

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

Agenda date: July 27, 2010
Prepared by: Jeff Bond

ITEM/ **6a**

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)**

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. No formal action by the Commission will be taken at this meeting.

Discussion

The applicant has worked to address issues raised by the public and Commissioners at the April 27, 2010, and June 3, 2010 study sessions. A particular focus has been made on automobile and truck circulation, with the preparation of several alternative circulation plans (Attachment 1). A staff report on these alternatives prepared for the Traffic and Safety Commission is attached (Attachment 2).

On July 22, 2010, the Traffic and Safety Commission held a meeting to discuss the three alternative circulation plans. The purpose of this study session is to allow the Planning and Zoning Commission to review the materials discussed at the Traffic and Safety Commission.

The consensus of the Traffic and Safety Commission was a preference for Plan A with elimination of the traffic barrier on Neilson. Other traffic calming and traffic controls, such as turn restrictions in and out of the store, should be considered in order to address traffic concerns in the residential portions of Curtis and Neilson streets.

Commissioners also noted a making pedestrian safety and a vibrant street front on Solano Avenue a priority. The Commission further noted that it should be explored whether the Solano Avenue curb cut in Plan A is necessary for truck movements (e.g., trucks turn onto Neilson after leaving

the truck dock). Finally, it was noted that off-hours function and appearance of the truck-turning apron in Plan A should be further explored, including whether it should be fenced off or made available for evening parking.

A number of residents in the neighborhood addressed the Commission. One of the comments made by several residents was a desire to have a major auto entrance from Solano Avenue. In addition, several speakers expressed concern about parking capacity. Recent correspondence from residents in the neighborhood is attached (Attachment 3)

Attachments:

1. Revised circulation plans
2. July 22, 2010 staff report to the Traffic and Safety Commission
3. Recent correspondence

**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
Jeff Bond, Planning & Building Manager

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.

ATTACHMENT |

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

Jeff Bond

From: bettinafox@earthlink.net
Sent: Wednesday, July 21, 2010 12:05 PM
To: Jeff Bond
Cc: Aleida Andrino-Chavez
Subject: Safeway's Proposed Expansion

July 19, 2010

Dear Traffic and Safety Commission:

While we would like to support the Safeway Corporation in their effort to update and improve their Albany store, there are several aspects of the proposed expansion that would have substantially negative impacts on the surrounding residential neighborhood and on traffic, safety and circulation on and around Solano and Marin Avenues.

The following summarizes the key problems with the proposed project:

1) The proposal to move the delivery truck access and all car traffic down into the residential areas of Curtis and Nielsen: The proposed design brings 18-wheel delivery trucks, all other delivery vehicles, and all automobile traffic, much further down into the residential neighborhoods on Curtis and Nielsen Street to two new large driveway accesses approximately 30 feet from the back of the current store (and directly across from residences on Curtis Street and Nielsen Street). This is an unreasonable incursion on a residential zone which creates traffic, safety, noise, vibration, parking, and air quality problems.

Currently, Safeway's access is at the top of Curtis and Nielsen Streets and on Solano Avenue. Most traffic enters the store parking lot via the Solano Avenue driveways. For reasons that make no planning sense, the Safeway architect has eliminated all vehicle access from Solano Avenue, and redirected that traffic flow down into the residential areas of Nielsen and Curtis Streets. Driveway access from commercial businesses is standard on Solano Avenue—and that is because traffic belongs on the main commercial route, not on adjacent low-density residential streets.

The applicant should be directed to move the vehicle access back up towards Solano to where it currently is. It is unfair and unreasonable to direct ALL of this current and expected additional traffic activity into the heart of already impacted residential streets.

In Safeway's "new" circulation drawings sent out on July 19, they do not offer a serious examination of at least some vehicle access to the new larger Safeway store from Solano Avenue or at the upper portion of Nielsen and Curtis where the entrances are currently located. If there is no way to allow large delivery trucks to enter

the store parking lot from Solano Avenue, Safeway can at least provide access for car traffic and smaller delivery trucks.

