San Jose Arena Authority

3.1.b

P.O. BOX 90207
SAN JOSE, CA 95109-3207
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December 16, 2009

Akoni Danielsen
City of San Jose
Planning Division
City Hall, 3rd Floor
200 East Santa Clara Street
San Jose, CA 95113-1905

Dear Akoni:

The San Jose Arena Authority appreciates the opportunity to respond to the Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Report for the Baseball Stadium in the Diridon/Arena Area. Please be advised that the items listed below specifically relate to the potential impacts of the baseball stadium on the continued operations at HP Pavilion at San Jose. The Arena Authority considers the Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Report as a critical foundation document in the evolutionary process for the design and construction of the baseball stadium project in the Diridon/Arena area.

The Arena Authority respectfully requests that the following issues be considered at the forefront of discussions with the City and other critical stakeholders in the development and implementation of this significant stadium project:

- Identification of issues specifically relating to stadium construction and operation
- Significant land development issues contemplated in the Diridon/Arena area
- Coordinated analysis of Pavilion and stadium on-site and off-site parking issues
- Coordinated analysis of Pavilion and stadium vicinity road and traffic issues
- Public transit options currently under consideration in the Diridon/Arena area
- Analysis of pedestrian access issues in and around the Diridon/Arena area
- Evaluation of Pavilion event coordination issues with stadium construction and operation
- Analysis of residential neighborhood integrity issues during stadium construction and operation
- Integration of stadium operations plans with Pavilion event management plans
- Establishment of standing stakeholder committees to oversee stadium construction and operation

I appreciate your consideration on the items listed on the previous page and look forward to continuing to work cooperatively on this important stadium project. Please feel free to contact me with any comments or questions. I can be reached at morrisey@sjaa.com or at 408-977-4783.

Sincerely,

Chris Morrisey
Executive Director

cc: Members of the Arena Authority Board of Directors
Members of the Arena Events Operations Committee
Jim Benshoof, HP Pavilion Management
Jim Goddard, HP Pavilion Management
Kip Harkness, Redevelopment Agency
Dennis Korabiak, Redevelopment Agency
Hans Larsen, Department of Transportation
Abi Maghamfar, Redevelopment Agency
Jim Ortbal, Department of Transportation

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SAN JOSE ARENA AUTHORITY

CITY OF SAN JOSE
CAPITAL OF SILICON VALLEY

Department of Planning, Building and Code Enforcement
JOSEPH HORWEDEL, DIRECTOR

NOTICE OF PREPARATION OF A DRAFT SUPPLEMENTAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT FOR THE BASEBALL STADIUM IN THE DIRIDON/ARENA AREA

FILE NO:	PP05-214
PROJECT APPLICANT:	San Jose Redevelopment Agency
APN:	259-48-011, -012, -013, -052, -053, -057, -060, -071, -073, and -074; 259-28-041, -043, and -044; 259-38-009, -010, -011, -027, -028, -029, -085, -133, and -141; 259-47-059, -068, and -080; 261-34-020; and 261-35-002, -003, -006, -007, -010, -014, and -027.

As the Lead Agency, the City of San Jose will prepare a Supplemental Environmental Impact Report (SEIR) for the above-referenced project and would like your views regarding the scope and content of the environmental information, which is germane to your agency's statutory responsibilities in connection with the proposed project. This SEIR may be used by your agency when considering approvals for this project.

The project description, location, and probable environmental effects that will be analyzed in the SEIR for the project are attached.

According to State law, the deadline for your response is 30 days after receipt of this notice; however, we would appreciate an earlier response, if possible. Please identify a contact person, and send your response to:

City of San Jose
Attn: Akoni Danielsen
Planning Division
City Hall, 200 East Santa Clara Street, 3rd Floor
San José CA 95113-1905
Phone: (408) 535-7823
e-mail: Akoni.Danielsen@sanjoseca.gov

Joseph Horwedel, Director
Planning, Building and Code Enforcement

Akoni Danielsen
Deputy

Date: 11/17/09

NOTICE OF PREPARATION
OF A
SUPPLEMENTAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT
FOR THE
BASEBALL STADIUM IN THE DIRIDON/ARENA AREA

November 19, 2009

A. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) is to inform decision-makers and the general public of the environmental effects of a proposed project that an agency may implement or approve. The EIR process is intended to provide information sufficient to evaluate a project and its potential for significant impacts on the environment; to examine methods of reducing adverse impacts; and to consider alternatives to the project.

A Supplemental Environmental Impact Report (SEIR) is prepared when an EIR has previously been certified and changes are proposed to a project or new information becomes available, which was not known and could not have been known when the EIR was certified, *and* the changes to the project or new information will result in 1) new significant effects, and/or 2) a substantial increase in the severity of previously identified significant effects. The SEIR need contain only the information necessary to make the previous EIR adequate for the project as revised. In this case the EIR being supplemented is the Baseball Stadium in the Diridon/Arena Area EIR, which was certified by the San Jose Planning Commission on February 28, 2007. The SEIR for the proposed project will be prepared and processed in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) of 1970, as amended.

