

# 400 Main Street





DATE: September 25, 2012

AGENDA ITEM # 9

**TO:** City Council  
**FROM:** David Kornfield, Planning Services Manager  
**SUBJECT:** 400 Main Street Mixed-Use Retail/Office Building

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Approve Design Review and Use Permit applications subject to findings and conditions

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**SUMMARY:**

**Estimated Fiscal Impact:**

**Amount:** An increase in property tax and sales tax revenue to be determined

**Budgeted:** Not applicable

**Public Hearing Notice:** August 16, 2012

**Previous Council Consideration:** Not applicable

**CEQA Status:** Mitigated Negative Declaration certified on January 25, 2011

**Attachments:**

1. Project Plans including 3-D Color Renderings
2. Planning and Transportation Commission Minutes dated August 16, 2012
3. Memorandum to the Planning and Transportation Commission dated August 16, 2012
4. Correspondence
5. Development Agreement
6. Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Commission Recommendation

## BACKGROUND

This is a Design Review and Use Permit application for a mixed-use, commercial building at the City-owned property at 400 Main Street. The project is a two-story commercial building with approximately 12,500 square feet of retail area at the first story and approximately 18,500 square feet of office space at the second story. The project includes on-site parking behind and below the building. The parking is accessed from First Street via a shared driveway with the Safeway development.

The project has received a considerable amount of public and private review. The review included a conceptual evaluation by the City Council that resulted in a Development Agreement and Purchase Agreement. The formal application process has included numerous meetings with staff as well as Design Review by the former Architectural and Site Review Committee in May of 2012, a study session by the Planning and Transportation Commission in July of 2012, a Design Review and Use Permit public hearing by the Planning and Transportation Commission in August of 2012, and a review by the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Commission in August of 2012. The Planning and Transportation Commission minutes and memorandum are attached for reference as well as a report to the Council from the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Commission. The applicant also met with the Chamber of Commerce and the Los Altos Village Association; both organizations supported the project. Lastly, the applicant met with neighboring property owners and community groups. The applicant considered this input and made substantial changes to the project throughout the process to address stated concerns.

As described in the memorandum to the Planning and Transportation Commission, the project is consistent with the General Plan, Downtown Design Plan, Downtown Design Guidelines and zoning codes. The project conforms to the Development Agreement by providing the specified public benefits such as a high quality design, an extension of retail development along First Street, incorporating the First Street Streetscape plan improvements, and meeting minimum project density expectations.

The project incorporates elements recommended in the Downtown Design Plan such as an entry wall element at the Main Street/Foothill Expressway corner including a wider sidewalk, edge landscaping along the expressway that buffers the parking lot and provides softened views of the building, an approximately 1,300-square-foot plaza at the corner of Main and First Streets, a building design that includes a mix of retail and office uses, and highly visible tower elements that serve as landmarks at the prominent Downtown entry.

The project incorporates the City's First Street Streetscape improvements including broader, nine- to 18-foot-wide sidewalks along Main and First Streets, street trees, light fixtures, benches, special paving and landscape areas. Additionally, the project provides an approximately 3,900-square-foot courtyard between the proposed retail buildings facing First Street, opposite the Public Parking Plaza No. 4. The public-private courtyard space has large areas for outdoor tables and chairs and incorporates an interesting four-foot tall water fountain with an integral seat wall. In addition to those elements that reflect the City's Downtown Design Guidelines, the project includes other village character building elements such as:

- Narrow storefront bays reflecting the finer-grain pattern of buildings on Main Street;
- Articulated building massing that responds to both the Main Street and First Street context;
- High quality, traditional architectural design elements such as deeply recessed windows with mullions, low awnings and overhangs, parapet walls with detailed corbels and cornices;
- Natural building materials including limestone, cement plaster, and a copper roof treated to maintain a brown patina;
- Special textured paving for the courtyard and plaza areas that complement the First Street Streetscape plan; and
- Diverse signage opportunities including locations on the building, in the tower faces and pedestrian-scaled blade signs.

The Planning and Transportation Commission recommended approval of the project and directed the applicant to work with staff prior to City Council consideration to:

- a) Refine the architectural details of the main tower elements facing Main Street and Foothill Expressway to maintain their significance and enhance their compatibility with the overall building design, and
- b) Consider material and/or color changes to the Foothill Expressway building elevation to differentiate and distinguish the building further.

Additionally, the Planning and Transportation Commission required its subsequent review of the Master Sign Program (see Condition No. 13), a recommendation to increase the pedestrian seating and bicycle parking facilities, a provision of 3-D renderings for City Council review and suggested that Public Arts Commission review the proposed water fountain element and north stair tower (facing Safeway) for opportunities to incorporate public art. If the Council desires, a condition could be added to require the Public Arts Commission review prior to any development permits.

The Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Commission (BPAC) was split on its input to the location of the project's two bicycle lockers in the parking garage with concerns about the slope of the vehicle ramp access and recommended consideration of special ramp paving or elevator access. The BPAC recommended orienting the bicycle racks on the sidewalk parallel to parking spaces or drive lanes to minimize conflicts with pedestrians. The BPAC also recommended that the Council consider additional bicycle parking either on-site or off-site to accommodate a future demand. Finally, the BPAC recommended a review of the line of sight from the sidewalk to the driveway in common with Safeway and to require low-level landscaping if appropriate.

## DISCUSSION

### Design Changes

The applicant addressed the Commission and staff concerns as follows:

- Refined the main towers by simplifying the natural limestone pattern and lowering the arches, added a cornice detail to their walls, extended the eaves of the hip roofs, and added a copper fascia and gutter to complement the copper tile roofs making the towers more integral to the building design;
- Used a darker color on the part of the building nearer Safeway and a lighter color for the tower elements to differentiate the building massing from the central tower and bridge elements;
- Revised the two awnings on the Main Street frontage to metal and glass canopies to correspond to the main tower design;
- Added three more benches for pedestrians on the First Street and Main Street frontages;
- Added one more bike rack behind the building and oriented the racks parallel to the parking or curbs;
- Changed the fountain design to incorporate the project's natural limestone material and a decorative metal spout;
- Relocated the building address sign from the First Street fountain to the bridge arch;
- Removed the upper story signage from the Main Street tower;
- Revised a storefront bay on the Main Street (south) building elevation into a display box; and
- Provided photo-real, 3-D representations of the project from five perspectives.

### First Street Improvements

The project incorporates all of the First Street Streetscape improvements shown in the City's selected version of the streetscape plan. The applicant has approached staff to omit the stone-faced news rack element near the project's border with Safeway given their concern that there is no other use of that stone material along the project's frontage. The location of the stone news rack element was intended to incorporate the City's stone material that is prominently used across the street to maintain a cohesive appearance.

Staff supports omitting the news rack element from the streetscape improvements since there are other news racks located nearby (i.e., on State near First Street), and the applicant's

request is consistent with discussions the City has had with local print news media regarding the number and location of news rack opportunities Downtown.

The Planning and Transportation Commission discussed using the City's stone on the water fountain element as a means to bring in the City's material; however, that was not imposed as a condition. The applicant's original fountain design included cement plaster facing, which has been changed to the use the project's natural limestone in effort to make the element more in-keeping with the First Street Streetscape. Staff recommends that the City Council consider requiring the use of the City's First Street stone material on the water fountain element.

The applicant's landscape plans include an alternative bike rack design (see Page L-2 of the colored plans). The alternative bike rack differs from the City-standard black U-pipe bike rack in that it has a more contemporary, rectangular shape that reflects the metal details of the building's light fixtures and the refined nature of the building architecture. The City has allowed the use of alternative bicycle racks with other projects if they relate to the project's design.

- Should the Council support the use of the alternative bicycle rack then this should be added to the conditions.

### **Signage**

The entry element suggested in the Downtown Design Plan is a landscaped wall that provides City identity signage (i.e., Downtown Los Altos). The applicant's proposal includes an attractive wall element that is appropriately landscaped; however, the design shows project signage rather than City identity signage. From the applicant's perspective, it is important to identify the project at the prominent location to attract larger, high-quality retailers and office tenants.

The Planning Commission supported staff's position that it was inappropriate to provide project signage on the entry element that is intended to identify the Downtown area. This is reflected in Condition No. 13 (i). Staff's approach would be to incorporate the granite and/or polished marble signage that is compatible with the other Downtown entry signs on Foothill Expressway at San Antonio Road and Edith Avenue (see Condition No. 10).

### **Display Window Box on Main Street**

The applicant revised the left storefront bay on the Main Street (south) building elevation to provide a display window box. Originally, this bay was an open element to the side of the driveway ramp providing a building recess under the second story. The opening was screened at the back of the sidewalk with a landscaped wall for safety from the ramp below. To address concerns about the appearance of the wall, the applicant proposed a window in that area to reflect the pattern of the adjacent storefront. This was an interesting solution that maintained the pattern of the storefront windows and provided views into the ramp area. Following the Planning and Transportation Commission's review, this element evolved into a display window box.

While the display window box approach might provide some pedestrian interest, it produces a shallow display area that in staff's experience becomes stagnant in nature, and, in effect produces another form of a blank wall. In staff's view:

- The left storefront bay on the Main Street elevation should have either a window without a display box, or use a full-height, recessed wall in the archway that could be landscaped and/or have a stone bench incorporated at its base for pedestrians.

