending on the planned horizon years. He noted that Sunnyvale is following the Councils' decisions regarding open space requirements.

Comm. Sulser made a motion on 2010-7090 towards Alternative 1 recommended by staff; to accept the first phase plan for Lawrence SAP as provided in Attachment B of the staff report. Comm. Chang seconded.

Comm. Sulser stated that he attended the outreach meetings and read the report. He further noted that he is looking forward to the next steps of the study, especially the office R&D use and mixed-use options.

Comm. Chang noted that this study, Lawrence SAP is part of the Land Use and Transportation Element, and the General Plan. He said the study shows that pedestrian and other forms of transportation to the station are needed for the station to be viable. He stated the importance for residential neighborhoods to have access to the area. He noted he would like to see the retail portion sustainable and would like to see phase two of the study include other sources of transportation to intensify the area and put this project to fruition.

Chair Hendricks said he would be supporting the motion, as he sees nothing to not approve the Lawrence SAP. He said he would like to see options for open space in the next phases. He also noted that the railroad tracks are like natural obstacles and wants to make sure that the ideas of what could be developed is not limited to the current access to Lawrence Station. He would like to see options into integrating multiple transportation modes to the station. He mentioned other Industrial to Residential projects blocked by walls, and would not want to limit multimodal access to the station. He also asked if the study would go through the new Sustainability Commission. He concluded that this is a great Phase 1 study of the Lawrence SAP and is looking forward to see the next phases.

ACTION: Comm. Sulser made a motion on 2010-7090 towards Alternative 1 recommended by staff; to accept the first phase plan for Lawrence SAP as provided in Attachment B of the staff report. Comm. Chang seconded. Motion carried unanimously, 7-0.

APPEAL OPTIONS: This item is scheduled to be considered by City Council at the November 1, 2011 City Council meeting.