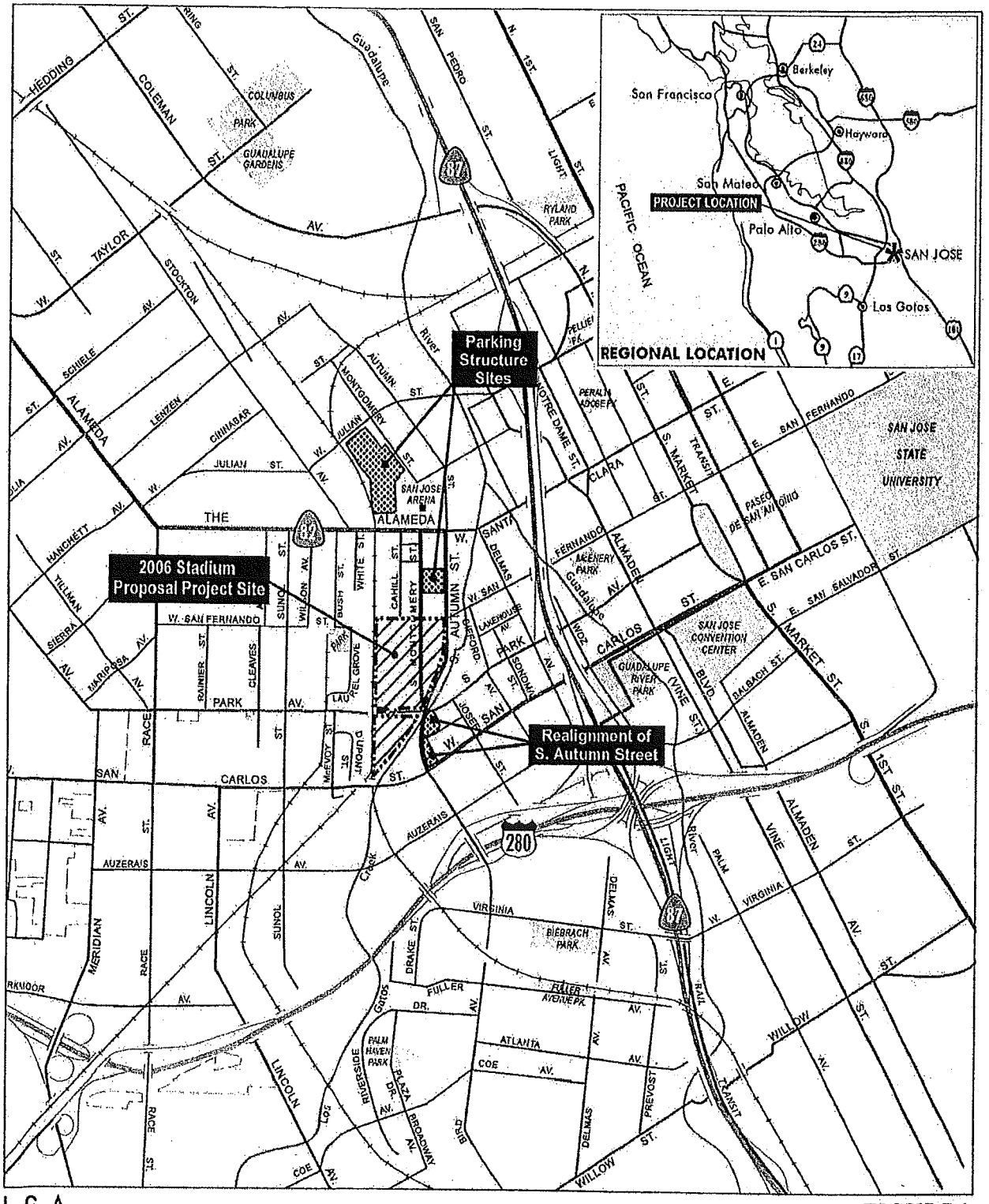
B. PROJECT LOCATION

The proposed modified project would be located in the Diridon Station Planning Area along the western edge of downtown San Jose in Santa Clara County. Figure 1 shows the project's regional location. The stadium and parking structure components of the proposed modified project would be constructed in the area generally bounded by Autumn Street, Bird Avenue and Los Gatos Creek to the east and south, railroad tracks to the west, and Julian Street to the north. Figures 2 and 3 show the stadium and parking structure components of the project in their local contexts.

Existing land uses in the project vicinity include a mix of single- and multi-family residential units, commercial, office, light industrial, and transit- or transportation-related land uses.

C. PROJECT BACKGROUND

In February 2007, the City certified an EIR for the Baseball Stadium in the Diridon/Arena Area Project (2006 Stadium Proposal). The 2006 Stadium Proposal consisted of the development of an approximately 1.5 million square-foot major league baseball stadium and a parking structure with ground floor commercial uses on approximately 23.1 acres in the City of San Jose. The 2006 Stadium Proposal included a maximum seating capacity of 45,000 and a maximum height of 165 feet, with scoreboards up to approximately 200 feet and lights approximately 235 feet above finished grade.