### **Landscape and Sight-Visibility**

The Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Commission raised a concern about the potential sight-visibility of the landscape adjacent to the proposed building along the common driveway with Safeway. Staff confirmed that this landscape area will maintain the sight-visibility from the driveway to the sidewalk area. The planter is part of Safeway's drainage plan area with low-level grasses and ground cover.

### **FISCAL IMPACT**

This project will generate property tax and sales tax revenue from the increased property value and the retail sales potential.

### **PUBLIC CONTACT**

A notice regarding the scheduled City Council review of the project was mailed to property owners and business tenants within 500 feet of the site.

A notice was posted on-site on both the Main Street and First Street frontages.

Posting of the meeting agenda serves as notice to the general public.

The attached correspondence contains letters received at the Planning and Transportation Commission hearing and additional letters addressed to the Council.

## FINDINGS

11-D-09 & 11-UP-06—400 Main Street

1. With regard to the Environmental Review, the City Council finds that the project is consistent with the Mitigated Negative Declaration certified January 25, 2011 in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act.
2. With regard the commercial design review the City Council finds in accordance with Section 14.78.040 of the Municipal Code that:
  - a. The proposal meets the goals, policies and objectives of the General Plan and any specific plan, design guidelines and ordinance design criteria adopted for the specific district or area;
  - b. The proposal has architectural integrity and has an appropriate relationship with other structures in the immediate area in terms of height, bulk and design;
  - c. Building mass is articulated to relate to the human scale, both horizontally and vertically. Building elevations have variation and depth and avoid large blank wall surfaces;
  - d. Exterior materials and finishes convey quality, integrity, permanence and durability, and materials are used effectively to define building elements such as base, body, parapets, bays, arcades and structural elements;
  - e. Landscaping is generous and inviting and landscape and hardscape features are designed to complement the building and parking areas and integrated with the building architecture and the surrounding streetscape. Landscaping includes substantial street tree canopy, either in the public right-of-way or within the project frontage;
  - f. Signage is designed to complement the building architecture in terms of style, materials, colors and proportions;
  - g. Mechanical equipment is screened from public view and the screening is designed to be consistent with the building architecture in form, material and detailing; and
  - h. Service, trash and utility areas are screened from public view, or are enclosed in structures that are consistent with the building architecture in materials and detailing.
3. With regard to the use permit, the City Council finds according to Section 14.80.60 of the Municipal Code that:
  - a. The proposed location of the conditional use is desirable or essential to the public health, safety, comfort, convenience, prosperity or welfare;

- b. The proposed location of the conditional use is in accordance with the objectives of the zoning plan as stated in Chapter 14.02 of the Code;
- c. The proposed conditional use complies with the regulations prescribed for the district in which the site is located and the general provisions of Chapter 14.02;
- d. The proposed use and structure is in scale with the existing development and enhances the unique village character of the CRS District; and
- e. The proposed use and structure will not cause degradation in the level of service of the street and intersections within the CRS District.

## CONDITIONS

11-D-09 and 11-UP-06—400 Main Street

### **GENERAL**

1. Project approval is based upon the plans received on September 17, 2012 except as modified by these conditions.
2. The property owner shall be responsible to maintain the landscape and Downtown entry element at the Foothill Expressway corner, and the fountain in the First Street right-of-way.
3. The property owner shall allow for public use along the Main Street and First Street sidewalk areas abutting the public right-of-way.
4. With regard to improvements in the Main Street and First Street right-of-way:
  - a. The applicant shall be responsible for the cost, the engineering and the installation of improvements within the public-right-of-way along the frontage of the subject property. Improvements include, but are not limited to, curb, gutter, sidewalk, landscaping and street trees. The improvements shall be consistent with the First Street Streetscape Improvement Plan except as modified by the project development plans, as required by the City Engineer;
  - b. The applicant shall contribute \$178,630 to the City for the cost of the City's prior installation of curbs, gutters, mid-block crosswalk, curb ramps, detectable warning surfaces, granite accent pavers, decorative utility vault covers, street lights, string light pole, sewer lateral installation and one-quarter of the traffic signal system; and
  - c. The applicant shall coordinate their construction schedule with the City for the purpose of excavation, street closure and installation of curb, gutter, sidewalk and pedestrian amenities within the Main Street and First Street right-of-way.
5. Permits shall be obtained from the Engineering Division prior to any work done within the public right-of-way. The permits and the work shall be in accordance with plans to be approved by the City Engineer.
6. Improvements shall comply with the City of Los Altos Municipal Regional Stormwater (MRP) NPDES Permit No. CA S612008, Order R2-2009-0074 dated October 14, 2009. The improvement plans shall include the "Blueprint for a Clean Bay" plan sheet in all plan submittals.
7. The applicant shall contact electric, gas, communication and water utility companies regarding the installation of new utility services to the site.

