CITY OF ALBANY
PLANNING AND ZONING AGENDA
STAFF REPORT

Agenda date: December 14, 2010
Prepared by Ann Chaney

ITEM/ **6b**

SUBJECT **1500 Solano. Planning Application #08-031 – Study Session**
A study session to review alternative design concepts associated with an application from Safeway to construct a new store totaling approximately 52,000 square feet. The Planning and Zoning Commission will make no final decisions regarding the proposed development in the study session.

SITE: **1500 Solano Avenue**

APPLICANT/OWNER: **Safeway**

ZONING: **SC (Solano Commercial)**

Recommendation

Staff recommends that the Planning and Zoning Commission review alternative design concepts, take testimony from the public, and provide the applicant with direction regarding project design No formal action by the Commission will be taken at this meeting

Background

The key issues surrounding the development of a new Safeway store appear to center mainly on auto and truck circulation, height, and treatment at the rear of the site. The Commission has held numerous study sessions and Safeway has prepared a numerous alternatives During a P&Z Commission meeting in June, an idea arose of involving other professionals to help brainstorm optional approaches This idea took shape this past fall when City staff and Safeway agreed that Ken Lowney (Lowney Architecture) and John Ciccarelli (Bicycle Solutions) be asked to look at new approaches to this site. As way of background, Lowney has his own architectural firm which, among other project, designs grocery stores His clients include Whole Foods, Safeway, People's Community Market, and a number of other independent markets John Ciccarelli is a member of the team currently preparing the City's Pedestrian Master Plan and Bicycle Master Plan update. Mr. Ciccarelli deals with the broader issues of circulation and offered helpful comments during the Traffic and Safety Commission's review of the Safeway project

Staff and Safeway agreed that the brainstorming be done as an independent exercise without Safeway's architectural team present It was agreed however, that Barbara Ellis attend. Ms. Ellis is Safeway's community liaison Two brainstorming sessions were held with City staff, Lowney, Ciccarelli and Ellis The results are presented below A third session was held with Safeway staff to present the brainstorming results

The designs options are strictly conceptual in nature and not intended to answer every issue. For example, issues of exterior design, bicycle access/parking, and specific landscape treatments were not explicitly addressed It should be recognized that some of the options are unacceptable to Safeway for various reasons Ultimately a project must be satisfactory to the applicant/owner, and to the City for permitting purposes. The intent of this exercise is to help foster ideas that might lead to an acceptable project design

A Word about Truck Loading

The last P&Z Commission meeting on the Safeway project was on July 27, 2010 One issue that seems most challenging, and influences other decisions, involves truck circulation Last spring, the applicant presented three new alternatives to the truck loading area. Because these options required the trucks to either backup onto city streets or cross heavily used sidewalks, City staff and Planning commissioners were unable to support the concepts Traffic and Safety Commission did express a preference for Alternative A These alternatives are not attached to this report, but will be available at the upcoming meeting if needed

Project Goals as Expressed by Various Interest Groups

Based on verbal and written testimony at public meeting, different groups have different goals for this project Staff has attempted to generally summarize some of these goals in no order of priority

- Construct a larger, more contemporary grocery store with expanded services
- Reduce store size
- Create a vibrant street presence
- Be pedestrian and bicycle friendly
- Accommodate large truck deliveries
- Use smaller trucks
- Locate auto and truck access close to Solano Avenue, minimize traffic impacts on neighborhood
- Attractive design
- Remodel existing store
- At the rear, provide large building setback, low building height, do not use rear area for trucks or autos, provide buffer between building and residents
- Minimize interruption to Solano sidewalk pedestrian traffic
- Well functioning store with good variety and quality
- Avoid attractive nuisance (e g , loitering at rear)
- No increase in traffic on residential streets

Brainstorming results

To assist in reviewing the concept plans, Options 1, 2, and 3, staff has attempted to summarize key features of each Option below In addition, attached is a matrix that attempts to compare aspects of the three options with the existing Safeway store and the new Safeway proposal (as of 7/27/10).

Option 1: "Taking Over the Street" w/ Residential at Rear

Entrance and Exit

- One-way entrance and exit
- Trucks/autos share entrance from Curtis Street (approx 188' south of Solano)
- Trucks/autos share exit onto Neilson Street (approx. 185' south of Solano)
- Autos only could also use entrance directly off Solano

Truck loading

- Trucks unload inside subterranean parking area at rear of store
- Merchandise reaches store level via elevator

Uses Neilson Right-of-Way as part of project site

- Portions of store encroach into Neilson right-of-way
- Portion of Neilson St (next to Safeway) narrows to one-way northbound

Residential

- New residential use located at rear of site
- Units face south onto new private street ("mew")
- Residents would use access into residential Parking located inside Safeway parking lot
- Wall separates private street from existing residential units