LSA

FIGURE 1

2006 STADIUM PROPOSAL PROJECT SITE

NEW SITES ADDED AS PART OF THE MODIFIED PROJECT

N

0 500 1600
FEET

Baseball Stadium in the Diridon/Arena Area Supplemental EIR

Project Site Location and Regional Vicinity

SOURCE: CALIFORNIA STATE AUTOMOBILE ASSN., 2005; LSA ASSOCIATES, INC., 2009

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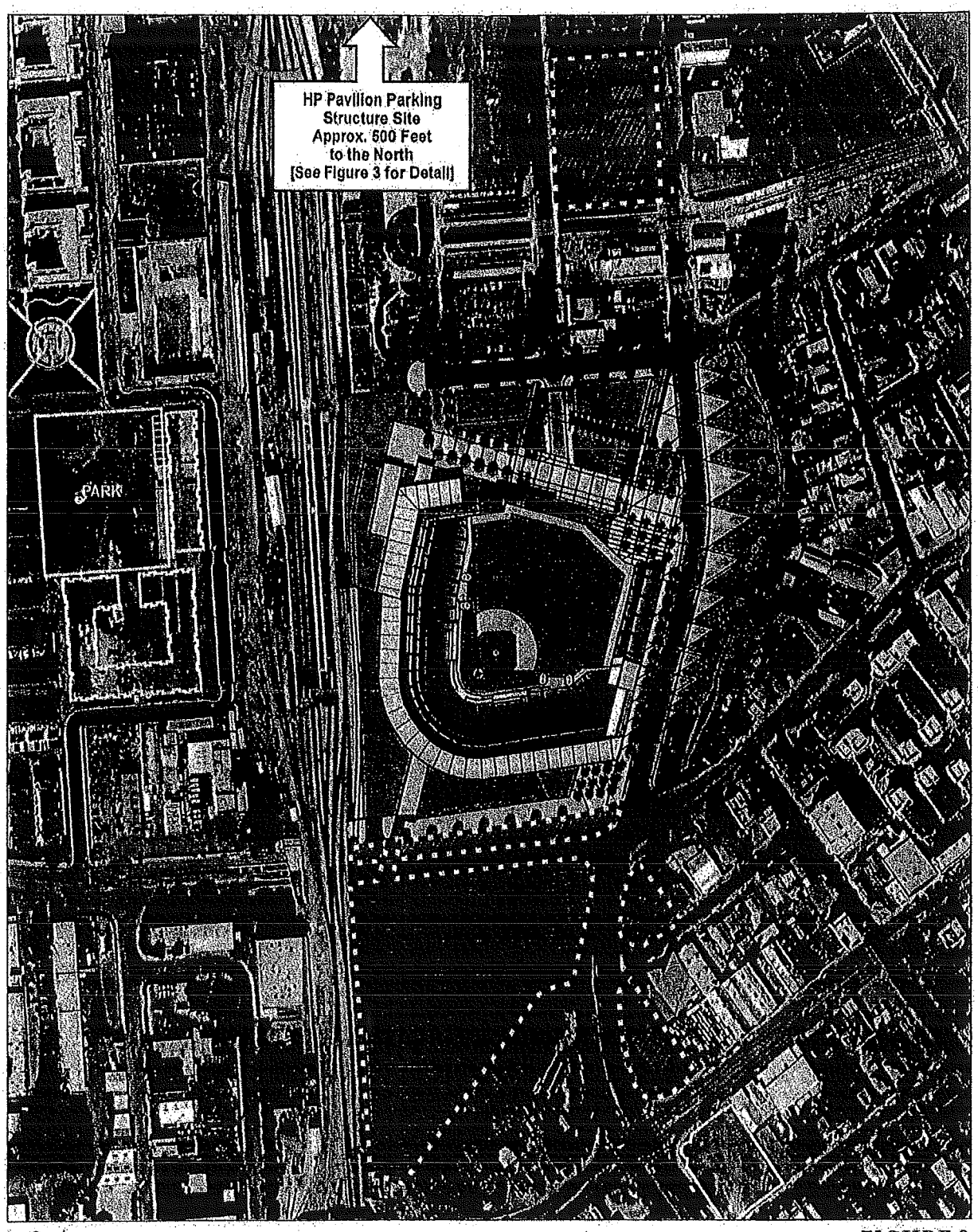

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FIGURE 2

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SITES ADDED AS PART OF THE MODIFIED PROJECT

SITE DELETED AS PART OF THE MODIFIED PROJECT

Baseball Stadium in the Diridon/Arena Area Supplemental EIR

Conceptual Site Plan

SOURCE: CITY OF SAN JOSE, REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY, 2006.