8. The applicant agrees to indemnify and hold City harmless from all costs and expenses, including attorney's fees, incurred by the City or held to be the liability of City in connection with City's defense of its actions in any proceeding brought in any State or Federal Court, challenging the City's action with respect to the applicant's project.
9. The Planning & Transportation Commission may approve minor changes to the development plans, as determined by the Community Development Director. Such minor design changes, if approved by the Planning & Transportation Commission, shall be final and not appealable.
10. (New Condition) The entry element wall shall provide signage identifying "Downtown Los Altos" as approved by the Community Development Director. Such design shall incorporate the granite and/or polished marble signage that is compatible with the other Downtown entry signs on Foothill Expressway at San Antonio Road and Edith Avenue.

#### **PRIOR TO SUBMITTAL OF BUILDING PERMIT**

11. The plans shall show that all exterior lighting on the building above the first-story has shrouds and/or is directed downward to avoid impacts to the nearby properties.
12. The applicant shall prepare a landscape and irrigation plan that includes the Foothill Expressway shoulder within the public right-of-way that fronts on the subject property. The plan shall meet the requirements of the City's Water Efficient Landscape Regulations.
13. The applicant shall develop the master sign program for Planning and Transportation Commission review and approval as follows:
  - a. Only anchor tenants may only have signage at the second story within the established sign areas. Anchor tenants are defined as tenants occupying at least 5,000 square feet of building area;
  - b. The building signs shall have individual metal or wood letters applied to the wall surface or suspended in the tower window not to exceed 12 inches in height except for anchor tenant signs that may have letters up to 18 inches in height;
  - c. The signs shall be externally illuminated or halo-lit from behind;
  - d. The signs shall identify business names and logos only;
  - e. Retail tenants may have a combination of building signs and blade signs only. Retail tenants may only have one sign facing Foothill Expressway;
  - f. Permanent window signs are not allowed unless otherwise approved in the master sign program;
  - g. Office tenants may not have blade signs or window signs;

- h. Window signs are prohibited on the second story except in the established sign area within the tower element facing Foothill Expressway; and
- i. Project signage is prohibited on the Foothill Expressway entry wall.

#### **PRIOR TO ISSUANCE OF BUILDING PERMIT**

- 14. The applicant shall obtain an easement or fee title from Santa Clara County for that portion of the Foothill Expressway right-of-way used by the project site plan.
- 15. The property owner shall dedicate and record a Fire Department Access Easement of at least 20 feet in width in the shared ingress/egress easement driveway area accessed from First Street and a Fire Department turnaround connected to the west end of the Fire Department Access Easement.
- 16. The applicant shall record a Pedestrian Use Easement for the portions of the private property within the sidewalk area along First Street, the open area of the courtyard along First Street, and the sidewalk along Main Street and First Street in a form approved by the City Engineer and City Attorney. The plat and legal description of the Pedestrian Use Easement shall be submitted for review by the City Land Surveyor. Applicant shall provide a sufficient fee retainer to cover the cost of the review of the Pedestrian Use Easement.
- 17. The applicant shall submit the Storm Water Management Plan (SWMP) in accordance with the requirements provided by the City Engineer. The SWMP will show the entire requirement on how the design is in compliance with the MRP. The SWMP shall be reviewed and approved by a City approved third party consultant at the applicant's expense. The recommendations from the SWMP shall be shown on the building plans and approved by the third party consultant.
- 18. The applicant shall prepare and record a lot line adjustment or lot merger map to combine the site into one property. Plats and legal descriptions of the lot line adjustment or lot merger shall be submitted for review and approval by the Planning Division and the City Land Surveyor and shall show the shared access easement in common with the property at 160 First Street (Safeway). The applicant shall provide a sufficient fee retainer to cover the cost of the lot merger application.
- 19. The applicant shall pay a traffic impact fee in accordance with Chapter 3.48 of Los Altos Municipal Code.
- 20. The applicant shall pay all applicable sanitary sewer connection fees.
- 21. The applicant shall submit on-site grading, utility and drainage plans for approval by the City Engineer. The grading/drainage plans shall include, but not limited to, drain swales, drain inlets, rough pad elevations, building envelopes and elevations at property lines. Utility plans shall show the size of proposed sanitary sewer lateral for the new building. The location of all underground utilities in the public right-of-way shall be shown on the

plans. The applicant shall verify that the city sewer and storm drain systems are adequately sized to handle the proposed flows.

