

**CITY OF ALBANY  
TRAFFIC AND SAFETY COMMISSION  
STAFF REPORT**

Agenda Date: July 22, 2010

**Subject:** Study Session on Proposed Safeway Store, 1500 Solano Avenue

**Report By:** Diane Henderson, Contract Planner  
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**STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends that the Traffic and Safety Commission take testimony from the public, discuss the proposed circulation alternatives, and provide direction to the applicant and to the Planning and Zoning Commission on preferred circulation alternatives for the proposed new Safeway store.

**PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

Safeway is requesting approval to remove the existing grocery store and surface parking lot at 1500 Solano Avenue and construct a new approximately 50,000 square-foot grocery store above a partially sub-grade parking structure. The subject property is a 67,406 square foot lot that slopes from front (north) to rear (south). There is almost a 14' difference from the highest to lowest points on the lot. There is currently an approximately 25,577 square-foot, single-story grocery store, with a surface parking lot on the site that would be removed.

Pedestrian and bicycle access would occur primarily along Solano Avenue, as well as from Neilson Street and Curtis Street. The existing AC Transit bus stop with "18" and "G" line service is located at the corner of Solano and Curtis and would provide convenient pedestrian and ADA access to the store.

**Background on City Approval Process**

In order to construct the proposed store, the Planning and Zoning Commission must review and approve the project. In particular, "Design Review" approval is required for the architectural design of the building. In addition, it is possible that a "Planned Unit Development" approval will be required if adjustments to setbacks, building heights or parking standards are desired. Modifications to the public right of way may require City Council action, based on recommendations from the Traffic and Safety Commission and the Planning and Zoning Commission.

In addition, the project will be subject to environmental review pursuant to the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The City has retained consultants qualified to evaluate the full range of issues, including traffic, noise, greenhouse gases, etc. Although the applicant has conducted some preliminary analysis as part of their design process, the technical studies associated with the City's CEQA review will be prepared independent of the studies completed by the applicant. It is anticipated that a scoping session will be scheduled for a Planning and Zoning Commission meeting in the near future at which members of the public will have an opportunity to provide comments on the scope and content of the environmental review.

### **DISCUSSION**

The design of the proposed store has evolved significantly over the past few years. In 2008, Safeway submitted plans to remove the existing store and replace it with a new Safeway grocery and smaller retail shops above a parking structure. A study session was held by the Planning and Zoning Commission in June 2008. The Commission expressed concern with the height and bulk of the project, the architectural design of the store and proposed circulation. In response to Commission concern, the applicant redesigned the project and submitted a revised application.

On April 27, 2010, the Planning and Zoning Commission held a study session on the redesigned project. Following the April 27 study session, the applicant further refined the project, and presented the changes to the Planning and Zoning Commission on June 3, 2010.

### **Neighborhood Comments**

During the course of previous study sessions, a number of concerns have been raised by members of the public. In summary, concerns include:

- Noise and air quality impacts from autos and trucks near single family residences;
- The desire for landscape buffering near single family residences;
- Parking and traffic impacts on Curtis and Neilson streets;
- Size of the store out of scale with the neighborhood; and
- Impact of store on neighborhood businesses.

### **Key Considerations in Review of Plans**

In addition to neighborhood concerns, the site poses several design challenges:

- Regardless of the size or location of the footprint of the store on the parcel, delivery truck access and safe maneuvering room represents one of the most significant planning issues raised by this application.

- The proposal is for a single level store with parking below. The floor of the store set at grade along Solano Avenue. The floor of the parking area below the store meets grade at the back of the parcel.
- Two separate entrances into the parking lot are necessary for a functional parking lot.
- Locating parking lot entrances on Curtis and Neilson helps eliminate the need for internal ramps on the parking level
- On the Neilson Street side of the store, the residential zoning district begins approximately 150 feet from Solano Avenue
- On the Curtis Street side of the store, the residential zoning district begins approximately 100 feet from Solano Avenue

#### **Truck Circulation in April 27 Plans**

Under the April 27 study session proposal, trucks would travel up Solano Avenue, turn right on Curtis Street, turn left into the main project driveway at the rear of the property and travel through the project site, turn left on Neilson Street and then back into Safeway's delivery dock located adjacent to Nielson Street on the east elevation of the building.

After dropping off merchandise, trucks would pull forward onto Neilson Street and turn onto Solano Avenue. The circulation pattern was intended to minimize truck travel on local streets, but many concerns were voiced at the study session regarding the truck traffic in close proximity to the residences that border the rear of the property and the fact that the trucks would back into the delivery dock from Neilson Street.