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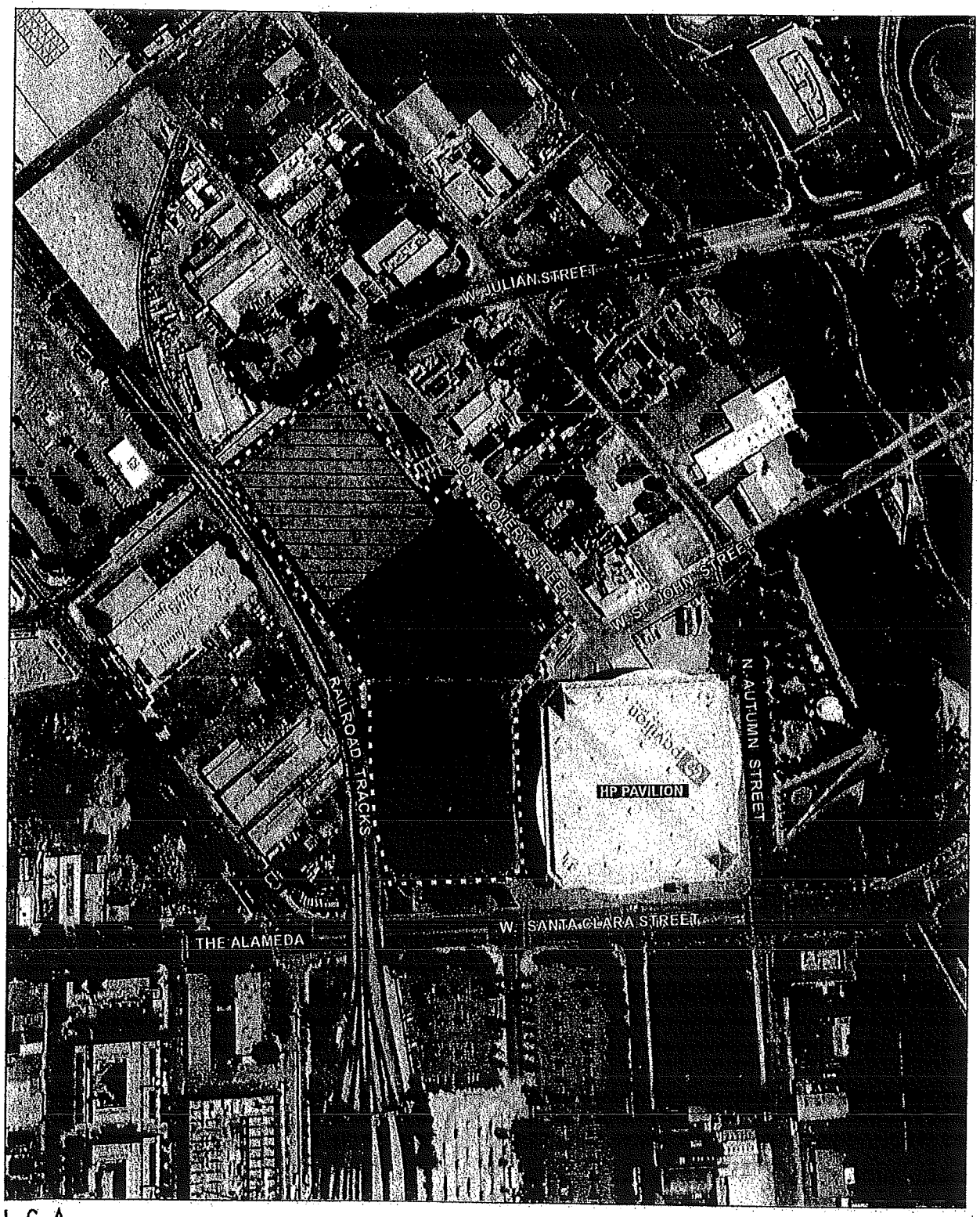

LSA

FIGURE 3

APPROXIMATE FOOTPRINT OF "SECOND-DECK" PARKING STRUCTURE

APPROXIMATE FOOTPRINT OF NORTHERN CONFIGURATION PARKING STRUCTURE

APPROXIMATE FOOTPRINT OF SOUTHERN CONFIGURATION PARKING STRUCTURE

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Baseball Stadium in the Diridon/Arena Area Supplemental EIR

HP Pavilion Parking Structure Site

SOURCE: GOOGLE EARTH; LSA ASSOCIATES, INC., 2009.

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In early 2009, the City began exploring the development of a modified stadium project. Key components of the modified project proposal that differ from the 2006 Stadium Proposal include: a smaller maximum seating capacity; relocation of the parking structure; an option to reposition the stadium to the south; and the realignment of South Autumn Street and South Montgomery Street near their intersection with Park Avenue.

D. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

A major league baseball stadium with a seating capacity of up to 36,000 would be constructed on the project site under the modified project proposal. A detailed plan for the modified project has not yet been prepared but the modified stadium would have a similar configuration and orientation to that proposed in 2006. The stadium would be located on the same site as proposed in 2006 or, as an option, may be shifted approximately 100 feet to the south. Repositioning the stadium to the south would require that Park Avenue be narrowed from four lanes to two between Autumn Street and the railroad tracks but would avoid the need to reconfigure a Pacific, Gas and Electric (PG&E) substation located on the northwest corner of the proposed stadium site.

Parking for the modified project would be provided in either existing parking lots or structures in the downtown San Jose area or within a new parking structure to be constructed at one of the locations shown in Figure 1. The area south of Park Avenue that was proposed as the site of a parking structure in the 2006 Stadium Proposal would not be developed under the modified project. This area would remain a Fire Training Facility. By not developing this site as a parking structure, its future development as a park as envisioned in the Midtown Specific Plan would not be precluded. Existing structures on the stadium and parking structure sites would be demolished or relocated.

The various components of the modified project are summarized below. Key differences between the 2006 Stadium Proposal and modified project are highlighted.