22. The applicant shall contact Mission Trail Waste Systems and submit a solid waste disposal plan indicating the type and size of container proposed and the frequency of pick-up service subject to the approval of the Engineering Division. The applicant shall submit evidence that Mission Trail Waste Systems has reviewed and approved the size and location of the proposed new enclosure for recyclables.
23. The applicant shall submit plans to the County of Santa Clara for any proposed improvements within the County's right-of-way and provide approval of these improvements to the City.
24. The applicant shall submit a construction management plan for review and approval by the City Engineer. The plan shall include:
  - a. A traffic control plan and a pedestrian detouring plan that will be implemented during the construction phase of this project;
  - b. Detailed plans for any construction activities affecting the public right-of-way, including but not limited to excavation, material storage, earth retention, construction vehicle parking, traffic control, and safe pedestrian access; and
  - c. A truck routing and staging plan for the proposed excavation of the site.
25. Pay any applicable fees to the Engineering Division for the transportation permit as required by the City Engineer.

#### **PRIOR TO FINAL INSPECTION**

26. The applicant shall provide an acoustical analysis demonstrating that all mechanical equipment is in compliance with the City's Noise Control Regulations.
27. All landscaping and irrigation shall be installed. The applicant shall obtain an encroachment permit from County Roads and Airports prior to installation of landscaping and irrigation in the Foothill Expressway shoulder.
28. The applicant shall submit a one-year, ten percent maintenance bond upon acceptance of improvements in the public right-of-way.
29. The applicant shall label all new or existing public and private catch basin inlets which are on and adjacent to the site with the "NO DUMPING - FLOWS TO BAY" logo as required by the City.
30. The applicant shall submit a Certificate of Completion as required by the City's Water Efficient Landscape Regulations.

31. The applicant shall submit a recorded maintenance agreement for the storm water treatment methods installed in accordance with the Storm Water Management Plan (SWMP). The approved third party consultant shall certify that all storm water treatment systems were properly installed per the approved SWMP and project plans.



## MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** August 16, 2012  
**TO:** Planning & Transportation Commission  
**FROM:** David Kornfield, Planning Services Manager  
**SUBJECT:** 11-D-09 & 11-UP-06—400 MAIN STREET

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### RECOMMENDATION

Recommend approval of Design application 11-D-09 and Use Permit application 11-UP-06 to the City Council subject to findings and conditions.

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This is a design and use permit application for a mixed-use, commercial building. The project is a two-story building with retail area at the first story and office space at the second story. The project provides on-site parking behind and below the building accessed from First Street. The following table summarizes the project's technical details:

<b>GENERAL PLAN DESIGNATION:</b>	Downtown Commercial
<b>ZONING:</b>	CRS Commercial Retail Sales
<b>PARCEL SIZE:</b>	34,888 square feet
<b>MATERIALS:</b>	Copper tile roof, cement plaster siding, aluminum windows, natural stone cladding, plaster details, metal trellises, fabric awnings

	<b>Existing</b>	<b>Proposed</b>	<b>Allowed/Required</b>
<b>FLOOR AREA:</b>			
First story	--	12,464 square feet	--
Second story	--	18,541 square feet	--
Total	--	31,005 square feet	--
<b>SETBACKS:</b>			
Front (First St)	--	Back of sidewalk	Back of sidewalk
Left Side (Main St)	--	0 feet	0 feet
Right Side	--	1.5 feet	0 feet
Rear (Foothill)	--	44 to 46 feet	0 feet
<b>HEIGHT:</b>			
Overall/Tower	--	30 feet/45 feet	30 feet/45 feet
Parapet Walls	--	38 feet	38 feet
<b>PARKING:</b>	--	125 spaces	123 spaces

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Committee and Commission Input**

On May 16, 2012 the Architecture & Site Review Committee considered the project. The Committee generally supported the project but continued their review to allow the applicant to present the plans at a study session with the Planning Commission to review the site plan alternatives and design. The Committee's discussion included but was not limited to such issues as the parking's connectivity to the street, the appropriateness of incorporating public open space into the site plan, the courtyard design, the character of the building design and the need for more three-dimensional representations of the project (see attached minutes for more details).

On July 5, 2012 the newly formed Planning & Transportation Commission held a study session with the applicant. The applicant presented revised plans to the Commission that included but were not limited to an expanded courtyard design, revised building elevations including more wall articulation defining the courtyard, arched storefronts, enhanced stairway towers facing the First Street and Foothill Expressway frontages, a lower landscape wall at the Main Street and Foothill Expressway corner, and additional storefront windows on the Main Street building elevation.

Individual direction from the Planning & Transportation Commissioners included but was not limited to: a request to provide more three-dimensional representations of the project, consider more parking spaces as a public benefit and more parking spaces at-grade, provide a location for public art at the corner, open the landscape at the frontage to make the building and signage more prominent, that three-story development could be appropriate if substantial public benefits were included related to providing extra parking spaces and/or a public plaza, that the courtyard should provide more of a public emphasis, that higher ceilings and taller massing were important to retain in the project to enhance the retail potential, and that the building design could be differentiated within the project, and that the overall building design should emphasize the project's retail use (see attached minutes for more details).