Further, Safeway trucks and other large delivery trucks frequently circle the block (requiring them to drive on Marin Avenue illegally). We have observed this on multiple occasions (as recently as 06/25/10) and reported this to the Albany Police. With a substantial increase in the number of truck trips at the new larger store, this can be expected to become an even bigger problem.

2) Parking Impacts: As neighbors of Safeway, we on Curtis and Nielsen already compete to park on our street with Safeway shoppers, Solano Avenue merchants, our neighbors as well as teachers, staff and parents going to Marin Elementary School. This project will eliminate already scarce street parking to accommodate large truck access to and from Safeway. Safeway should be required to provide parking in excess of what is normally required and should allow patrons of nearby businesses to use the parking. The commission should also recommend that all Safeway employees use the interior parking exclusively.

3) Traffic on Marin and Solano Avenue in the area around Safeway is already at capacity at peak times. The additional cars and trucks on Solano and Marin may make currently busy intersections unworkable. The impacts may require re-configuring Marin Avenue back to its old four lane set-up to accommodate the new peak traffic loads. Additional signal lights may be required at Nielsen and Solano and at Curtis and Marin.

Pedestrian crossing at Solano and Curtis is already dangerous and has been the location of serious injuries from vehicle vs. pedestrian accidents.

Curtis Street is a narrow street where cars often need to pull over to one side to allow on-coming traffic to pass. We already have issues with speeding cars and accidents. Our neighbor across the Street had his PARKED van totaled this morning by a Waste Management truck. Two months ago, the same neighbor had his driver-side door torn off by a passing car. Directing the majority of Safeway traffic off of Solano and onto the residential side streets will exacerbate existing problems and create serious additional negative impacts to safety and circulation.

The Traffic and Safety commission should recommend new permanent speed bumps on both Curtis and Nielsen Street to calm traffic and improve safety (Curtis Street requested speed bumps several years ago, even without considering the additional cumulative impacts of Safeway's expansion.)

4) Substantial Increase in Trip Generation and Related Impacts: By more than doubling the store area, Safeway will seriously impact parking, traffic and pedestrian circulation, as well as the safety and capacity of Solano Avenue. In addition, the significant increase in all vehicle trips to and from the store will further amplify existing traffic, noise, pollution, and speeding problems on the residential streets. There are numerous small children that live in the houses on these Streets (the 900 block has about 12 children under 10 alone). Both

Curtis and Nielsen have busy sidewalks as children and families walk towards Marin Elementary School or Solano Avenue.

Thank you for considering our comments.

Josh Fox, Bettina Fox and Henry Fox

926 Curtis Street, Albany, CA

510-558-0957

-----Original Message-----

From: Jeff Bond

Sent: Jul 21, 2010 11:20 AM

To: bettinafox@earthlink.net, Aleida Andrino-Chavez

Subject: RE: Safeway's Proposed Expansion

To: Traffic and Safety Commission
City of Albany, California
Re: Proposed Safeway Expansion, 1500 Solano Avenue

CITY OF ALBANY

Date: July 20, 2010

JUL 20 2010

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
DEPARTMENT

Dear Commission Members:

I live at 918 Curtis Street. My house is located approximately opposite the alleyway that runs behind the current Safeway store. When I purchased my home in 2001, the real estate disclosures included "Safeway." Little did I know then what that meant.

I am writing now to continue to express my objections to the proposed development plans for the property at 1500 Solano Avenue. While I have no problem with Safeway making improvements to their store, the excessive scope of the proposal has generated issues that concern many Albany residents, not only those who live in the immediate area of the store.

Curtis Street is already a major access thoroughfare for people who want to avoid Solano Avenue when going to or leaving Safeway. Curtis Street is narrow. When cars are parked on both sides, as is normally always the case, vehicles approaching from the north and south at the same time are often in danger of colliding. This occurs now, under the current conditions. Many parked cars have been hit.

