



PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION

Virtual Meeting
Albany, CA 94706

MINUTES OF SPECIAL MEETING WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 4, 2021

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1. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Watty called the special meeting of the Planning and Zoning Commission to order at 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday, August 4, 2021.

2. ROLL CALL

Present: MacLeod, Momin, Pilch, Watty
Absent: Donaldson
Staff Present: Planning Manager Anne Hersch
Associate Planner Christopher Tan

3. EX PARTE COMMUNICATIONS

Commissioner Pilch disclosed discussions of the project at 540 San Pablo Avenue with individuals having no ownership or financial interest in the project.

4. CONSENT CALENDAR

None

5. ANNOUNCEMENTS/COMMUNICATIONS

None

6. PUBLIC COMMENT

None

7. DISCUSSION & POSSIBLE ACTION ON MATTERS RELATED TO THE FOLLOWING ITEMS:

None

8. NEW BUSINESS

8-1. **PA21-002 Proposed Mixed-Use Development at 540 San Pablo Avenue** – A formal application has been submitted for a new mixed-use project with 207 units and 5,500 sq. ft. of ground-floor retail at 540 San Pablo Avenue. The subject site is 2.18 acres with existing commercial spaces approximately 37,700 sq. ft. in area. The applicant has submitted plans for Design Review and Density Bonus for two



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1 mixed-use buildings that include a mix of studio, one-, two-, and three-bedroom
2 apartments and nine townhouses with three-bedroom units. Building A will have
3 121 units and will be 69' in height. Building B will have 77 units and will be 71'
4 height. The townhouses will have nine units and will be 38' in height. The project
5 is proposed to have 181 off-street parking spaces. Two concessions are requested
6 for the open space requirement and Planned Unit Development (PUD)
7 requirement. This is a study session and no action will be taken.
8

9 **Recommendation:** Staff recommends that the Planning & Zoning Commission
10 review the formal application and the revisions made by the applicant based on
11 comments received on the preliminary application and provide feedback. This is a
12 study session and no action will be taken.
13

14 **CEQA:** The project is Categorically Exempt from CEQA pursuant to Section
15 15332, "In-Fill Development" of the CEQA Guidelines.
16

17 Planning Manager Anne Hersch presented the staff report dated August 4, 2021.
18

19 **Isaiah Stackhouse**, project architect, reported the easement through the project site can
20 be relocated and allows vehicles from Sutter to access San Pablo via the traffic signal at
21 Brighton. With the easement relocated and surface parking reduced, the project now has
22 three buildings and 51% more open space. The project includes wider sidewalks,
23 numerous street trees, approximately 11,000 square feet of publicly accessible amenities,
24 102 family residential units, and extensive bike parking. The proposed floor area ratio
25 (FAR) and gross floor area are 12% less than that allowed under the density bonus. The
26 color palette for the buildings is rich, earthy tones. Bowling elements will be included in
27 open spaces. When asked, Mr. Stackhouse explained traffic circulation through the
28 project. The entrance at Brighton allows two-way traffic, and that condition will remain.
29 The curb cut on Clay will be removed. The easement between Sutter and the property
30 owner provides for two-way traffic. Many fire departments discourage the use of trash
31 chutes, and trash facilities are provided on the ground floor. Public art for the project has
32 not been determined. Residential units will have electric appliances, and solar panels
33 and electric vehicle (EV) charging stations will be installed. The use of gas for building
34 systems and food service spaces has not been determined. The only way to increase
35 the square footage of the project is to increase the size of units.
36

37 PUBLIC HEARING OPENED 38

39 **Yi-Shan Chen** indicated the project does not comply with General Plan goals for
40 pedestrian-oriented designs. The project will increase traffic on San Pablo and Clay. She
41 expressed concerns about realistic landscape renderings and stormwater mitigation
42 measures. The Commission should direct the applicant to reduce the heights of buildings
43 and provide a shadow study, contextual view studies, an infrastructure feasibility study,
44 and a traffic study.



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2 **Joe Matera** believed the parking ratio of ½ space per residential unit is too low and
3 suggested parking and traffic studies be conducted.
4

5 **Buddy Williams** supported the project and appreciated the inclusion of affordable
6 housing units.
7

8 **Dan Johnson** supported the project and commended the applicant for proposing 207
9 residential units near schools and shopping. Electric building systems are available and
10 can be included in the project.
11

12 **Elaine Ngo** expressed concern that building heights will reduce morning sunlight on
13 neighboring residences.
14

15 **Eric Biber** did not believe the City could make findings required by the Housing
16 Accountability Act to deny the project. The Commission should approve the project as
17 expeditiously as possible.
18

19 **Kara Vuicich** supported the project and appreciated the applicant responding to
20 Commissioners' comments with design changes. No one has presented data or facts to
21 support concerns about parking impacts. Studies have found that people who live within
22 a half mile of a BART station drive significantly less and require significantly less parking.
23 Current vehicle ownership and commute modes are the best factual indicators of
24 transportation patterns. Ideally, the parking ratio for the project could decrease more.
25

26 **Lindsay Brothers** concurred with Ms. Vuicich's comments regarding parking concerns.
27 The project addresses Albany's commitment to fight the climate and housing crises. She
28 urged the Commission to move the project forward and to consider data.
29

