

City of Albany
Planning and Zoning Commission
Study Session/Staff Report

Meeting Date: June 24, 2008

Prepared by: _____

Agenda Item: 6a

Reviewed by: _____

Subject: **1500 Solano. Planning Application 08-031.** The applicant is requesting approval to demolish an existing grocery store and to construct a new 60,000 sq. ft. grocery store that includes separate retail areas along Solano Avenue plus a 216 space parking garage. Potential approvals required may include an increase in building height and design review.

**Applicant/
Owner:** David Blair with MCG Architecture for Todd Paradis with Safeway, Inc

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 study session to provide the Commission and members of the public an opportunity to review preliminary plans. No action by the Commission will be taken at this meeting.

Project Description

The subject property is a 67,406 sq. ft. 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 a single-story grocery (Safeway store) approximately 28,000sq.ft. in area, with a surface parking lot in front of the store that provides approximately 80 parking spaces. The building has setbacks of approximately 5' on the sides and 15' at the rear. The building is approximately 26'-28' in height from grade, and features a decorative arched front facade that is the tallest feature on the building. There is a covered area for truck parking and unloading on the west side of the building and a recycling booth located at the northwest corner of the lot.

The applicant is requesting approval to demolish the existing grocery store and construct a new 3-story structure with a grocery store on the top level, separate retail spaces along Solano Avenue on the middle level, and parking below. The building is proposed to be built out to the front and side property lines with a 40' rear yard setback. The first floor of the building provides a partially sub-grade parking garage (completely sub-grade at the front and fully above grade at the rear). The second level provides more parking at the center and rear and towards the front there is 9,447sq.ft. of retail space along Solano Avenue. The third floor provides a 49,825 sq. ft. grocery store. Cumulatively there is 59,272sq.ft. of retail and 160,312sq.ft. of total building area proposed (including all garage space).

The anticipated approvals for the application include a Planned Unit Development required for an increase in the allowable building height from 35' to 49'. The building varies in height throughout, depending on the topography. As previously stated, the subject property had a down sloping lot so the building has a maximum height of 33' at the front, 49' at the rear. A The enclosed garage provides 216 parking spaces where 148 are required. Design Review approval also is required for the architectural design of the building.

Background on Application

An application with preliminary design was received on April 30, 2008.

Environmental Analysis

The project will be subject to environmental review pursuant to the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The City will retain consultants qualified to evaluate the full range of issues, including traffic, parking, noise, 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.

Summary of Key Issues

A. Context

The subject property is the largest commercial parcel in the Albany portion of the Solano Avenue commercial district. It is also currently the only full service grocer in the city and has been operating at the site for decades. The size of the proposed store is consistent with the state of the grocery industry. The challenge for this project is to size and design the store large enough to serve the community and in a manner that is in scale with surround neighborhood and that can be managed by existing infrastructure. The store is surrounded by a mix of relatively small commercial spaces, single-family homes, and several multi-family properties. The parcels adjacent to the rear are zoned R-1, single-family residential, as are the majority of the properties along the sides of the parcel.

B. Initial Review of Development Standards

The Safeway grocery store is a permitted use in the Solano Commercial (SC) district. The following are brief discussions about development requirements:

1. Floor-Are-Ratio (FAR). The maximum allowed FAR in the SC district is 1.25. The proposed FAR for the building is approximately 1.25. Square footages will have to be finalized and verified as the project design is refined. The applicant's stated goal is to comply with FAR requirements, so at this time no exception is requested.

Municipal Code Section 20. 24.050(C2) states that enclosed parking areas for commercial uses that meet the minimum number of off-street parking spaces for a

commercial use shall not be included in FAR calculations. Thus, 148 of the 216 structured parking spaces are exempt from FAR calculations.

2. Parking. The Municipal Code requires one parking space for every four hundred square feet of building are. The enclosed garage provides 216 parking spaces where 148 are required.
3. Building Height. The height of the building varies between 33' at the front to 49' at the rear. The height of the building is an important variable in the overall visual impact of a development at the site. Most of the buildings along Solano Avenue are one and two-stories. The proposed building is two stories above grade on the Solano frontage and because of the sloping lot, three-stories at the rear with full exposure of the garage wall. Typically floor-to-ceiling heights for grocery stores are taller than for other retail.

Consideration for an increase in building height should be sensitive to the impact on surrounding neighbors. A light, shadow and massing study may be required to provide more information on the increase in height may have.

4. Setbacks and Daylight Plane. The proposed project appears to comply with setback requirements

The Commission may use the "Planned Unit Development" (PUD) mechanism for granting the increase in building height. Planning and Zoning Code Section 20.100.060 (Planned Unit Development) states that "The purpose of the Planned Unit Development (PUD) is to promote flexibility of design and increase available open space in developments by allowing diversification in the relationships of various buildings, structures, and open spaces in building groups and the allowable heights of the buildings and structures, while insuring substantial compliance with the district regulations and other provisions. The code also requires that a finding be made that the project incorporates an "exceptional level of amenity or other benefits to the community that could not be achieved with the PUD."

C. Design Review

Only a sketch of the front elevation has been provided. The proposed project has a contemporary-rustic architectural style. There is a mix of gabled and flat roofs that would likely have a composition shingle roof. The preliminary are large brackets under the roof eaves and large picture windows with decorative mullions. There are also extended wood rafters and stone-finished columns and walls accenting the building. It appears there will be a variation of building materials, including stucco, vertical wood siding, wood features, etc.

