

August 28, 2017

City of Los Altos  
1 N. San Antonio Road  
Los Altos, CA 94022

RE: FIRST STREET GREEN  
Commercial Design Review Application

Honorable Member of the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Commission (Commission):

On behalf of Los Altos Community Investments (LACI) and First Street Green Park Foundation (Foundation), we are pleased to present the application for commercial design review for the First Street Green project. To date, the project has received five (5) study sessions: two joint sessions with the City Council and Planning and Transportation Commission (PTC); one PTC-only pre-application study session; one City Council Plaza-only study session and one plaza-only session with the Parks and Recreation Commission. We are pleased that the two most recent study sessions with the PTC and Council were widely attended, demonstrating large support for the project from the community.

The design incorporates much of the feedback and input from the PTC and City Council, and also reflects input from the larger Los Altos community. To date, LACI has received feedback from over 900 community members through surveys, small group events, and one-on-one dialogue.

Please find the attached plans for First Street Green that propose a new Class A office building of approximately 77,000 square feet and a community-oriented, half-acre public plaza on the Plaza 7 parking lot. The plans include a three-level subterranean parking garage which relocates the former surface parking spaces underground and extends under both the adjacent proposed plaza and the building. In addition to replacing the existing surface public parking spaces at a one-to-one ratio, the parking garage will create up to 40 additional new public parking spaces, a 50% increase over the current amount. It should be noted that, while the plans are presented as a single project, the office building and public plaza are separate projects that are being considered in parallel. As discussed further below, LACI and the Foundation are not proposing the public plaza as a community benefit in exchange for approval of the office building; however, to take advantage of synergies, efficiencies in construction, and creating a coherent design, we are requesting that the City consider both projects together.

## Project Overview

### More Parking Downtown with a Free Public Plaza and Vibrant Office Building

#### Free Public Plaza at No Cost to Taxpayers

First Street Green will feature a **free public plaza that will be built at no cost to taxpayers** on a half-acre space on the western portion of Parking Plaza 7 (Plaza 7). The First Street Green Park Foundation—a program of the New Venture Fund, a 501(c)(3) public charity, which has a third-party grant agreement with the Anne Wojcicki Family Charitable Fund (Foundation) —will donate the cost of creating the plaza on the asphalt lot that is now Plaza 7. Additionally, under the exclusive negotiating agreement (ENA), the Foundation is committed to reimbursing the City for the time spent planning, designing, and negotiating the plaza. To date, LACI has reimbursed the City for meetings and time spent on the initial discussions of the ENA that were incurred prior to the creation of the Foundation and as early as October 2016.

Further, as a community benefit for the building, **LACI will grant public access on approximately 7,400 square feet of its private land to increase the functional size of the public plaza by approximately one third.**

The plaza, along with streetscape, has been designed to create a multi-use, flexible, and engaging outdoor space that provides a valuable resource for downtown residents of the City of Los Altos. The outdoor space will accommodate a wide range of experiences for all ages within a small footprint, from active play space for hop-scotch or ping-pong to more quiet, contemplative, and meditative green spaces (e.g., senior-oriented activities such as chess and bocce ball). An interactive art piece will be an integral part of the space, allowing the community to engage in a variety of ways throughout the year. A combination of umbrellas, trellises, and tree canopy will provide much-desired shade and filtered sunlight to the plaza. Additional amenities include items that are outlined in the 2012 Los Altos Parks Plan citywide goals: a play area, picnic area, and publicly-accessible restrooms.

The design and approval of the public plaza is part of an ongoing process and discussion around a public-private partnership with the City outlined in the ENA.

#### More Downtown Parking

The design proposes a three-level subterranean parking garage from Shasta Street to the edge of the proposed plaza on Plaza 7 with ingress and egress ramp entrances on Shasta Street and Plaza 7 to access the garage. The Foundation will relocate all the existing parking spaces on Plaza 7 to the first level of the garage as part of the development of the plaza. The garage will provide the zoning code requirement of one space per every 300 net square feet of building.