If, however, Safeway succeeds in placing an overly large store onto this lot, and locates all customer parking access on the two side streets, the traffic burden will be amplified. The potential for accidents will increase. Noise from additional speeding cars will diminish the quality of life—and safety—of surrounding residences. Curtis Street cannot sustain the increase in two-way traffic that would result.

INCREASING THE AMOUNT OF VEHICULAR TRAFFIC ON CURTIS STREET WILL CREATE DANGEROUS CONDITIONS.

Curtis Street meets Marin Avenue in an *elementary school zone*. Because I drive down Curtis to Marin almost every day, I am very familiar with the traffic dynamics at this intersection. When one comes to the stop sign at the bottom of Curtis, and looks left up Marin, there is, because of the curve in Marin, a clear view of traffic for a significant distance. If the driver sees that the "path is clear" and fails to look to the right before executing a right turn, there is a high risk of endangering anyone who might be in the crosswalk on the west side of the intersection. The Curtis/Marin intersection invites fast, wide turns by drivers who have already sped down Curtis. If drivers leaving the Safeway parking lot have almost no option but to exit onto Curtis Street, and if they, as most do, want to avoid Solano Avenue, the results could be tragic.

COMBINE PLAN A AND PLAN B1.

Safeway's architects have produced three alternate site plans. According to the staff report, the City's engineer favors Plan A, because it requires no backing up of the delivery trucks on Solano Avenue or the side streets. This makes sense. Plan B1, which is disfavored because of the truck backup problem, *also includes a ramp to the parking area that is accessible on Solano Avenue.* Access to the parking lot via a ramp ON SOLANO AVENUE would lessen the amount of traffic on the side streets because not everyone would have to use Curtis or Neilson to get into or out of the parking lot.

Additionally, if Neilson is blocked, as the plans suggest, CURTIS WOULD BEAR THE BULK OF THE TRAFFIC LOAD IF THERE IS NO ADDITIONAL PARKING LOT ACCESS ON SOLANO.

The City of Albany owes its residents and property owners the consideration of a safe environment. The value of our properties—and the related tax base—are intimately tied to the quality of life we enjoy by living here. While outside business interests are important, at the end of the day, it is the citizens of Albany who matter. Please remember us.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nancy Brandt', written in a cursive style.

Nancy Brandt

Cc: Andrea Gardner, Planning and Zoning Commission
Jeff Bond, Planning & Building Manager

Jeff Bond

From: Peter Hsu [admin@stopsafewayonsolano.org] on behalf of Peter Hsu [peter@stopsafewayonsolano.org]
Sent: Wednesday, July 21, 2010 10:03 PM
To: Aleida Andrino-Chavez
Cc: Jeff Bond
Subject: Safeway Store - Comment for Traffic & Safety Commission Meeting

Aleida,

The current Safeway store has several critical design problems.

First, the excessive store size will **push existing major arterials past their maximum capacity**. Solano and Marin are already heavily impacted; simple tasks like taking a left turn onto Marin are nearly impossible during rush hour. Solano has become similarly overcrowded in recent years. The new store design will double the traffic load and add vehicle trips that Solano and Marin simply can't handle.

Vehicle access points must be on Solano: The idea of transferring primary parking/vehicle access from Solano to residential streets is not acceptable. Neilson and Curtis are low density residential streets; it simply isn't right to transform them into high traffic thoroughfares. Even Safeway's B-1 proposal places the Neilson/Curtis parking garage access points south of where they current exist. On Neilson, rather than being across from BofA as is current design, the access is moved down to face across from a residence; a similar change is made on Curtis. A better design would be to eliminate the Neilson/Curtis access points entirely, and require primary access through Solano.

Unsafe for children: The houses on the 900 blocks of Curtis and Neilson were purchased by many people who are currently raising children, or who would like to do so. If Safeway doubles its vehicle traffic, and then diverts it from Solano onto residential streets, these streets will no longer be safe for children.