1. Baseball Stadium

The proposed baseball stadium would include baseball-related facilities, as well as associated restaurant and retail/commercial uses.

a. Baseball Facilities. The types of baseball-related facilities to be located within the proposed stadium would be the same for the modified project as for the 2006 Stadium Proposal. Baseball-related facilities would include the playing field, spectator facilities, food service and retail, home and visiting team facilities, press facilities, service and operation facilities, administrative facilities, on-site parking, loading docks, lighting/scoreboard, sound system, and public access and plazas. While square footages have not been calculated for the modified project they are expected to be the same as those calculated for the 2006 Stadium Proposal or possibly less because of the modified stadium's smaller seating capacity. Specifically, the square footages associated with spectator facilities and food services may be lower for the modified project than for the 2006 Stadium Proposal.

b. Baseball Stadium Uses. The proposed ballpark complex would be used for major league baseball games and associated activities, as well as events other than baseball. The proposed uses are the same for the modified project as for the 2006 Stadium Proposal.

2. Commercial Development South of Park Avenue

The commercial development south of Park Avenue that is envisioned as part of the 2006 Stadium Proposal would not be constructed as part of the modified project and the building on this area of the site, which houses a water pump, would not require relocation. Absent a parking structure, future development of the site as a park as envisioned in the Midtown Specific Plan would not be precluded.

3. Parking Facilities and Roadways

a. **Parking Facilities.** Parking for the modified project would be addressed under one of three options – a Montgomery/Autumn Street parking structure, an HP Pavilion parking structure, or a "no parking structure" option.

The Montgomery/Autumn Street parking structure would be located north of the proposed stadium on a site that is bounded by S. Montgomery Street to the west, S. Autumn Street to the east, the Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) light rail tunnel to the south and a parking lot to the north, as shown in Figure 2. The parking structure would include approximately 1,200 parking spaces – the same number as the 2006 Stadium Proposal – and would have up to eight levels of parking. Vehicle access and egress for the parking structure would be provided from S. Montgomery Street and S. Autumn Street. The ground floor of the parking structure would have commercial uses facing S. Montgomery Street and possibly S. Autumn Street.

The HP Pavilion parking structure would be located on the parking lot west of the HP Pavilion. The parking structure would increase the number of parking spaces in this area by approximately 1,300 to a total capacity of approximately 2,750 spaces. Three possible configurations are being considered for the parking structure on the HP Pavilion site. The three configurations include: 1) a four- to six-level parking structure at the south end of the parking lot on W. Santa Clara Street, 2) a five- to six-level parking structure located on the north end of the parking lot on W. Julian Street, and 3) the addition of a second deck of parking across the entire parking lot. Access and egress for the HP Pavilion parking lot may need to be modified with ramps within the HP Pavilion parking lot.

The no parking structure option would rely upon existing parking in downtown San Jose and not construct a parking structure as part of the modified project. If no parking structure is constructed as part of the project, vehicles would be accommodated by the approximately 21,072 parking spaces currently located within ¾ miles of the stadium site to the north and east.

b. **Roadways.** The same roadways that would be abandoned or realigned as part of the 2006 Stadium Proposal would be abandoned or realigned as part of the modified project. The proposed realignment and setback of S. Autumn Street are the same for the modified project as for the 2006 Stadium Proposal. In addition, if the stadium is shifted to the south, Park Avenue would be narrowed from four lanes to two between Autumn Street and the railroad tracks.

A series of transportation-related changes are planned for the S. Montgomery Street/S. Autumn Street corridor, either as background improvements (something already planned without the stadium) or as part of the stadium project. The proposed transportation-related uses are the same for the modified project as for the 2006 Stadium Proposal, except that the intersection of S. Autumn Street and S. Montgomery Street with Park Avenue would be modified. Realignment of the streets and modification of the intersection would require acquisition of three parcels (259-47-059, -068, and -080) on the east side of S. Montgomery Street, between Park Avenue and W. San Carlos Street.

4. PG&E Substation

Under the modified project the PG&E substation located adjacent to the railroad tracks on the northwest corner of the proposed stadium site would be reconfigured as previously described in the 2006 Stadium Proposal or would remain as it is if the stadium were shifted to the south.

5. Site Acquisition, Demolition/Relocation and Preparation

The Redevelopment Agency is in the process of working with individual property owners to purchase properties within the project site. To date 5 of 16 properties are owned or are in negotiations with the San Jose Redevelopment Agency.

The modified project would include the demolition or relocation of five buildings on the site of the proposed Montgomery/Autumn Street parking structure and two buildings on the parcels south of Park Avenue and east of S. Montgomery Street that are needed to allow realignment of S. Autumn Street. Both the 2006 Stadium Proposal and modified project would include the demolition or relocation of at least two known historic resources, the former KNTV Broadcast Facility located at 645 Park Avenue and the Sunlite Baking Company building located at 145 S. Montgomery Street. Both the 2006 Stadium Proposal and modified project would include the removal of 12 buildings south of San Fernando Street to Park Avenue and east of the railroad tracks to Los Gatos Creek, on the location of the proposed stadium. Removal of the Fire Training Center buildings south of Park Avenue and west of S. Montgomery would not be required under the modified project. Abandonment and demolition of a portion of Park Avenue would be required if the proposed stadium were shifted to the south.

Grading and excavation activities required for construction of the modified project would be the same as for the 2006 Stadium Proposal. The removal of ordinance-size trees would be required, although an estimated 11 fewer trees would be removed under the modified project than under the 2006 Stadium Proposal.

6. Project Construction and Schedule

If a City-sponsored ballot initiative were to be approved in November 2010, site preparation, infrastructure development and reconfiguration of the PG&E substation would begin in the spring of 2011. Opening day could be as early as April 2013.

