

May 04, 2017

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

RE: FIRST STREET GREEN
Parks and Recreation Commission Information Session

Honorable Members of the Los Altos Parks and Recreation Commission (Commission):

We are the development manager for Los Altos Community Investments (LACI). On January 10, 2017, the Los Altos City Council voted to enter an exclusive negotiating agreement (ENA) with LACI which allows for discussion around a public-private partnership to develop and construct a half-acre public plaza on the western portion of Parking Plaza 7 (Plaza 7) on First Street in downtown Los Altos.

On April 11, 2017 LACI submitted plans to the Planning and Transportation Commission (PTC) as part of a design review pre-application study session for the First Street Green project. Contained within those plans is a proposal for a new state-of-the-art, environmentally friendly office building, as well as a free public plaza at no cost to taxpayers. The proposed public plaza is designed with intent to offer a unique community gathering space in the downtown area for events and community groups while supporting the Los Altos Downtown Design plan.

At the May 10, 2017 Commission meeting we are eager to receive your input on the early design and programming of the proposed public plaza. We hope this is the beginning of a dialogue with the Commission and look forward to working collaboratively. For reference, we are including an abbreviated version of the April 11 submission that contains the relevant plaza drawings and plans. While we understand the Commission's focus is on the free public plaza, we include references to the building as it relates to the plaza, parking, and increased open space.

Additionally, alongside the meetings with you and other Los Altos Commissions, we have begun an extensive outreach effort to hear from the Los Altos community at large. This outreach, along with the recommendations from the PTC, has greatly informed what we are presenting as our design for the plaza. Following is a summary of the proposal.

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**. The plaza was inspired by the success of LACI-sponsored State Street and Third Street Greens to create permanent open space downtown.

The First Street Green Park Foundation—a program of the New Venture Fund, a 501(c)(3) public charity which is supported by the Anne Wojcicki Family Charitable Fund (Foundation)—will donate the cost of creating the plaza on part of asphalt lot that is now Plaza 7. Additionally, under the ENA, LACI 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 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**. We contemplate that this could be accomplished through a type of public access agreement or easement.

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 Los Altos and the neighboring residents. The outdoor space will accommodate a wide range of multigenerational experiences within a small footprint: from active play space for playing hop-scotch or ping-pong to more quiet, contemplative and meditative green spaces. An interactive art piece will be a crucial part of the space and the community will be able to engage in a variety of ways throughout the year.

As the ENA progresses, the Foundation will continue discussions around the idea of participating in **the ongoing programming for the park moving forward (e.g. concerts and farmer's markets)**.

More Downtown Parking

First Street Green proposes a three-level subterranean parking garage from Shasta Street to the edge of the proposed park on Plaza 7 with 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 park. 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, **LACI proposes creating up to forty (40) additional underground public parking spaces. 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.

Proposed Building and Plaza					
	Community Benefit	Park Replacement	Retail	Private Office	Total Spaces
Level 1 spaces	40	67	6	5	118
Level 2 spaces				141	141
Level 3 spaces				102	102
					361

Moreover, LACI and the Foundation would like to open an additional dialogue with the City, under the ENA, around a public-private financial partnership that could increase the size of the proposed underground garage under the park **up to an additional thirty-nine (39) 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 plaza is proposed to include open space with trees and plantings for strolling and play, outdoor meeting space, and an area for farmer’s markets and arts and crafts shows. Los Altos currently has a limited public open space, as evidenced by recent street closures to create community event space. Experts note that public open spaces are at their best when they successfully provide a platform for social interaction and expression. Accordingly, the plaza will include a community stage for presentations, music, or outdoor movies and will help fill the need for downtown space for events such as concerts, games, and picnics.

To activate and enliven the space, the office building will contain 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 1,700 square feet of indoor, furnished meeting space on the first floor, with a dedicated public entrance, that may be reserved by the public as an additional and valuable community benefit.**

A Vibrant Downtown

The recent *Downtown Los Altos Economic Vitality Strategy Options*¹ report, prepared for the City as part of the visioning process, estimates that the **office building next to the plaza at First Street Green can generate \$1.2 Million in annual retail sales for Los Altos’ downtown businesses.**²

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

¹ 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.

² (Land Economic Group 2017, p. 38)

thrive, with more patrons thanks to community events in the plaza, customers from the new commercial building, and more bicycle-, pedestrian- and age-friendly improvements. In turn, **more appealing shops and restaurants will surely be attracted to Los Altos due to a more vibrant downtown.**

Preserving Los Altos Village Charm

With deeper set-backs, more open space, and a third story that will step-back and be barely visible from the street level, the building will be pedestrian-friendly and 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 embodies many of the goals outlined in the Downtown Design Plan.³

The design also shows respect for the residential quality of the neighborhood alley reflected in the setback and careful concealment of service uses and mechanical equipment. The resulting green alley will improve the quality of the shared-use corridor. **When combined, the public plaza, the publicly accessible private land, and the deep set-backs will create over half an acre⁴ of new landscaped open space along First Street.**

In addition, LACI has hired *EHDD* and *Joni L. Janecki & Associates* for the project. They are the architect and landscape architect team who designed the beloved Packard Foundation building at 343 Second Street.

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

³ [Los Altos Downtown Design Plan](#) (DDP) rev. 2009 (formerly the Downtown Urban Design Plan) pg.1

⁴ Approx. 26,200 square feet

First Street Green Features	
Increase in Downtown Parking	40 spaces
Even more Downtown Parking with City Partnership	39 spaces
Increased setbacks with additional landscape	5,700 s.f.
Public access to private land	7,400 s.f.
Public indoor meeting and event space for community groups	1,700 s.f.
Free Public Plaza	Yes
Retail café	Yes
Ongoing programming of Free Public Plaza	Yes
Public restrooms	Yes
Maintenance of publicly accessible land	Yes

Feedback Requested from the Commission

During the Commission meeting, we would appreciate your input on the early design and programming of the proposed public plaza.

Notably, the plaza is intended to be a gift to the citizens of Los Altos. 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 as contemplated in the Los Altos Municipal Code⁵ for an exception to the building height limits; 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 park moves in parallel with the building, LACI would be able to offer significantly more parking as a community benefit while minimizing the duration and neighborhood impact from construction. 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 additional parking and future maintenance and programming.

Again, we are eager to receive the Commission’s feedback and look forward to working collaboratively to deliver a wonderful public plaza and open space as part of First Street Green.

⁵ Los Altos Municipal Code § 14.52.160

Submittal Enclosures

Enclosed in this pre-application submittal you will find:

- Abbreviated drawings for the PTC dated April 7, 2017

Thank you again for your review.

Sincerely,
SRGNC CRES, LLC

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Matthew Materkowski".

Matthew Materkowski
Assistant Vice-President