Based on the study session input the applicant revised the plans to improve the building design in the following general ways:

- Incorporated more natural stone facing at the first-story elements and bridge arch to enhance the First Street courtyard architecture;
- Revised the windows and column design at the first-story to a frameless glazing system to enhance the retail appeal and provide a more horizontal emphasis to the building's first story;
- Changed the second-story windows to a more traditional system with smaller openings that emphasize the building form rather than the office use;
- Modified the rear elevation to use the natural stone facing on the stairway tower and bridge;
- Lowered the entry element wall at the Foothill Expressway corner; and
- Added bike racks near the First Street courtyard.

## **Downtown Design Plan**

The Downtown Design Plan (DDP) was adopted to reinforce the identity of Downtown as a retail center, to improve the visual quality of the area, and to promote an attractive pedestrian environment. The project site is located in the core of the Downtown area and at Gateway Entry adjacent to Main Street and Foothill Expressway (DDP, pages 9-15, 20-22). Additionally, the Downtown Design Plan also considers this property as an important edge to the Downtown (DDP, pages 17-19). As a Downtown Edge property, the development should introduce external elements that are visible from Foothill Expressway in order to bring attention toward Downtown and provide attractive views into the Downtown area. Plantings along the shoulder should allow for partial views through to attractive uses. Along First Street, the development should create an urban boulevard streetscape that includes continuous street trees and other amenities.

As an entry point the Downtown Design Plan calls out for refined elements that contrast with the park-like edge of Foothill Expressway including small flowering accent trees, Downtown identity signage, flowering perennial plants, low evergreen hedges and special paving. The Downtown Design Plan suggests that projects on this site should reinforce the Downtown Core by reinforcing the link between Main and State Streets, provide an opportunity for anchor stores, create a pedestrian scale streetscape, and create a memorable landmark. The Downtown Design Plan also identifies the subject property as an important site for rehabilitation (DDP, KFC Site, pages 35-36) and outlines the following elements that *might* be incorporated into a site plan:

- A mixture of land uses, with retail on the ground floor;
- A tower or other highly visible building component that acts as a public landmark;
- A public plaza at the corner;
- An outdoor café or other active visible, pedestrian oriented outdoor uses located adjacent to the street corner;
- A well articulated, well designed building with an equal attention to detail on all sides;
- A gateway element and City identity signing; and/or
- An edge setback and character consistent with adjacent streets. Along Main and First Streets, the character should be consistent with that of Main Street, with its buildings close to the street, awnings and display windows. Along Foothill, the character should be consistent with other development and have wide planted setbacks and numerous large street trees.

## **Downtown Design Guidelines**

In addition to the required design review findings (discussed later) and consideration of implementing the Downtown Design Plan, the project is subject to the Downtown Design Guidelines. The project site is located within the First Street District, which is discussed in Section 5 (Guidelines, pages 65-70). Guidelines for this area build on the guidelines for the Downtown Core District and include minimizing the visual impact of parking, providing pedestrian amenities, designing to a village scale and character, designing structures to be compatible with adjacent existing buildings, landscaping Foothill Expressway edges with shrubs and trees, and adding street trees along the street frontages. Since the property is adjacent to the Downtown Core, the project

should relate more to the finer-grain pattern of Main Street while respecting the larger-scale of some of the buildings in the First Street corridor. The Guidelines also highlight the property as a Downtown Gateway that warrants special design treatments such as towers, outdoor uses, fountains, special lighting, increased architectural details and City identity signing (Guidelines, page 41).

## **DISCUSSION**

### **General Plan Compliance**

The General Plan goals for land uses Downtown including preserving and enhancing the identity and unique character of Los Altos, increasing the appeal and attractiveness of Downtown to pedestrians and shoppers, and enhancing the area's economic vitality. This project meets these goals by providing a design that is compatible with the village atmosphere, including pedestrian-oriented elements such as expansive storefronts, a large courtyard with a fountain, wide sidewalks, and by providing an opportunity for an anchor store at a prominent entry that should help attract shoppers and strengthen the Downtown's overall economic vitality.

### **Downtown Design Plan and Guidelines Conformance**

The project conforms to the Downtown Design Plan by providing for a mix of uses including a building design that will accommodate the potential for a major retailer and help reinforce the area's commercial core. The ground floor of the building contains two, large retail areas totaling 12,240 square feet. The project sets the primary retail space at the corner of Main Street and First Street; and both retail areas have frontage on First Street that help connect the retail core on Main Street to State Street.

The project incorporates special landscape features such as wider sidewalks at the Foothill Expressway corner, Main Street frontage and along First Street, landscaped walls, and a water feature that enhances the pedestrian environment. In incorporating the First Street Streetscape design, the project provides a 9-foot wide sidewalk along the street that expands to approximately 20 feet in width at the central courtyard. The expanded sidewalk area includes a water feature that has an integral bench that provides an interesting design element for pedestrians that offers a more public use of the courtyard area. The water feature also helps define the edge of the courtyard from the street.