30 **Christopher Weinberger** agreed with requests for data. Currently, very few vehicles
31 utilize the Brighton driveway, but this project will significantly increase the number of
32 vehicles utilizing the driveway. Parking on Clay is already congested. Perhaps story
33 poles can be installed to demonstrate changes that the project will bring. The requested
34 increase in building heights does not make sense for the number of very-low-income units
35 provided in the project. He expressed concerns regarding mechanical parking.
36

37 **Chenglong Tsai** supported the project because it is well designed and provides much
38 needed housing. Traffic will not be affected as much as anticipated. Requiring all electric
39 appliances is a great idea.
40

41 PUBLIC HEARING CLOSED
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43 Commissioner MacLeod commended the applicant for redesigning the project to reflect
44 Commissioners' comments and making significant improvements to open space and



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1 access to Adams Street. The location is ideal for this kind of development. Spaces along
2 the street frontage for mechanical rooms and bicycle storage should be retail or
3 commercial uses to activate the street. The bicycle rooms could be larger, and access to
4 them could be more straightforward. The overall design, varied facades, rhythm of the
5 various building sections, and massing are good. The townhouses are a nice addition to
6 the project. The site could support more units. Parking could be reduced more to provide
7 more open space. A larger seating area adjacent to the café could activate the street
8 space even more.

9
10 Commissioner Momin indicated large and small changes have significantly improved the
11 overall design. The townhouses are a significant improvement over surface parking and
12 create a nice street frontage that is compatible with nearby residences. The current
13 locations of the easement and the garage entry to Building B are good ideas. The center
14 space is much more meaningful and has been designed efficiently and skillfully. The
15 pedestrian connections are a great amenity, but they are a bit too narrow. The provision
16 and distribution of open space are good. With more family units, the open space could
17 include a children's play area. The articulation and color palette of facades are attractive.
18 The San Pablo Avenue side of the sixth floor between the two bookends should be
19 stepped back 4-5 feet. The height of Building A along Adams Street should be reduced,
20 and the building mass should be relocated to the San Pablo side of the building. Building
21 A's facade along Adams Street should have some residential character, especially the
22 lower two or three floors. The dog park may not be large enough to be useful. The
23 townhouses are well composed but need some variation in planes and patio heights.

24
25 Commissioner Pilch supported suggestions for a children's play area and variation in the
26 townhouses. Blank building facades are a concern. Opening the garage walls to visibility
27 and air flow is preferable. The south, east, and west sides of Building A could be stepped
28 back. Parking spillover into neighborhoods could occur, and a parking permit program
29 could be beneficial. Parking for Buildings A and B is unbundled. The community would
30 love some recognition of the Albany Bowl on the site, such as including the Albany Bowl
31 sign on the facade. Access to bicycle storage rooms should be easy. A cycle track on
32 San Pablo Avenue could facilitate connections across town. The City requires charging
33 station infrastructure for all parking spaces and charging stations in 20% of all parking
34 spaces. Perhaps splashes of color could be incorporated in building facades.
35 Electrification of the project should not be a huge problem.

36
37 Chair Watty reiterated that density bonus projects are not required to comply with all
38 aspects of local codes and General Plans. Market-rate units are needed to subsidize the
39 cost of affordable units. The townhouses, public open spaces, and bowling elements are
40 great. Incorporating the Albany Bowl sign into the project would be a special gift to the
41 community. Wider sidewalks and changes in architectural materials are appreciated and
42 a significant improvement. Eliminating the easement, if possible, would improve the
43 project and reduce the possibility of pedestrian conflicts. Building A's facade along San
44 Pablo appears monolithic and could benefit from some architectural differentiation. More



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1 ground-floor spaces need to accommodate active uses. Planters in the second-level
2 terrace should be built-in. Building management should be responsible for maintaining
3 landscaping. Perhaps, the railings on townhouse balconies could be solid to minimize
4 privacy concerns, and EV charging stations could be installed in all parking spaces.
5 Future submissions should include details for window reveals.
6

7 Commissioner MacLeod noted electric building systems are available, cleaner, cost
8 effective, and energy efficient. The Brighton entrance is a concern and should be studied
9 for pedestrian safety. If the easement could be eliminated, the space could be a children's
10 play area or a multi-use area. Accessing the townhouse bike parking is difficult if a car is
11 parked in the garage. Replacing some of inactive uses on the storefront side of buildings
12 with active uses would be helpful and benefit the community.
13

14 Commissioner Pilch concurred with Commissioner MacLeod's comments. An all-electric
15 project would eliminate the cost of gas infrastructure.
16

- 17 **9. NEXT MEETING – September 1, 2021**, City Hall Council Chambers, 1000 San Pablo
18 Avenue or virtual meeting pursuant to state and county guidance
19

20 Planning Manager Hersh announced the September 1 meeting will begin at 4 p.m.
21

22 **10. ADJOURNMENT**
23

24 The meeting was adjourned at 9:14 p.m.
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26
27

28 Submitted by: Anne Hersch, Planning Manager
29
30
31

32 Jeff Bond, Community Development Director