We have heard clearly from our outreach that the community wants more parking downtown. Therefore, as a community benefit for the office building, **LACI proposes creating up to forty**

**(40) additional underground public parking spaces to support the downtown community and the new plaza. This will increase the amount of public spaces currently on the western half of Plaza 7 by over 50%**, (a total of 107 public parking spaces). All the public spaces will be clearly marked “Public” on the first level and accessible from both ramps.

Community members may park underground in an easily accessible, safe, and secure parking garage that is fully integrated into the structure. Moreover, LACI and the Foundation will consider working with the City and community stakeholders to engage with an artist to create and implement, at a reasonable cost, a pleasing design for portions of the interior of Level 1 of the underground garage to further enliven a visit to the new downtown public plaza.

<b>Building and Plaza</b>					
	Community Benefit	Park Replacement	Retail	Private Office	Total Spaces
Level 1 spaces	<b>40</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>116</b>
Level 2 spaces			<b>8</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>135</b>
Level 3 spaces				<b>109</b>	<b>109</b>
					<b>360<sup>1</sup></b>

Furthermore, LACI and the Foundation have proposed to open an additional dialogue with the City around a public-private financial partnership that could increase the size of the proposed underground garage under the plaza and **create up to thirty-nine (39) more public parking spaces, thereby increasing the current amount of parking on the western half of Plaza 7 by approximately 79 spaces, a 118% increase.**

**More Community Events Downtown**

The proposed plaza is envisioned to include open space with trees and plantings for strolling and play, an outdoor meeting space, and an area for farmer’s markets and arts and crafts shows. The plaza will help promote more community and family-oriented events downtown such as concerts, games, and picnics. Plans also propose including a community stage for presentations, music, artists, theater, and outdoor movies in the public plaza.

To activate and enliven the space, the office building will include a retail café with outdoor seating and **publicly accessible restrooms that will be provided and maintained as a community benefit.** For events and meetings that need to be held inside, **LACI is offering a large, 1,000-**

---

<sup>1</sup> Note that the total number of spaces have shifted since the pre-application study session. The design shows a net decrease of one (1) space. There are two (2) additional retail spaces and a decrease of three (3) spaces as the square footage shifted due to requested design changes.

**square-foot,<sup>2</sup> indoor, furnished meeting space on the first floor that may be reserved by the public** as an additional and valuable community benefit.

As the ENA progresses, the Foundation will consider discussions around the idea of financially participating in **the ongoing programming for the plaza (e.g., concerts, farmer’s markets, etc.)**.

### **A Vibrant Downtown**

The recent *Downtown Los Altos Economic Vitality Strategy Options*<sup>3</sup> report, prepared for the City as part of the visioning process, estimates that the **office building at First Street Green can generate \$1.2 Million in annual retail sales for businesses located in downtown Los Altos.**<sup>4</sup>

First Street Green’s new state-of-the art and environmentally friendly building and plaza will help modernize the block and encourage more Los Altos residents to come downtown for shopping, entertainment, and dining instead of going to other locations. Los Altos merchants will better thrive, with more patrons thanks to community events in the park, customers from the new commercial building, and more bicycle-, pedestrian- and age-friendly improvements. **As a result of a more vibrant downtown, we believe more appealing shops and restaurants will be attracted to Los Altos.**

### **Preserving Los Altos Village Charm**

With deeper set-backs, more open space, and a **third story that steps back on all sides in order to not impact the pedestrian experience and the residents of the back alley,** the building is pedestrian friendly and will allow for a significant increase in the public plaza layout.