The project meets the Design Guidelines by respecting the village character and scale. The design provides substantial small-scale, high-quality details such as natural stone, plaster siding, pre-cast corbels, lower-height light fixtures, recessed windows, decorative columns and detailed parapets. It also uses pedestrian-scaled elements on the building such as a low column bases, blade signs, awnings and light fixtures. The large, frameless retail windows enhance the building's appeal to shoppers and emphasize the building's retail use. The shorter columns and arches at the first-story emphasize the first-story and human scale at the ground-level. The smaller second-story windows deemphasize the office use, reflect a more traditional architecture by revealing more of the wall and allow the first-story's retail use to remain visually prominent.

The building's main tower element appropriately faces Main and First Street (rather than Foothill Expressway) to provide a focal element for the Downtown gateway that emphasizes more active part of the commercial area and the importance of the building. The building mass is separated into two smaller elements connected by a bridge over the courtyard. This massing reflects a good balance between the larger scale of buildings along First Street, including the recently approved Safeway project, and the smaller scale of the buildings along Main Street (see page 13 of the plans). The face of the building is articulated at a 30-foot rhythm reflecting the finer-grain pattern along Main Street. The building steps back from First Street to frame the courtyard with even smaller-scale elements that bring attention to the expanded courtyard design. As a height reference, the adjacent traffic light standard is 30 feet tall to the top of the pole, the new lights along First Street are 12 feet tall to the top of their pole (not including the glass lens), and the Tivoli light pole near Safeway is 25 feet tall.

As a likely result of several different community and City meetings and a desire to satisfy all concerns, from a staff perspective, the project has taken on a somewhat fussy appearance in maintaining its tower designs. The applicant's intent is to provide a principle design element at the most prominent corner, which is appropriate with the site's context; however, the larger towers use hip roof forms that are not characteristic of the overall traditional architecture. With the continued evolution of the plans we think that the tower design with a parapet top will appear as a more integral element in the language of the overall building design; and that a parapet roof will reduce the scale of the design element and clarify its design. Furthermore, we have a concern that the keystone design of the natural stone tower arches adds an undesirable emphasis to the higher scale and massiveness of the element. We are recommending a simpler pattern for the natural stone arches.

The project provides an appropriately landscaped edge along Foothill Expressway that buffers the parking lot yet still provides views of the building. The project includes a Downtown entry element, a landscaped wall at the corner of Foothill and Main Street; although it is presently envisioned by the applicant for building signage rather than Downtown identity signage. To respect the gateway site and purpose of the Downtown entry element, staff has conditioned that the entry sign provide Downtown identity signage only.

### **Additional Zoning and Design Review Findings**

Many of the required design review findings are reflected in the discussion above. Elements not discussed above are covered in this section.

The project meets the Commercial Retail Sales (CRS) District zoning regulations. The proposed retail use at the ground floor and office use at the second story complies with the permitted uses allowed by the Code. The building is set to the back of the sidewalk along the Main and First Street frontages as required. It meets the height limits with its upper ceiling set at 30 feet, its towers within 45 feet and its first level within one foot of the sidewalk. The project provides the required number of off-street parking spaces. The surface parking is buffered from the street by the building and by landscape in the parking lot and within the Foothill Expressway shoulder. The ramp to the underground parking garage is screened by the wall at the corner defining the Foothill and Main Street intersection. The trash room design is integral to the building and hidden from the street by

facing the parking lot. The roof design provides for architectural screens to hide the roof-top mechanical equipment that is appropriately set back from the building face.

The grading plan lowers the site to be compatible with the sidewalk on First Street. The finished floor of each retail space steps down toward the north and maintains an appropriately low relationship with the sidewalk and curb grades. The retail floors along First Street are set level with the sidewalk and generally within four to six inches of the adjacent curb height with planter areas along the curb taking up the difference. Along Main Street the corner entry is set at the sidewalk grade and part of the retail floor is set as much as a foot lower than the curb which is appropriate given the site's grade difference with Foothill Expressway.

As discussed, the design meets the purposes outlined in the CRS District by providing for a mix of uses that benefit the area, a building and site plan that enhance the pedestrian experience and architectural interest of the Downtown, a courtyard and other open spaces such as widened sidewalks and the decorative entry paving that enhance commercial activities and encourage interaction, and a pedestrian-scale design that allows for opportunities for outdoor activities.

