



Agenda Report

20-565

Agenda Date: 8/18/2020

REPORT TO CITY COUNCIL

SUBJECT

Public Hearing: Action on Early Consideration of a General Plan Text Amendment to allow a greater Floor Area Ratio than currently allowed in the Regional Commercial General Plan designation for the 3.86-acre property located at 4949 Great America Parkway [Council Pillar: Promote and Enhance Economic, Housing and Transportation Development]

BACKGROUND

On February 27, 2020, SC Hotel Development LLC filed a project development plan application for General Plan Text Amendment for the 3.86-acre property located at 4949 Great America Parkway. The project site is currently developed with an 8-story hotel (Hilton Santa Clara) and a surface parking lot. The existing General Plan designation for the site is Regional Commercial and the site is zoned Commercial Park (CP). The proposed General Plan Text Amendment would allow a greater Floor Area Ratio (FAR) than currently allowed in the Regional Commercial General Plan designation. The increased FAR would then allow the replacement of the surface parking lot located behind the existing Hilton Hotel with a new hotel building housing a parking structure and additional hotel rooms.

Through the early consideration process, the Council can direct staff to continue processing the General Plan Amendment (GPA) application, or the Council can preemptively deny the proposed GPA request as inconsistent with the City's General Plan goals and policies. Should the Council provide direction to continue processing the application, staff would complete the review process for the proposed General Plan Text Amendment, including environmental analysis of the proposed project consistent with the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Direction to continue the review process in no way obligates or commits the Council to ultimately approve the proposal.

The goal for the early consideration process is to minimize costs and work associated with the review of a GPA application should an amendment not be viable. A proposed GPA should be evaluated for consistency with the Major Strategies and other high-level goals and policies of the General Plan to determine if there is clearly a conflict that would indicate further evaluation of the proposal is not warranted. The General Plan Major Strategies identify the importance of maintaining a land use plan that supports other goals and policies, preserving the City's fiscal health, promoting quality of life, preserving and cultivating existing neighborhoods and promoting sustainability.

Pursuant to the City's Early Consideration Policy for GPAs, the applicant conducted a virtual community meeting on June 3, 2020.

DISCUSSION

The City's evaluation of an Early Consideration for a GPA is based on identification of a clear

inconsistency with General Plan strategies, goals or policies that demonstrates that the proposal will not be in conformance with the General Plan. The following discussion considers any potential conflict with the General Plan that would result from modification of the General Plan to allow intensification of a commercial hotel use at the project location.

The Project would replace the existing surface parking in the southeastern portion of the site with a 22 story, 237'-2" (239'-6" max) hotel building, including a ground floor lobby, seven levels of parking, 12 stories containing 319 hotel rooms, and a rooftop restaurant and an observation deck. It would also add a new driveway at the southwest corner of the site.

The existing Regional Commercial designation of the project site is intended for retail and commercial uses that provide local and regional services and supports development of the site for hotel use. It is intended for commercial developments that serve both Santa Clara residents and the surrounding region. A broad range of retail uses is allowed, including regional shopping centers, local serving offices, medical facilities, home improvement/durable goods sales and services, warehouse membership clubs, new and used auto sales and services, and travel related services such as hotels, gas stations, restaurants, convention centers, amusement parks and sports venues.

The maximum allowed FAR for this designation is 0.60. General Plan Policy 5.5.1 P13 allows hotel development north of the Caltrain corridor in any land use designation, except Light and Heavy Industrial, at a maximum FAR of 2.0, provided that the property is annexed to the City's Community Facilities Assessment District, or similar district, and that the use is compatible with planned uses on neighboring properties and consistent with other applicable General Plan policies. The project, including the existing and proposed hotel buildings, would however result in an FAR of 2.74. Without a GPA, Policy 5.5.1-P13 would not be sufficient to accommodate the project, since the FAR of the existing and proposed hotel buildings would exceed the allowed FAR of 2.0.

As a result, the proposal is to make a text amendment to the General Plan to increase the allowable intensity of hotels north of the Caltrain Corridor in General Plan Policy 5.5.1-P13. The proposed General Plan Text Amendment to the General Plan Policy on hotels north of the Caltrain corridor would allow a greater FAR than 2.0 sufficient to construct the new hotel building on the existing Hilton Hotel site.