The variation in the plane of the façade will buffer the mass of the other buildings along First Street that are built up to the lot line. This, along with landscaping, more generous public outdoor space, and a smaller footprint, will avoid a boxy building and help preserve Los Altos’ small-town charm. This will alleviate the “canyon effect” often lamented in conjunction with First Street and it embodies many of the goals outlined in the Downtown Design Plan.<sup>5</sup> **When combined, the public plaza, the publicly accessible private land, and the deep set-backs will create over half an acre<sup>6</sup> of new landscaped open space along First Street without giving up parking– as a matter of fact, there will be a 50% increase in parking.**

---

<sup>2</sup> The pre-application submission proposed a 1,700 s.f. meeting space which included storage, bathrooms, and corridors. While we had to reduce the size to accommodate the requested building architectural changes from the PTC, we are still providing a state-of-the-art facility. The 1000 s.f. is actual available meeting space.

<sup>3</sup> Land Economic Group. (2017). *Land Economic Group. Administrative Draft.* . Retrieved from: [http://los-altos.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php?view\\_id=4&event\\_id=293&meta\\_id=49605](http://los-altos.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php?view_id=4&event_id=293&meta_id=49605).

<sup>4</sup> (Land Economic Group 2017, p. 38)

<sup>5</sup> *DDP pg.1*

<sup>6</sup> Approx. 26,200 square feet (The plaza and public access easement total 22,000 s.f.)

Great attention was given to the pedestrian experience and reinforcing Los Altos' small-town charm as one walks down First Street. The inherently warm natural qualities of limestone and redwood, along with the variation in the façade, interact with the plantings to create a great pedestrian experience. Continuing down First Street one will observe how the building is broken down into smaller components to reflect the downtown's scale. The high quality, natural materials with integral finishes reflect a long-term commitment to this community. These are materials that communicate commercial use but with a warmth of palette and an approachability that support the character and charm of downtown. The design also shows respect for the residential quality of the neighborhood alley with building setbacks and careful concealment of service uses and mechanical equipment. The resulting green alley will improve the quality of the shared-use corridor.

We truly believe that this project will be of significant long-term value to the City and its community.

### **Proposed Community Benefits**

The project proposal is in compliance with all applicable City requirements and plans, with the exception of the 30-foot commercial height limit. The Los Altos Municipal Code allows for exceptions to the code in cases where “the project will result in a public benefit to the downtown.”<sup>7</sup>

Consequently, LACI is proposing the following generous community benefits for the exception to the height limit and the partial third story. We understand there is an ongoing discussion of the size and nature of community benefits contemplated in the Los Altos Municipal Code.<sup>8</sup> We believe the benefits outlined above and summarized below greatly meet and exceed what has been or could reasonably be contemplated as a community benefit for the proposed third story:

- **Additional public parking** – Forty (40) additional underground public parking spaces located on the first level of the garage for an over 50% increase in the amount of public spaces currently on the western half of Plaza 7.
- **Public access to approximately 7,400 square feet of privately held land** to increase the functional size of the public plaza. The open space will help reduce the existing “canyon” effect as referenced in the Downtown Buildings Committee Recommendations.<sup>9</sup>
- **Publicly accessible and maintained restrooms.**

---

<sup>7</sup> Los Altos Municipal Code §14.52.160

<sup>8</sup> Los Altos Municipal Code §14.52.160

<sup>9</sup> *Los Altos Downtown Building Committee Final Report 5-4-16* (Rep.). (2016). Los Altos , CA

- **Improvements to Alley** – The current alley will be transformed into a green, pedestrian-friendly alley with new landscape and hardscape improvements, new trees, and undergrounded utilities.
- **Increased setbacks** allowing for publicly accessible landscaped space along First Street,<sup>10</sup> in addition to what is being provided for the plaza. The setbacks will allow for a more pleasant pedestrian experience<sup>11</sup> and provide an enhanced sense of welcome for those entering downtown from the northwest along First Street.
- **Indoor, furnished meeting space:** over 1,000-s.f. state-of-the-art meeting room available for reservation by community groups.
- **Maintenance** of publicly available spaces on the private property.
- **Possible** partnership for outdoor learning space.

LACI and the Foundation have been very deliberate in separating the funding, creation, and approval of the proposed plaza so that it is independent from the private office building.