### **Master Sign Program**

The design review findings require the signage to complement the building architecture in terms of style, materials, colors and proportions. Additionally, the sign regulations require the development of a master sign program since the building will contain multiple tenants (see Section 14.68.130 of the Municipal Code). The purpose of the master sign program is to achieve visual harmony and a consistent theme in identifying the various tenants in the building. The master sign program should define signs to relate by using some common elements such as size, shape materials, color, location, illumination, letter style or letter size. Section 3.3 of the Design Guidelines encourages signs oriented toward pedestrians rather than passing motorists and signs that maintain the village scale and character. The Guidelines also encourage metal or wood signage and avoiding internal illumination and plastic materials. The City's sign regulations prohibit signs facing Foothill Expressway except in accordance with a master sign program.

The proposed master program includes wall signs and blade signs. The wall signs are located over the retail bays facing each frontage including Foothill Expressway and on the window mullions in the towers. The wall signs are proposed as internally illuminated and the blade signs are proposed as face lit by wall mounted fixtures. Building signage is proposed on the Foothill Expressway entry element wall and on the exterior face of the First Street water feature. The signage materials are not specified.

As previously discussed it is inappropriate to locate project signage on the Downtown entry element wall at Foothill Expressway. This entry feature should have City identity signage. Additionally, the fountain element along First Street should not have project signage either as it is an element meant for public enjoyment and it is located within the public right-of-way. In addition to resolving these concerns, and to respect the small-scale village character and the Downtown Design Guidelines, staff recommends that the master sign program establish the following limits:

1. Only anchor tenants may only have signage at the second story within the established sign areas. Anchor tenants are defined as tenants occupying at least 5,000 square feet of building area;
2. The building signs shall have individual metal or wood letters applied to the wall surface or suspended in the tower window not to exceed 12 inches in height except for anchor tenant signs that may have letters up to 18 inches in height;
3. The signs shall be externally illuminated or halo-lit from behind;
4. The signs shall identify business names and logos only;
5. Retail tenants may have a combination of building signs and blade signs only. Permanent window signs are not allowed unless otherwise approved in the master sign program;
6. Office tenants may not have blade signs or window signs;
7. Window signs are prohibited on the second story except in the established sign area within the tower elements; and
8. Signage is prohibited on the Foothill Expressway entry wall and the First Street fountain feature.

### **Use Permit**

The zoning code requires granting a use permit for the project since the building exceeds 7,000 square feet. The purpose of the use permit is to give the City more discretion for large buildings in the Downtown in relation to village character and to consider potential traffic impacts.

As described earlier in this report, the proposed mixed-use retail and office building meets the objectives of the zoning code and is a desirable use that should enhance the identity of the Downtown gateway and increase the retail potential of the area. The proposed location of the project is appropriate since it provides a continuous retail frontage between Main Street and State Street and it adds office workers that add vitality to the area.

As determined in a prior environmental review, this project was determined to have a less than significant impact on traffic and circulation.

### **County Right-of-Way**

The project's site plan relies on property within the County's right-of-way along the expressway that the City is presently negotiating. The site narrows significantly toward the Main Street frontage. Early on in the development review process City staff has been in negotiation with the County to obtain an easement or land transfer to widen the property. This is an important aspect of the site planning as it allows the parking garage to have a normal layout and maximize the site's development potential. It is expected that the easement or fee title will be obtained as staff has the conceptual approval from the County for the use of the land. In the event that the land is not obtained for use then the applicant will have to substantially redesign the project and return through the development review process.

## **Correspondence**

The Committee received a recent letter from a resident expressing concern about the grading, stairway access to the second-story, use of the roof for solar panels, and a sight-visibility issue with the Tivoli light pole at the First Street and State Street intersection. As previously mentioned in this memorandum, the grading plan appropriately sets the building's first floors within one foot of the First Street sidewalk and the Main Street sidewalk at the intersection. The Building Official has determined that the building meets the minimum requirements of the California Building Code for emergency access and this aspect is beyond the purview of the Commission. The City's Buildings and Construction Regulations require that a project of this nature provide an energy efficiency that exceeds the California Building Code requirements by at least 15 percent. While there may be an opportunity for solar roof equipment, and the City encourages the use of solar energy, it should be left to the applicant as to how to meet the building codes. With regard to the potential sight-visibility issue from the Tivoli light pole, staff has not identified any conflict.

Correspondence to the prior Architecture and Site Review Committee related to the project has been attached for the Commission's information. Included in that correspondence is a letter of support from the Chamber of Commerce.

## **Environmental Review**

As part of the Development Agreement and Purchase Contract process, in January of 2011, the City Council certified a Mitigated Negative Declaration for this project. The Mitigated Negative Declaration did not identify any significant environmental effects and found that the project maintained an appropriate level of service and circulation in the downtown intersections.

Cc: Jeffrey A. Morris, The Jeff Morris Group, Inc.  
Dawn Jedkins, DES, Architects

## Attachments

- A. Application
- B. Area Map and Vicinity Map
- C. Meeting Minutes
- D. Correspondence