Truck access must be on Solano: City code currently prohibits commercial vehicles from using residential streets. This is with good cause, and because such access is highly disruptive to the neighborhood and detrimental to quality of life.

Insufficient parking: Standard parking ratios for suburban destination retail is 3.5 to 4 spaces per 1000 square feet; grocery stores are often higher with as many as five (5) spaces per 1000. Albany currently requires 2.2 parking slots per 1000 square feet. Safeway is requesting a variance from this already low parking ratio. Customers unable to locate parking in the store lot will spill over onto neighborhood streets, exacerbating parking difficulties for neighbors & businesses and creating additional traffic. Neighboring businesses will see their revenues decline. Because this is a grocery store, the practicality of alternate modes of transit such as busses and bikes is limited (ever try biking home with groceries for your family of four?).

Do not close Neilson: Please do not close Neilson to through traffic. This is a highly disruptive action; a brief drive through Berkeley can show you how unpleasant this makes navigating city streets, and out of principle I must oppose this. Further, this ghettoizes the neighborhood, divides people from their neighbors, and creates an urban eyesore.

Thanks for your consideration.

Regards,
Peter

Peter Hsu
909 Neilson St.

Jeff Bond

From: Richard Hsu [rlpish@netscape.net]
Sent: Wednesday, July 21, 2010 10:50 PM
To: Aleida Andrino-Chavez
Cc: Jeff Bond; lehsu2@pacbell.net
Subject: Traffic issues with the proposed Safeway design

Hi, Aleida:

My wife and I have lived in the same house across from Safeway for 30 years and we have seen the traffic on Solano and Marin avenues steadily get worse over the years. Marin Avenue during weekday commute hours and at various times during the weekend is especially congested since the lane reconfiguration a few years ago. Waiting for a break between cars to turn right on Marin is usually a several minute ordeal. Turning left on Marin takes even longer and is dangerous.

Enlarging the Safeway store per the current proposal would greatly increase the traffic on both Solano and Marin as well as on Neilson and Curtis streets, exacerbating congestion. Neilson and Curtis are relatively narrow residential streets with barely enough clearance for two way traffic. We don't want to see Neilson and Curtis turn into mini Solano or Marin avenues. The street design as well as the residential nature of Neilson and Curtis do not support heavy traffic. Traffic on these streets is just tolerable now. More traffic would be terrible.

We also do not want Safeway trucks driving up or down Neilson or Curtis. The trucks make it impossible for oncoming traffic to pass on these streets and very noisy. The added traffic congestion and noise pollution will take a significant toll on the quality of life in our neighborhood.

Thanks for listening!

Sincerely,

Richard & Linda Hsu

To: Traffic and safety Commission

From: John Shokouh

Locations: 914 Neilson St. Albany And 915 Curtis Ave. Albany

All new proposal drawing are much improvement – from previous proposal and relocating the loading dock to the front of the store. The traffic issue regarding the customer entrance and exit has not been address. The way it is, most of the traffic will be direct toward Curtis Ave. With new Safeway size and expectation of many more customer with doubling the size of the building. And small size of the Curtis Ave, it will be very difficult to get most if traffic go through the Curtis Ave. It is already very hard for two cars pass by each other.

Entrance for Safeway customer should be on Solano Ave. If Safeway wants to use the side street (Neilson and Curtis) the customer entrance and exist should be way up close to Solano Ave, as much possible and both Neilson and Curtis should be block from any traffic flow from both side, to calm the traffic and to make it safe for children in both block, and Marin school at Curtis street and to maintain level of normal residential streets for Safeway neighbors.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to see different drawing and express our ideas. I hope Traffic and safety Commission consider our input regarding the traffic flow, if they use the side streets they should be block from traffic follow or put the customer entrance and exit at Solano Ave.

Regard

John Shokouh