#### **Auto Circulation in April 27 Plans**

With regard to automobile traffic, the plans presented at the April 27 study session also included closing the existing vehicular driveways on Solano Avenue as well as the northernmost driveways on both Curtis Street and Neilson Street. The driveways from Curtis Street and Neilson Street at the rear of the existing building were proposed to be retained to continue to access the through driveway at the rear of the store, which would provide customer access to the covered parking areas located beneath the store, as well as function as access for delivery vehicles. Concerns were raised at the study session regarding the proximity of the only access drive for both cars and delivery trucks being located next to the existing single family residences to the south. After receiving testimony from the applicant and the public, the Commission provided direction to the applicant and voted to continue the study session.

### **Truck Circulation in June 3 Plans**

On June 3, 2010, the applicant presented a revised proposal to the Planning and Zoning Commission, eliminating truck access behind the store. Under the revised proposal, trucks would travel along Solano Avenue and then back onto Neilson Street and into the loading area on the east elevation of the building. Additional enclosed loading was added to the building in order to eliminate the previously proposed street loading space. The applicant acknowledged that the proposed solution, which would require trucks to back down Solano Avenue and Neilson Street, had potential traffic and safety impacts. The Commission indicated that the key to addressing truck circulation will be to find the best way for trucks to access the site and then turn around so that they can enter and exit in a forward direction.

### **Auto Circulation in June 3 Plans**

Following the April 27 study session, the applicant also redesigned the vehicular access to the site, relocating the two major entrance/exits (from Curtis Street and Neilson Street) approximately 32 feet to the north (toward Solano Avenue.) Moving the access also moved the circulation further away from the adjacent residential parcels to the south and placed the vehicular circulation almost entirely underneath the building, in an effort to reduce potential noise and light impacts associated with the vehicles. An additional vehicular entrance to the parking area was proposed from Curtis Street near the Solano frontage. This additional access point would allow vehicles entering the parking areas from Solano a more direct way to enter the parking area and would reduce the number of cars that would travel further down Curtis Street.

### **Revised Plans for Traffic and Safety Commission Review**

At the close of the June 3 study session, the Planning and Zoning Commission acknowledged that progress had been made, but indicated that they still had concerns about circulation. Towards this end, they requested that the applicant work to develop additional circulation alternatives for their review. The applicant has subsequently submitted three new circulation alternatives (attached). The Planning and Zoning Commission has requested that the Traffic and Safety Commission review the alternatives that the applicant has developed and provide input regarding your preferred alternative.

The three alternatives are as follows:

- *Alternative A* proposes that delivery trucks would approach the site westbound on Solano Avenue and turn left onto Neilson Street. A new delivery driveway would be located on Neilson Street opposite Bank of America. Trucks would turn right into the driveway and immediately make a u-turn maneuver on-site, proceeding

north on the Safeway property towards Solano Avenue. Trucks would overhang the sidewalk somewhat and then back into the loading dock. After the truck has unloaded, it would pull forward and exit onto Solano Avenue. Autos would access the subterranean parking garage via two-way driveways on Curtis Street and Neilson Street.

- *Alternative B* proposes that delivery trucks would travel eastbound on Solano Avenue, and, towards the middle of the site, trucks would back-up on Solano Avenue and into the loading dock located at the northwest corner of the site. Trucks would unload and exit in a forward direction. Autos would access the subterranean parking garage via two-way driveways on Curtis Street and Neilson Street.
- *Alternative B-1* proposes the same delivery truck access to the site, as Alternative B. However, this plan includes an automobile ramp down to the subterranean garage immediately adjacent to and east of the truck loading dock, in addition to the two-way automobile driveways on Curtis Street and Neilson Street. This alternative was developed at the request of the Planning and Zoning Commission in order to show how an auto entrance from Solano might work.

The City Engineer has reviewed the three alternatives and prefers Alternative A, as it does not involve a truck backing up in the public right-of-way.

All three alternatives show Neilson Street closed to through traffic. This is possible because the residential portion of Neilson street starts far enough down Neilson to allow truck and auto access to the store without isolating residence on the Solano side of the traffic control. It is important to note that a full study has not yet been prepared to determine the ramifications of closing Neilson Street, thus this should be considered a conceptual idea at this stage. Some sort of traffic control (including possibly a barricade) may or may not happen. Any plan to barricade the street would have to provide a means for cars to turn around at the barricade.

All three proposals also show two-way traffic at the driveway on Curtis Street; however, it might be that a right turn only exit on Curtis Street might be more appropriate to minimize traffic impacts to residential properties on Curtis Street.

Attachments:

1. Alternative A
2. Alternative B
3. Alternative B-1