The site is located at 4949 Great America Parkway, and is bordered by Tasman Drive to the north, Great America Parkway to the West, and surface parking lots for Levi's Stadium to the east and south. The southeastern corner of the site is proposed to be redeveloped with a new hotel building. Great America Parkway and Tasman Drive are both arterial roadways with robust transit options, including Great America Station and Old Ironsides Station in close proximity to the site. The site is also in close proximity to highways (Routes 101 and 239) for ease of regional access.

The General Plan Major Strategies support economic development projects, including hotels which contribute to the City's fiscal health, at locations that minimize impacts to neighborhoods and utilize existing infrastructure. The proposed project would be consistent with major applicable General Plan policies, including:

5.3.1-P7: Work with property owners to improve or redevelop underutilized and vacant properties.

5.3.1-P9: Require that new development provide adequate public services and facilities, infrastructure, and amenities to serve the new employment or residential growth.

The project proposes services, facilities, infrastructure, and amenities, including a beautiful rooftop restaurant and observation deck.

5.3.1-P10: Provide opportunities for increased landscaping and trees in the community, including requirements for new development to provide street trees and a minimum 2:1 on or off site replacement for trees removed as part of the proposal to help increase the urban forest and minimize the heat island effect.

- The project will replace surface parking with a more efficient high-rise hotel use, leaving space for landscaping.

5.3.1-P12: Encourage convenient pedestrian connections within new and existing developments.

The project proposes pedestrian activation via a walkway connecting the two hotels.

5.3.3-G2: Quality commercial uses throughout the City, particularly along key transportation corridors.

5.3.3-G4: New commercial uses that respect surrounding neighborhoods and are sited to reduce potential land use conflicts.

5.3.3 P1: Provide a mix of retail and commercial uses to meet the needs of local customers and draw patrons from the greater region.

- The Project will bring 319 needed hotel rooms to the area, serving visitors to Levi's Stadium, the Great America theme park, and regional visitors.

5.3.3 P3: Encourage all commercial development to include neighborhood oriented stores and amenities.

- The project's rooftop restaurant and observation deck will serve hotel guests and their visitors, and will be open to the public to provide a beautiful gathering place for Santa Clara.

5.3.3-P12: Support the continued tourist oriented commercial uses in the Bayshore North area, including lodging, entertainment, sports facilities, recreation and retail uses.

Based on an initial review, the proposed General Plan Amendment is potentially consistent with the City's General Plan and there are no identified areas of significant conflict with the overall General Plan strategies, goals and policies. The proposed GPA supports expansion of an existing land use that is supported by the General Plan at a location likely suitable for intensification and with minimal potential for impacts upon Santa Clara neighborhoods.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

If this proposal moves forward, the project review will include analysis in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact to the City other than administrative staff time and expense. Staff costs associated with review of the proposed General Plan Text Amendment are generally recovered through application fees paid by the project applicant.

COORDINATION

This report was coordinated with the City Attorney's Office.

PUBLIC CONTACT

In accordance with the Early Consideration Policy, a noticed virtual community meeting was conducted to present the development proposal to neighbors and interested parties and engage public input. The virtual meeting was held on June 3, 2020 from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. and was attended by four community members. Public notice of the meeting was mailed to property owners within 1,000 feet of the project site and posted on the City's Community Meetings webpage.

Four people participated in the community meeting, and two spoke, expressing general interest in the proposal with a few questions and concerns mostly regarding the architectural design of the project, construction timeline, and expected customer demand for the hotel expansion.

Public contact was made by posting the Council agenda on the City's official-notice bulletin board outside City Hall Council Chambers. A complete agenda packet is available on the City's website and in the City Clerk's Office at least 72 hours prior to a Regular Meeting and 24 hours prior to a Special Meeting. A hard copy of any agenda report may be requested by contacting the City Clerk's Office at (408) 615-2220, email clerk@santaclaraca.gov <<mailto:clerk@santaclaraca.gov>>.

RECOMMENDATION

City Council direct staff to continue processing the subject General Plan Text Amendment to allow a greater Floor Area Ratio than currently allowed in the Regional Commercial General Plan designation for the 3.86-acre property located at 4949 Great America.

Reviewed by: Andrew Crabtree, Director of Community Development

Approved by: Deanna J. Santana, City Manager

ATTACHMENTS

1. Statement of Justification
2. Development Plans
3. Virtual Community Meeting Notification