7. Employment

Employment for the modified project would be slightly less than the 2006 Stadium Proposal due to the reduction in seating capacity of the stadium and the possibly smaller number of employees needed to operate and maintain the spectator and food service facilities.

E. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS TO BE ANALYZED IN THE SEIR

Based on its preliminary analysis, the City concludes that the modified project does not propose substantial changes to the Baseball Stadium in the Diridon/Arena Area Project; result in any new significant impacts or substantially increase the severity of previously identified impacts; or decline to adopt feasible mitigation measures or alternatives that would reduce identified significant impacts. In addition, most existing conditions have not substantially changed since the Baseball Stadium in the Diridon/Arena Area EIR was certified.

Given these circumstances alone, the modified project would not require preparation of an SEIR and would qualify for an addendum in accordance with CEQA Guidelines Section 15164. However, due to an error in the traffic data that were used in the previous traffic study for the 2006 Stadium Proposal the City has determined that it is necessary to update the traffic analysis for the modified project using corrected traffic data to disclose a new significant impact to freeways. In addition, because the effects of the project on global climate change were not analyzed in the previously certified EIR, the City has elected to address this issue in the SEIR. Therefore, the City will prepare an SEIR for the purpose of analyzing and disclosing the environmental impacts of the proposed revisions to the project on 1) traffic and 2) global climate change.

The results of the City's preliminary analysis of the modified project, in the form of an Initial Study checklist, will be included as an appendix to the SEIR. The Initial Study checklist will compare the environmental impacts of the modified project with those of the 2006 Stadium Proposal, providing analysis of whether the modified project would result in new significant environmental impacts for topics other than

traffic and global climate change. At this time the City has not identified any new significant impacts or previously identified impacts of substantially increased severity that would trigger the need for further analysis beyond these two issues. However, additional subjects may be added at a later date if new information comes to light.

1. Transportation

The SEIR will include a traffic analysis for the modified project that will conform to the City of San José's and the Santa Clara County Congestion Management Agency's (CMA) methodologies. The transportation analysis prepared for the SEIR will describe the existing roadway conditions, circulation patterns, parking conditions, and other elements (light rail, bus routes, etc.) of the transportation system in and around the site, including the local streets and intersections, regional facilities, and freeways. A transportation modeling analysis will be prepared in order to evaluate the long-term impacts of the modified project.

2. Global Climate Change

The SEIR will examine the potential for the modified project to result in global climate change impacts and will discuss the measures included in the modified project to minimize impacts and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

3. Alternatives

The SEIR will update the Alternatives analysis in the certified EIR. The modified project will be compared to the 2006 Stadium Proposal and the Alternatives presented in the certified EIR. The SEIR will identify the degree to which each alternative might reduce one or more of the project's impacts, whether or not the alternative could result in other or increased impacts, the viability of the alternative, and the degree to which the alternative is consistent with the project's goals and objectives. An "Environmentally Superior" Alternative will be identified.

4. Other Required Sections

The SEIR will also include other information typically required for an EIR. These other sections include the following: 1) Growth Inducing Impacts; 2) Significant, Unavoidable Impacts; 3) Significant Irreversible Environmental Changes; 4) References; and 5) EIR Authors.

The Mercury News
MercuryNews.com

A's stadium foes, supporters discuss revised proposal

By Tracy Seipel
tseipel@mercurynews.com

Posted: 12/17/2009 12:00:00 AM PST

Special Report

- Baseball in the South Bay

More on the Athletics

- **A's Forum:** Talk with fellow fans
- **A's special section:** More news, stats and video.

Though an A's ballpark in San Jose is still just an idea, the project's impact on residents and downtown traffic have already come under some fire.

A special San Jose City Hall meeting Wednesday night to discuss a revised environmental impact report brought out dozens of people, including supporters and a handful of critics from a new San Jose Giants-backed coalition opposed to any taxpayer money that might fund the ballpark.

San Jose Mayor Chuck Reed on Wednesday said he found the coalition's position "odd" considering that the city — which owns Municipal Stadium, where the minor league San Jose Giants play — has forked over almost $1 million in the past two years to pay for upgrades and repairs to the stadium. On Tuesday, the City Council, acting as the redevelopment agency board, signed off on $300,000 for electrical improvements at the stadium.

"They ought to know about the funding of the stadium because isn't that who this group is? Did they not notice the million dollars we spent on Muni Stadium? It's kind of funny," Reed noted. "But I don't expect people to be consistent when it gets to these political issues."

Jim Weyermann, president and chief executive of the San Jose Giants and a member of the coalition, said Municipal Stadium is a city asset that has not had major repairs over the decades. He said the team has spent more than $2 million of its own money on repairs.

"We have an obligation to ensure that the facility is safe and accessible to all the fans. And the city is also responsible for that, per our lease," he said.

An Oakland A's spokesman declined Wednesday to comment on the coalition.

The issue of a ballpark remains hypothetical for now. Oakland's A's owner Lew Wolff wants to move the team to San Jose, but the San Francisco Giants own the territorial rights to the area and refuse to relinquish them.