There is not a distinct or explicit predominate architectural style in Albany, and thus staff and Commission have often supported a mix of architectural styles. The proposed architectural scheme of contemporary-rustic is attractive; however, may wish to comment on whether this is an appropriate style for this site. This style of building and its arrangement of building materials are often associated with more rural and suburban areas. Staff believes that flexibility and openness to

various architectural styles is important; however, they need to accentuate and complement the architectural styles already in the city and not completely differ from them. Furthermore, the quality of materials and attention to detail in construction can be critical to the success of any design.

The applicant has not provided side or rear elevations at this time because they'd prefer feedback on the general and conceptual size and design of the building. Staff understands the reasoning for the applicant decision to not provide side and rear elevations and notes that the aesthetic characteristic and integrity of the side elevations and rear elevations will be as important as the front façade in that they will be fully visible from residents across the street and from travelers heading north on Neilson and Curtis. A screen wall has been proposed to help screen the rear of the building for adjacent neighbors. No detail has been provided; however the Commission may want to provide feedback on the screen wall concept and design.

It should be noted that a master sign plan for the grocery store and retail stores along Solano should be submitted to ensure consistent and appropriately sized and styled signage be provided for the businesses.

E. Automobile Circulation

The site currently has four entrances. One is approximately 80' from the front property line on Curtis Street, another approximately 60' from the front property line on Nielson Street. In addition, there are two access points on Solano Avenue. The applicant is proposing to maintain two entrances on Neilson and Curtis in approximately the same location. These entrances would directly access the grade level-parking garage.

The loading area for the existing store is located on the west side of the building, with truck access though the front parking lot. There also is an existing through driveway in the rear of the store, which is not regularly used by the store or by patrons. The proposed plan has the loading area for trucks at the rear of the building, using a 40' rear yard setback. The proposed route for trucks is to access Neilson Street, traveling east on Solano Avenue, pulling into the through driveway at the rear of the building, backing into the loading space and exiting on Curtis Street.

Staff would recommend the truck turning radius be evaluated and explore whether reversing the direction of the driveway is easier for trucks to manage.

F. Landscape and Lighting

A landscaping and lighting plan has not been provided at this time. There are mature ginkgos along the western side of the property that would be removed with the proposed project. There also are mature eucalyptus nicoli street trees along Solano Avenue. These trees are an attractive feature of the existing site, and efforts to preserve or replace as many trees on and around the site should be made.

Because of the large scale of the project and its potential visual impacts staff believes that a detailed landscaping and lighting design proposal is appropriate for Commission review and approval.

Landscaping is a vital and integral part of the design and should be thoroughly reviewed in consideration of the project. Lighting placement is important in regards to aesthetics, safety/visibility, and should be designed with the single-family homes across the streets and the windows of the adjacent multi-family structures taken into consideration.

G. Art Ordinance

On October 1, 2007 the City Council adopted a Public Art Program that requires applicants for all new development projects are required to include a Public Art feature valued at 1.75% of construction. For a project of this size the public art component could be a substantial amount. The applicant will be required to work with the Arts Committee on determining the appropriate style and location for the required public art.

H. Green Building

The City adopted a Green Building Ordinance on December 4, 2006. The standards of compliance for the ordinance require that all commercial projects receive a certified, gold Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) rating. This will be the first commercial project that to be processed with the LEED certification.

I. Conclusion

This is a large-scale in-fill project for Albany. It is located on a major arterial street that is built out. There are a number of potential impacts of the project. Staff understands the applicant's desire to improve aesthetics, services and functionality of the site; however, careful review of all potential impacts concerns need to made. 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.

Appeals:

The Albany Municipal Code provides that any action of the Planning and Zoning Commission may be appealed to the City Council if such appeal is filed within 14 days of the date of action. Appeals may be filed in the Community Development Department by completing the required form and paying the required fee. The City Clerk will then schedule the matter for the next available City Council meeting.

Attachments:

1. Analysis of Zoning Requirements
2. Application
3. Letters from Neighbors

20.24.050 Floor-Area-Ratio.

	Proposed	Requirement
Lot Size	67,406	None
Floor Area		
Total	160,312	--
Total Counted	approx. 85,000	--
Floor Area Ratio	approx. 1.25	1.25

20.24.060 Setback Areas, Encroachments.

Not applicable.

20.24.100 Distances Between Structures.

Not applicable.

20.24.110 Fences, Landscaping, Screening.

Not applicable.

20.24.130 Accessory Buildings.

Not applicable.

20.28 Off-Street Parking Requirement.

See discussion of key issues.

20.40 Housing Provisions

Not applicable.

20.44 Non-conforming Uses, Structures and Lot

Not applicable.

20.48 Removal of Trees

See discussion of key issues.

20.52 Flood Damage Prevention Regulations

Not applicable.

20.100.030 Use Permits.

Not applicable.

20.100.040 Variances.

Not applicable.

20.100.010 Common Permit Procedures.

Public notice of this application was provided on June 13, 2008 in the form of mailed notice to property owners and occupants within a 300-foot radius, and posted in three locations.

20.100.050 Design Review.
See Summary of Key Issues.

Green Building
Not submitted for study session.