Accordingly, we have not put forward the plaza as a community benefit for an exception to the 30-foot height limit. This is because the possibility of separate approval timelines would create too much uncertainty for the private office development. Additionally, we are mindful of not setting an unreachable precedent for future downtown development because the creation of a plaza for the small size and scale of this private development would be too financially generous to achieve for future developers.

While not a precondition of approval for the office building, if approval and construction of the plaza move in parallel with the building, LACI would be able to offer significantly more parking as a community benefit while minimizing the construction duration and neighborhood impact. Additionally, due to the synergies inherent in constructing an underground parking garage for both the building and plaza, dividing the timelines would significantly increase the overall cost, logistics, and business disruption, thereby limiting the ability to support replacement and additional parking and future maintenance and programming.

In addition to the submitted design review application, we have prepared a set of project plans that highlight the bicycle and pedestrian amenities.

---

<sup>10</sup> *DDP* pg. 4

<sup>11</sup> *DDP* pg. 1

## Pedestrian Amenities

The landscape is designed according to the City of Los Altos 2009 Downtown Design Guidelines,<sup>12</sup> with special considerations to **supporting a strong pedestrian environment** that is unique to the Los Altos Village character and scale. Landscape amenities are located to create safe, comfortable, and interesting experiences for users. Elements are threaded together to provide a continuous connection along First Street and a pedestrian gateway into the Downtown Core.

Pedestrian amenities include a variety of elements that encourage pedestrians to linger and take their time: **vegetated walkways, overhead trellising, outdoor seating and dining areas, public art and social gathering spaces**. Wider building setbacks along First Street allow for a broad pedestrian promenade with plantings and trees on both sides. Generous and **varied seating components** are proposed throughout the site to meet multiple user needs, featuring durable, quality-crafted, and natural materials such as wood, metal, and stone.

**The series of low walls along First Street reinforce the separation of pedestrians and vehicles** while providing articulated detail and texture and consist of wide planters with drought-resistant plantings and trees. Existing tree wells are expanded to include substantial planting buffers and storm water infiltration where possible. Low walls are placed to reinforce pedestrian flows and discourage unsafe drop-offs along First Street. The designation of a **rideshare zone on Shasta Street encourages safe pick-up and drop-off** outside of First Street traffic—it includes a shaded, trellised seating area for riders to gather.

Comfortable, substantially shaded areas along the project frontage are provided for pedestrians through a variety of tree species and canopies. Landscape elements such as special decorative and textured paving and plantings create inviting entries and emphasize openings. For pedestrian wayfinding, different pavings lead to different programs that diversify user experiences, while two entry trellises in the plaza create a vertical statement and sense of opening.

The Alley is improved as a shared-use corridor; the resulting **green, living alley** includes paving that is scaled down for pedestrians, undergrounded utilities, and planting and trees throughout.

The **pedestrian and vehicle crossing** at First Street is improved with special paving as a visual cue for the pedestrian right of way. The crossing at Shasta Street is made safer with a **bulb out**. Low plantings (below driver eye height) are used in these areas for safety and to provide a sense of opening and welcome. Visual obstructions are avoided in these areas; landscape elements are kept at a low height or kept thin so as not to obstruct driver and pedestrian sight lines for safe crossings.

A **public art path** is proposed along First Street to engage pedestrians with interactive and educational exhibits. Exhibits are placed in opportune areas to provide special interest near building openings and social spaces; interactive art elements bring a unique and whimsical

---

<sup>12</sup> DDP pg.1

character that is already present in downtown Los Altos. First Street will include pockets of public social spaces with amenities that connect and open to the public plaza.

## **Bicycle Amenities**

We envision the plaza could **accommodate any number of bike-related activities** such as playing host to “Bike to Work Day,” or serving as a great meeting and gathering point for local cycling clubs. Additionally, the plaza can serve as a **location for future Los Altos Bike Rack Design Competitions**<sup>13</sup> with dedicated artistic racks.

A **public bike repair station** is located near the main entrance of the public plaza near First Street, adjacent to bicycle parking. The station houses tools for basic bike repairs and maintenance so that the public can change bicycle tires, adjust brakes, etc. The tools are secured with tamper-proof equipment.

