

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

Agenda date: March 22, 2011
Prepared by: Diane Henderson

ITEM/ **6c**

SUBJECT: 1500 Solano. Planning Application #08-031 - Study Session

A study session to review an alternative design concept associated with an application from Safeway to construct a new grocery store and retail shops totaling approximately 63,411 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 the revised design concept, 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

To date, the key issues surrounding the development of a new Safeway store center mainly trade-offs between auto and truck circulation, building height, and treatment at the rear of the site. The Commission has held numerous study sessions and Safeway has prepared numerous alternatives. During a 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 projects, 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.

Three design options that came out of the brainstorming sessions were presented to the Planning and Zoning Commission at a study session on December 14, 2011. The three design options that were presented at that study session were strictly conceptual in nature and not intended to answer every issue. They were intended to generate conversation and solicit input from the community and the Commission to help foster ideas that might lead to an acceptable project design. The three options included Option 1, "Taking Over the Street" with residential at the rear; Option 2,

subterranean store with parking deck on top; and Option 3, "Rear Loading" modified Safeway proposal (please see the attached staff report dated December 14, 2010, for a detailed discussion of the three alternatives.) As described in the attached minutes from that meeting, the study session provided the Commission, members of the public and the project applicant to discuss pros and cons of various design options. At the close of the study session, the applicant reviewed the issues that were raised and prepared a revised plan to address those concerns.

Project Goals as Expressed by Various Interest Groups

Based on verbal and written testimony at public meetings, different groups have different goals for this project. Staff has attempted to 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.

Revised Submittal

Following the December 14, 2010 study session, the applicant reviewed the comments that were raised and prepared revised plans in an effort to address those concerns. The revised conceptual drawings include a 56,111 square foot grocery store and 7,300 square feet of retail shops in a three-story building. At the Solano Avenue frontage, the building would appear to be two stories, with retail shops along the ground-level street frontage and a parking garage behind. An additional level of parking would be located one level below, and the Safeway store would be located one level above, on the top (third) floor.

The retail shops at the street level would all orient towards the Solano Avenue frontage. Access to Safeway would be from a ground level lobby at the corner of Solano Avenue and Neilson Street. The upper floor grocery store would be oriented with the front of the store facing Neilson Street and the back of the store adjacent to Curtis Street. The structure would be located eight feet from the Solano Avenue property line, on the Neilson Street property line and within five feet of the property line along the first 68 feet of Curtis Street and then setback 15 feet. At the rear of the building, the two lower parking levels would be located within 15 feet of the rear property line and

the upper floor grocery would be setback 30 feet from the property line. Due to the sloping terrain of the site, the height of the structure would vary with a maximum height of 55'.

The site plan has been completely reworked from previous submittals to address the very difficult circulation issues. Under the revised plan, delivery trucks would enter the site traveling south on Curtis Street to a new driveway located approximately 110 feet south of the intersection of Solano Avenue and Curtis Street, travelling in a forward direction to the middle of the property and then backing into the loading dock area. Once trucks are unloaded, they would proceed in a forward motion, exiting left onto Neilson Street, to travel north to Solano Avenue. Vehicular traffic could enter and exit the site from the Curtis Street driveway or the Neilson Street driveway, and then turn south into the street level parking garage. At the street (upper) level of the garage, 77 parking spaces for vehicles as well as bicycle parking would be provided. An interior ramp adjacent to the Curtis Street frontage would provide vehicular access to a lower level of parking for an additional 78 cars. A second driveway on Neilson Street at the rear of the site would provide ingress and egress to the lowest level. This solution has reduces the number of neighboring residences impacted by traffic on residential streets, and staff believes the approach to handling trucks is a superior solution to earlier submittals.

Preliminary perspective drawings have been included to demonstrate how the project would incorporate architectural detail and landscaping to provide attractive street designs. The retail shops at the Solano Avenue frontage would create a vibrant presence along that frontage. Angled parking and the bus stop could be retained along the Solano Avenue frontage.

Staff has met with several residents in the area to discuss the new plans. As a result of the discussion, attached correspondence has been received from a nearby Nielson Street resident.

Next Steps

During the brainstorm sessions of recent months, staff has put the City's environmental impact report (EIR) consultant on hold until the basic design concept is established. Subject to Commission feedback, the next step in the formal processing of the application would be to authorize the consultant to start the environmental studies. At a Commission meeting in the near future, a formal hearing would be held on the scope of the environmental review to provide members of the public an opportunity to identify specific items that should be evaluated.

Attachments:

1. Safeway proposal, March 9, 2011
2. Staff Report to the Planning and Zoning Commission, December 14, 2010
3. Planning and Zoning Commission Minutes, December 14, 2010

**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 design 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

Dear Safeway Delegation,

As one of the neighbors who will be most affected by the proposed Safeway project, I wanted to make some suggestions. These suggestions are very reasonable and if implemented will most likely facilitate in the project being approved and going forward faster.

I'm going to avoid talking about the project being too big for Albany and whether or not it will hurt existing small businesses. I'm sure others will debate these points.

Since my home abuts the Safeway property, this project has been a source of deep concern and stress to me as you know. I do want to say that I think this is the best proposal so far and with some tweaking, I can see myself living with it.

The suggestions I'm about to make are reasonable and I hope you take them seriously as I'd rather not have to lawyer-up.

- 1) This is the most important suggestion: I understand that there would be a new wall erected to protect us from sound. The new wall I believe was to be 12 – 15 feet high. The current wall by the some of our bedrooms and bathrooms is only about 6 feet high. Although I like the idea of a wall to protect from sound, a wall that high would really make it dark and create a feeling of being engulfed. I suggest creating a 7 – 10 ft. easement so that the 15 foot wall is not so close to our home. You could compensate for this easement by reducing the green buffer a little and other slight tweaks of scale. This can be done and you'd still have the enormous new store you want.
- 2) The parking garage is open. Although I know some people who don't live near Safeway fear an enclosed parking garage I believe those fears are unwarranted. If the garage is designed with proper lighting, it should be as safe as an open garage. An enclosed garage will protect us from sound like the inevitable car alarm going off.
- 3) I see you have customers entering and exiting very close to our homes on Neilson. I won't go into the pedestrian safety issues on the sidewalk. A few of us thought it would be a great idea if we could put up a barrier on Neilson St. where customers could only turn left out of the parking lot. Neilson would be two way from Marin to the barrier but one-way after the barrier. No, we don't like having customers exiting and entering so close to our homes but with the barrier we could accept it. Give and take.

As you can see, the suggestions I make are reasonable, can be implemented without hurting your bottom-line, and could even help expedite the approval process. I do hope you can incorporate these suggestions as soon as possible. Feel free to contact me at the number below.

Steve Pinto
912 Neilson St.
Albany, Ca. 94706
Cell: (510) 393-9037