The decision lies with Major League Baseball Commissioner Bug Selig, who has appointed a committee to study the A's options. That committee has met with San Jose officials, but its members won't say when they expect their work to be finished. It would also take a vote of three-quarters of baseball's big league owners to terminate the Giants' territorial rights and allow the A's to move to San Jose.

San Francisco Giants Vice President Staci Slaughter

The Mercury News
MercuryNews.com

said the team supports the coalition and will continue to do so. But she added that much of the coalition's funding will come from its own fundraising efforts.

"We have a minority interest in the San Jose Giants, and we support the coalition's effort to understand the full economic and environmental impact of a major league ballpark in San Jose," she said.

Wednesday's meeting was meant to show the public how much the project proposal has changed since 2006, when the first stadium proposal was submitted. Planners also are seeking feedback on the environmental report.

Todd Smith, the attorney for the opposition coalition, Stand for San Jose, filed a nine-page letter with the city that challenged the planners' revised report. Among other issues, he said the report fails to take into account traffic on Interstate 880 as A's fans travel south from Alameda and Contra Costa counties.

A 2006 environmental impact report was based on a 45,000-seat stadium and parking structure envisioned on 23.1 acres.

But a modified ballpark proposal announced by city officials in early September reduced the project to 14 acres and seating to 36,000. More acreage would be added depending on which parking structure option is selected.

There are key differences in the new plan, according to the latest report. The ballpark's parking structure would be relocated; there is an option to reposition the stadium; and South Autumn and South Montgomery streets near their intersections with Park Avenue would be realigned.

Planners say repositioning the stadium 100 feet south would require that Park Avenue be narrowed from four lanes to two between Autumn Street and the railroad tracks. But doing so would avoid the need to reconfigure a PG&E substation on the northwest corner of the proposed stadium site. The substation could also be reconfigured as described in the 2006 stadium proposal.

Parking for the modified project would be addressed under one of three options; a Montgomery/Autumn Street parking structure, an HP Pavilion parking structure or no parking structure at all.

Because the 2006 report underestimated ballpark congestion on a segment of Interstate 280 between Highway 87 and 10th Street, planners said the city will need to correct that portion of the report.

The supplemental report also takes into account how the construction and use of the ballpark would affect global warming, an issue not considered in 2006.

The final report is expected to be finished in early 2010.

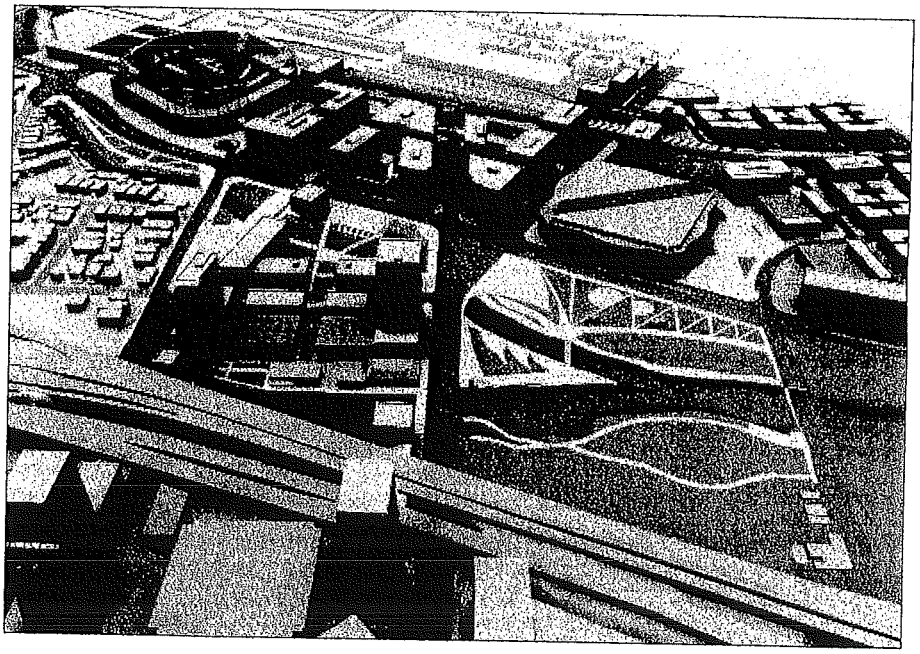
Contact Tracy Seipel at 408 275-0140.

Advertisement

Station plans 87 feet high

Engineers for the future high-speed rail project expected to stop at Diridon Station are recommending that the rail lines be built over existing Caltrain, Union Pacific and ACE Train tracks. On Dec. 3, staff reported to the California High Speed Rail Authority Board its decision to eliminate the option to put the high-speed rail corridor underground.

The San Jose Downtown Association has requested that the City Council get involved in this state-level decision, which will have a profound effect on the look of the city in the event the rail lines are built. SJDA believes more study of the feasibility of underground rail lines is necessary.



This schematic of downtown between Highway 87 and Diridon Station shows ground-level rail tracks.

The rail staff proposes tracks and station structures as high as nine stories. At the Diridon Station, the barrier to downtown from western neighborhoods will be 87 feet tall, a half-mile long and almost a football field wide.

In SJDA's view, downtown investment is at risk from such a massive structure. Likewise, the Council-created Diridon Good Neighbor Committee unanimously opposed abandonment of the underground option at its meeting Dec. 7.

