

**CITY OF ALBANY  
PLANNING AND ZONING AGENDA  
STAFF REPORT**

Agenda date: June 3, 2010

Prepared by: Diane Henderson/Jeff Bond

**ITEM/**

**SUBJECT: 1500 Solano. Planning Application #08-031.**

The applicant is requesting approval to demolish an existing grocery store and to construct a new approximately 53,923 square foot grocery store above a partially sub-grade parking structure containing 132 on-site parking spaces. Potential approvals required may include Design Review.

**SITE: 1500 Solano Avenue**

**APPLICANT/OWNER: Safeway**

**ZONING: SC (Solano Commercial)**

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**Recommendation**

Staff recommends that the Planning and Zoning Commission take testimony from the public, discuss the proposed project, and provide direction to the applicant on appropriate revisions. This meeting is a continuation of the study session held by the Commission on April 27, 2010 to provide the Commission and members of the public an opportunity to review preliminary plans. Since that time, the applicant has revised the plans, based on comments from the Commission and the public. No action by the Commission will be taken at this meeting.

**Background on Application**

After receiving testimony from the applicant, the public and Commissioners on April 27, 2010, the Commission voted to continue the study session. Since that time, the applicant has worked to address some of the concerns that were raised at the study session. The applicant has submitted draft plans and a cover memo (Attachment 2) which explains the changes that they have made to address the issues raised on April 27. While the applicant has attempted to address some of the concerns, there remain unresolved issues.

The purpose of this continuation of the study session is to allow the applicant to review the revisions to the plans since April 27 and receive input from the Commission and the public. The following section identifies the key issues raised at the April 27 study session and identifies the applicant's response to each of the key issues. Staff recommends that each of these issues be discussed separately at this continuation of the study session, to allow the applicant to present the proposed changes and receive input from the Commission and the public. The study session also

will provide an opportunity for the applicant to review some of the alternatives that were explored in the course of their design.

### **Summary of Key Issues**

#### **A. Truck Circulation**

Delivery truck access and safe maneuvering room represents one of the most significant planning issues raised by this application. Currently delivery trucks maneuver within the Safeway parking lot. If the footprint of the building and the location of parking change, then regardless of the size of the store, the truck maneuvering will change as well.

The plans presented at the April 27 study session included the main truck access to the site from Solano Avenue. Under that proposal, trucks would take the Buchanan exit from Highway 80, travel east on Buchanan, turn left on San Pablo Avenue, turn right on 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 return to San Pablo Avenue via 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 Nielson Street.

Since the April 27 study session, the applicant has redesigned the project, 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 has been added to the building in order to eliminate the previously proposed street loading space. The applicant has acknowledged that the proposed solution, which would require trucks to back down Solano Avenue and Neilson Street, has potential traffic and safety impacts. 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 exit in a forward direction.

#### **B. Car Circulation**

The plans presented at the April 27 study session 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. Comments focused on potential noise and light impacts to the adjacent residents.

Since the April 27 study session, the applicant has redesigned the vehicular access to the site to relocate the two major entrance/exits (from Curtis Street and Neilson Street) approximately 32 feet to the north (toward Solano Avenue.) Moving the access also moves the circulation further away from the adjacent residential parcels to the south and places 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 is 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.

### **C. Size of Store**

Numerous concerns were raised regarding the size of the new store. The plans presented at the April 27 study session proposed removing the existing approximately 25,577 square-foot store and constructing a new 55,896 square-foot grocery store on the 67,406 square-foot lot. The building would include 52,373 square-feet of retail space with a 3,523 square-foot office mezzanine above a partially sub-grade parking structure containing 127 on-site parking spaces. The anticipated approvals for the application included a Planned Unit Development required for the increase in allowable building height from 35' to 39' and to allow 127 on-site parking spaces where 140 would be required by Code.

Concern was expressed at the study session that a "planned unit development" is not appropriate for this project for a number of reasons, including the fact that the project does not include any public amenity. Since the April 27 study session, the project has been redesigned to reduce the size of the building by 1,973 square-feet. The redesigned store includes 50,400 square feet of retail space with a 3,523 square-foot mezzanine over a partially sub-grade parking structure containing 132 on-site parking spaces. The store has been lowered in height so that it conforms to the 35 foot height limit. The reduction in floor area and increase in on-site parking results in a proposal that meets the parking requirements of the Code. Because the project now meets the height and parking requirements, a PUD is no longer necessary.

The applicant continues to make the argument that in order for this to be a successful project, it is necessary to retain as much square-footage as possible. Staff has surveyed other grocery stores in the area and has found that the two closest Safeway stores, one on Shattuck and one on College Avenue are both located on larger sites and are proposed to be smaller than the Albany proposal.

### **D. Back of Store**

Numerous concerns were expressed at the study session regarding the impact of the rear of the store on adjacent residential properties. Individuals were concerned with the location of the through-access lane adjacent to the single-family residential units to the south, including potential noise and light impacts.

Since the April 27 study session, the applicant has redesigned the rear of the store to pull the building further away from the adjacent single family residences to the south, and (as discussed above) to relocate the truck and vehicular traffic away from the residences. The revised plans

include an expanded landscape buffer along the southerly property line. The previously proposed 12" high masonry and glass wall would be supplemented by a widened landscape buffer and small gateway plazas that are intended to provide a pocket park for the neighborhood. The passive area would include landscaping, enhanced paving, low voltage lighting, seating and trellises at the Curtis Street and Neilson Street frontages connected by a pedestrian walkway. The applicant has indicated that this area would also lend itself to the required public art that must be included in the project.

### **Conclusion**

This is a large-scale in-fill project for Albany and would represent the largest potential development project on Solano Avenue. Staff understands the applicant's desire to improve aesthetics, services and functionality of the store. Careful review of all potential impacts and concerns must be considered, particularly in light of its location immediately adjacent to a low density residential neighborhood. Staff recommends that the Commission receive testimony from the applicant and members of the public and provide direction to staff on issues of interest during the review process.

The next step in the planning process will be to schedule a "scoping session" to seek public comments on issues that should be addressed as part of the environmental impact report that will be prepared pursuant to the California Environmental Act (CEQA). As part of the study session, the Commission and staff can discuss the timing of the scoping session.

### **Attachments:**

1. Planning and Zoning Commission Minutes, April 27, 2010
2. Revised plans and cover memo dated May 28, 2010
3. Recent correspondence