Pros	Cons
Creates one-way circulation in an effort to distribute traffic on side streets more evenly.	Car ramp off Solano interferes with pedestrian traffic, breaks up urban streetscape
Widened store could have benefits to the store layout, function and flow	Safeway finds the inadequate amount of parking (75 stalls) to be unacceptable.
Loading occurs within parking garage	Trucks enter at rear across from residences
Trucks exit across from B of A parking lot	Residential front doors face parking structure
Places residential immediately next to R-1 zone	Residents would use garage to access units
Places private street/path between existing residents and new residential – 48' rear setback	Difficult to prevent non-residents from using private street
Lessens traffic volume on Neilson, south of the Safeway store	Raises policy issue regarding private use of public r-o-w
	A larger store may not necessarily need more parking, however may result in lower turnover
	Safeway concerned about adding residential with usage of garage parking, parties, increased visitors using garage
	Increased height at rear due to residential – 35'

Option 2: Subterranean Store (Parking Deck on top)

Entrance and Exit

- Vehicles enter and exit from both Curtis and Neilson streets 60' south of Solano Avenue
- Vehicles enter and exit directly from/to Solano
- Trucks enter from Curtis Street (approx 250' south of Solano)
- Trucks exit onto Neilson Street (approx 224' south of Solano)
- Vehicles park on roof deck; customers use stairs or elevations to the store below

Truck loading

- Trucks unload at rear of store within a fully enclosed area
- Entrance and exit set back from street to lessen visual impact on residences
- Possible use of gate operating system that gives truck drivers access, gate closes behind

View from Streets

- Two "glass-enclosed entry vestibules" housing stairwells and two-sided elevators, located adjacent to Solano Avenue (see photo insert on plan of the Apple Store in NYC)
- Add pavilions on Solano Avenue
- Landscaped areas at either end of glass enclosures (approx 1,000 sq ft each)
- Parking lot behind the glass enclosures with perimeter and internal landscaping
- Internal and/or perimeter landscaping; trees in large containers at edges, trellis with climbing vegetation in central part of parking (above-ground planters only allowed)
- Add "live wall" on Curtis and Neilson side, plus street trees
- Low level lighting (Designers believe that ground mounted lighting would meet safety lighting standards without having appearance of a suburban-style parking lot)

View from Rear

- 13'-15' high building wall of loading area
- 10' rear setback; could accommodate landscape screening.
- Parking deck on top of roof

View from Inside Store

- Natural light into the store via skylights and glass-enclosed vestibules (possibly clerestory windows)
- Customers could see people walking along the street above

Pros	Cons
Design is innovative; could prove inviting and offer customers an exciting experience	From the street, design concept could feel too much like a parking lot/deck
Auto access concentrated near Solano; reduces traffic impacts on Curtis/Neilson neighbors	May need to widen Curtis near Solano to create separate turn lane onto roof parking
Truck loading area fully enclosed if roll-up or bi-fold doors added; reduces noise	Trucks would use northern portion of Curtis and Neilson for entry and departure (respectively)

Roll-up doors, or similar treatment, help block view of loading area from neighbors	Need to address how to handle fumes within enclosed truck area
Parking deck could hypothetically provide space for public uses (e g., farmer's market)	Need to address headlights on parking deck
	Concept generally unacceptable to Safeway due to lack of physical connection with street, street view is pedestrian unfriendly, requires customers to shop underground

Option 3: "Rear Loading" (Modified Safeway proposal)

Entrance and Exit

- Drive aisle at rear (open to above) ramps down from Neilson, ramps up to Curtis.
- Vehicles and trucks enter from Neilson; approx 260' south of Solano
- Vehicles and trucks exit onto Curtis, approx. 300' south of Solano
- Vehicles park in subterranean garage, take elevators up to store level
  Note Parking stalls are 9' wide, Safeway using 8 ½' width

Truck Loading

- Trucks unload at rear and back into enclosed truck dock area
- Merchandise reaches store level via elevator

Street View

- Building extends to property line, except where pulled back along Solano Ave for store entrance and outdoor seating
- Curtis and Neilson includes 10' of landscaping next to building, and street trees

Rear View (Staff is seeking clarification from concept designer)

27' setback between building and rear property, assumes drive aisle is not enclosed
10' setback between drive aisle structure and rear property, if drive aisle partially enclosed

Pros	**Cons**
Encloses truck loading area to mitigate noise	Loading gate relies on internal staff to control
One-way circulation distributes traffic equally between Neilson and Curtis	Trucks enter and exit at rear of building
	Autos enter and exit at rear of building
	Height needs daylight plane?

Attachments:

1 Option 1 "Taking Over the Street"
2. Option 2 "Subterranean Store"
3 Option 3· "Rear Loading" (modified Safeway proposal)
4. Safeway proposal as of 7/27/10
5 Comparison of Concept Options, Safeway Proposal, and Existing Conditions