The 2012 VTA Bicycle Technical Guidelines<sup>14</sup> were used to inform bicycle parking supply in terms of the number of bicycle parking spaces and type of bicycle parking proposed. The table below (VTA Bicycle Parking Supply Recommendations) describes the number of Class I and Class II bicycle parking spaces recommended. **The amount of bicycle parking recommended has been increased to proportionately account for the 2.5% Los Altos bicycle commute rate** as reported by the 2015 Santa Clara County Bicycle Transportation and Safety Report.<sup>15</sup> The bicycle parking supply is calculated to serve both the office building/café portion of the proposal as well as the plaza portion of the proposal (the combined public plaza and publicly accessible private land areas).

**Class I (long-term) and Class II (short-term) bicycle parking is provided as defined by the 2012 VTA Bicycle Technical Guidelines.** Class I bicycle parking will be located in the B1 garage level next to the main lobby elevators to serve long-term parking needs for the building. A **shower room** is also available in the building for office bicycle commuter use. Class II spaces for the building will be located near the main lobby entrance and café entry for high visibility and convenience. Class II spaces will also be located throughout the plaza, primarily near entry areas. The number of spaces provided will meet or exceed the VTA Bicycle Technical Guidelines. All bicycle parking spaces are located in areas protected from vehicular traffic and spaced according to VTA guidelines.

---

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.losaltosca.gov/publicartscommission/page/los-altos-bike-rack-design-competition-2016>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.vta.org/projects-and-programs/planning/bikes-countywide-bicycle-plan-cbp>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.sccgov.org/sites/sccphd/en-us/Partners/Data/Documents/Bicycle%20Transport%20and%20Safety%20Final%202015.pdf>



**VTA Bicycle Parking Supply Recommendations**

Use	Required # of Bicycle Spaces (Criteria)	Criteria Assumption (based on 06/2017 Design Review Submittal)	# of Bicycle Spaces based on 2% National Average rate	# of Class I Bicycle Spaces based on 2.5% Los Altos rate	# of Class II Bicycle Spaces based on 2.5% Los Altos rate
Parks/Recreational Fields	1 Class I per 30 employees + Class II per 9 users during peak daylight times of peak season	337 users during peak daylight times of peak season* <sup>16</sup>	0.00 Class I 37.44 Class II	0.00	46.81
<b>TOTAL PLAZA (W/EASEMENT AREA)</b>				<b>0</b>	<b>47</b>
Retail Sales/Shopping Center/Financial Institutions/Supermarkets	1 Class I per 30 employees + Class II per 6,000 sq. ft.	1,457 sq. ft. café 2-3 employees	0.15 Class I 0.24 Class II	0.19	0.30
Office Buildings/Offices	1 per 6,000 sq. ft. (75% Class I & 25% Class II)	74,828 sq. ft.	12.47 total 9.35 Class I 3.12 Class II	11.69	3.90
<b>TOTAL BUILDING</b>				<b>12</b>	<b>5</b>

LACI and the Foundation look forward to continuing the discussion with the Commission. Thank you again for your review.

**Enclosures**

- First Street Green Design Review Application dated August 25, 2017

Sincerely,  
 SRGNC CRES, LLC

Matthew Materkowski  
 Assistant Vice-President

<sup>16</sup> Basis for assumption: A rate of 290 peak users per 1,000 sq. ft. of plaza area is extrapolated to 11,635 sq. ft. of the project’s functional plaza area. The assumed rate of 290 peak users per 1,000 sq. ft. was obtained from the San Francisco Plaza Public Life Study (2016)<sup>16</sup> provided by the San Francisco Planning Department’s Pavement to Parks Research Lab. The study was a systematic survey of six major public plazas throughout the City of San Francisco. We chose to extrapolate the peak user rate from Mint Plaza because it is a well-used and familiar public site which likely well-exceeds the anticipated use of a plaza in Downtown Los Altos.