

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

Agenda date: May 8, 2012
Prepared by: Diane Henderson

ITEM:

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 61,067 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 primarily on trade-offs between auto and truck circulation, building height, and treatment at the rear of the site. The Commission has held numerous study sessions over the past several years and Safeway has prepared numerous alternative designs in response. During a Commission meeting in June 2011, an idea arose of involving other professionals to help brainstorm optional approaches. This idea subsequently took shape 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 that prepared 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, 2010. 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
- 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 an opportunity 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, which was presented to the Planning and Zoning Commission on March 22, 2011.

The revised design presented at the Study Session last year included a Safeway store with retail shops at the Solano Avenue frontage with parking located to the rear. Although the design addressed many of the concerns previously expressed by the Planning and Zoning Commission and the public, numerous comments were raised regarding the fact that it still included both truck and car ingress and egress to the site from Nielson Street and Curtis Street. Following that Study Session, Safeway retained architect Ken Lowney who has prepared the attached, redesigned plan to address the expressed concerns.

Project Goals as Expressed by Various Interest Groups

Based on verbal and written testimony at public meetings, different groups have identified 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: April 2012

Following the March 22, 2011 study session, the applicant retained Ken Lowney (the architect who previously had helped the City and Safeway brainstorm the project) as project architect. Mr. Lowney has prepared revised plans in an effort to address the concerns expressed by the Commission and the public. The revised drawings include a 56,133 square foot grocery store and 4,934 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. Due to the sloping terrain of the site, the height of the structure would vary with a maximum height of 49'.

The retail shops at the street level would orient towards the Solano Avenue frontage. Access to Safeway would be from ground level lobbies on Solano Avenue outfitted with stairs, escalators and elevators to carry shoppers from the street level up to the store. Waste management would be contained within the structure and accessed via a roll-up door on Nielson Street. A fenced landscaped area at the rear would provide a buffer to the adjacent residential properties while serving as a bioswale for the site. Landscaping is proposed along the Nielson Street and Curtis Street facades to screen the structure and fenestrations along the side of the building allow air circulation to the parking garage while also providing green screens.

The greatest change compared to prior submittals is that the site plan has been completely reworked from earlier designs to address the very difficult circulation issues. Under the revised plan, delivery trucks would enter and exit the site from Solano Avenue only, via a ramp at the northwest corner of the building. The enclosed ramp parallels Curtis Street inside the structure, and would allow trucks to travel from the entrance at the street level to the lower level where the loading docks are located. The fully enclosed loading docks have been designed to provide adequate turn radius for the delivery trucks to turn around and exit the building in a forward motion. Trucks would unload and leave the site via the same ramp, exiting at Solano Avenue.

While truck access is limited to only the Solano Avenue entrance, patron automobiles could enter the two-levels of parking from the same main entrance on Solano Avenue or from secondary access points on Curtis Street (two curb cuts) or Neilson Street (one curb cut). At the street (upper) level of the garage, 106 parking spaces for vehicles would be provided; an additional 91 parking spaces would be located on the lower level.

The proposed circulation plan, locating the main entrance on Solano Avenue and limiting all truck deliveries to the Solano Avenue driveway only, addresses concerns regarding potential noise and traffic impacts previously expressed by neighbors on Curtis Street and Neilson Street. Not only does this design reduce the number of automobiles that would access the site from the side streets, it also keeps the truck traffic on Solano Avenue and out of the residential neighborhoods. Staff believes this approach to handling delivery trucks is a superior solution to earlier submittals. Further, it puts the entire loading dock activity, including associated noise, within an enclosed structure.

Preliminary 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. Outdoor café seating is proposed adjacent to the Solano frontage, at the upper (Safeway) level, on a roof deck overlooking the street, creating additional life along that frontage. Although the angled parking along Solano Avenue has been removed, the bus stop would be retained. Benches are proposed along the streetscape to enhance the pedestrian scale of the Solano Avenue frontage and bicycle parking is incorporated into the site plan, both along Solano Avenue and at the entrance to the store.

Next Steps

During the study sessions of the past two years, staff has put the City's environmental 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 review. At a future Commission meeting, the project and appropriate environmental documentation would be presented at a public hearing.

Attachments:

1. Safeway Project Plans, April, 2012
2. Staff Report to the Planning and Zoning Commission, March 22, 2011
3. Planning and Zoning Commission Minutes, March 22, 2011
4. Staff Report to the Planning and Zoning Commission, December 14, 2010
5. Planning and Zoning Commission Minutes, December 14, 2010
6. Clay Larson Zoning Ordinance & Daylight Plane E-Mail
7. E-mail Correspondence received through May 1, 2012