



Memorandum

TO: City Council**FROM:** Councilmember Matt Mahan**SUBJECT:** See Below**DATE:** 6/21/2022Approved 

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SUBJECT: El Paseo/Saratoga Urban Village Plan Prioritization**RECOMMENDATION**

Direct the City Manager to:

1. Work with the Planning, Building and Code Enforcement (PBCE) Director to prioritize planning for the designated Saratoga/El Paseo Urban Village in accordance with prior Council direction (Item 10.2, 12/07/21) to accelerate planning of designated urban villages that have strong market demand and high housing production potential,
2. Return to the Community and Economic Development Committee (CED) in fall of 2022 with a cost estimate and timeline for this work and, if necessary, a funding request that can be brought to the full Council for consideration.

BACKGROUND

The proposed project at 1312 El Paseo and 1777 Saratoga Avenue exemplifies many of the attributes we want to see in new developments in San Jose. The applicant has worked to envision a mixed-use and mixed-income project that provides valuable amenities, such as a new Whole Foods market, as well as underground parking and road improvements, including a new pedestrian crossing. I especially appreciate that the applicant opted to meet their inclusionary housing requirement by building affordable units on site. Socioeconomically diverse communities are stronger and more just communities.

What this and any individual future projects in the El Paseo/Saratoga area will struggle to adequately address, however, is the area's lack of accessible public space, high traffic congestion, and limited mass transit options that meet few residents' needs today. Our office has heard extensively from dozens of residents in the neighborhood who are concerned about the lack of communication from the City and VTA about our high-level, long-term plans for this designated urban village, and especially how we and partner agencies will provide adequate public space, such as parks, and traffic congestion mitigation, including viable alternatives to the single-occupancy vehicle. As for public space, while schools in the area have large sports fields and indoor facilities, public use of this space is limited by school district policies and fees, which may be an opportunity for future city-school district-community collaboration.

Many of the residents who reached out to our office recalled participating in the General Plan 2040 planning process a decade ago, through which they came to understand that future development in the El Paseo area would likely constitute three- to five-story developments, including new parkland (i.e. not simply in-lieu fees spent in other parts of the city) and connected by fast, frequent and safe transportation that would encourage residents to get out of their cars. In this case, a large project is moving forward with four towers of nine or more stories, parkland requirements that will be met primarily through in-lieu fees, and no concrete plans from our congestion management agency, VTA, for how it will manage thousands of additional cars on local roads in the years ahead.

Understandably, many residents fear that this pattern will only continue with individual future projects in the El Paseo/Saratoga urban village. The project before us today represents just one-third of an overall 30-acre shopping center, which itself is only one of three large shopping centers situated at the confluence of Saratoga Ave., Lawrence Expressway, and Prospect Rd./Campbell Ave. In all, this designated urban village includes 174 acres, or roughly 17 times the size of this project. Moreover, given its proximity to large regional employers, such as Apple and Google, and the investment being considered today, interest in redevelopment of other sites in the area will likely accelerate.

Today we have an opportunity to show residents that we are prepared to plan for and positively shape growth for their benefit and that of their future neighbors. Specifically, as Council directed last winter, designated urban villages that are experiencing strong market demand and provide opportunities to address our housing crisis, which is certainly true for the El Paseo/Saratoga urban village, should be prioritized for proactive and holistic planning that includes robust community engagement, new mobility solutions, and provision of adequate public space.