"We have worked hard creating a friendly and inviting downtown and invested too much the past three decades to construct a 'Berlin Wall' type of thing that closes downtown off to our Midtown neighbors," said **Henry Cord**, SJDA's representative on the committee. "The city may want to hire its own independent geologists and engineers for a second opinion, as Palo Alto has done."

The high-speed rail, which will shuttle passengers between Los Angeles and San Francisco in less than three hours, is designed to be underground in those two transportation hubs.

While the state makes its plans, the city makes plans for the next 25 years to expand the downtown core in the area around the train station. It recently received schematics for the area from the Harvard University Graduate School of Design. The models include a baseball stadium and rail lines at ground level.

Transportation officials project that the Diridon Station by 2030 will serve 4.1 million high-speed rail riders and 2.7 million Caltrain riders annually.

MEETINGS TO DISCUSS HIGH-SPEED RAIL IN SAN JOSE

What: California High Speed Rail Authority leaders will hold an open house on routes from the Diridon Station south to Merced.

When: 6 to 8 p.m., Tuesday

Where: Roosevelt Community Center, 901 E. Santa Clara St.

What: California High Speed Rail Authority leaders will give a presentation on possible routes from Diridon Station north to the Santa Clara County line.

When: 6 p.m., Thursday

Where: Bellarmine College Preparatory, Liccardo Center, 960 W. Hedding St. Signs will direct participants to parking and the venue.

Information: www.cahighspeedrail.ca.gov/library.asp?p=8281

tions for alignments into and from downtown. The authority's engineers said laying the track underground would be too expensive because of loose soil, a high groundwater table and the need to dig under a proposed BART tunnel that also would stop at Diridon Station.

Rod Diridon said Thursday that the estimated cost — at least $2 billion for the two miles of tunnel — is five to seven times more expensive than the average cost per mile of the system built above ground.

Still, the decision to keep studying the option is another step in the rail authority's quest to navigate the politics challenging the bullet trains. The board also is considering routing trains through tunnels or trenches along parts of the Peninsula, although that too would be much more expensive than elevated or surface-level tracks.

The alternative routes will be evaluated as part of an environmental review expected to be completed in 2011.

In related news, the rail authority's executive director, Mehdi Morshed, announced at Thursday's board meeting that he will retire at the end of March.

The 72-year-old said he wants to spend more time with his grandchildren. And after working on the high-speed rail project for the past 11 years, he said, it's time to move on.

As for fears of a nine-story structure bisecting downtown San Jose, Diridon said the elevated train track's highest point would occur only over the Highway 87-Interstate 280 interchange. Otherwise, he said, its height would come down to about 40 feet, stacked above the existing Caltrain track in and out of the rail station that bears his name.

Among others pleased by the board's decision was Henry Cord, who represents the Downtown Association on the Good Neighbor Committee.

"What we don't want to occur is building a structure that in 30 years we say is the worst thing we did, and now we have to tear it down," Cord said. "If it's not possible to go underground, then we have to find a solution about how it could work above ground."

Bay Area News Group staff writer Stephen Baxter contributed to this report. Contact Tracy Seipel at 408 275-0140.

HIGH-SPEED RAIL

Tunnel through downtown S.J. still a possibility

Outcry over 87-foot-high track spurs agency board to keep alternative alive

By Tracy Seipel
tseipel@mercurynews.com

Imagine an 87-foot-tall viaduct looming over downtown San Jose, zipping trains through the heart of the city en route to San Francisco or Los Angeles.

ONLINE EXTRA
For more on the plan, go to www.mercurynews.com/california-high-speed-rail.

San Jose residents and city officials are starting to wake up to that reality, and a growing chorus is worried about what it would mean.

Neighborhood activists and the city's Downtown Association have teamed up to decry what they say are "track and station structures as high as nine stories" that would divide the city's core from nearby neighborhoods like Willow Glen.

Officials with the state's High Speed

See RAIL, Page 19

Rail

Continued from Page 1

Rail Authority are trying to tamp down the furor, saying only a small portion of the tracks might reach that height — and even then, only under one configuration being weighed.

But on Thursday, after a request from San Jose Mayor Chuck Reed and two city councilmen, rail authority board member Rod Diridon said the board will keep alive — for now — a proposal to bring the tracks into downtown via an underground tunnel.

Just last month, Diridon cited engineers' reports to dismiss the idea as far too costly. And he and Reed both acknowledge that the odds against a downtown tunnel remain long.

A similar controversy has been playing out for months on the Peninsula, where many residents who voted to support the rail project say they didn't realize the superfast trains likely would run on a 20-foot elevated track.

But the debate over how high-speed rail could change the landscape has only recently picked up momentum in San Jose.

Reed and Councilmen Sam Liccardo and Pierluigi Oliverio, who represent the neighborhoods through which the trains most likely will run, got into the action Wednesday, asking the rail authority to keep studying the underground option.

That option had been favored by a Good Neighbor Committee of residents and entities such as the Downtown Association chosen to help plan for changes in the neighborhoods surrounding Diridon Station — including high-speed rail, a Bay Area Rapid Transit station and, perhaps, a major-league baseball stadium.

Yet even as Reed called the rail board's Thursday decision "good news," his letter seemed to recognize the challenges facing a tunnel.

"We do not presume an underground option will prove to be the most feasible," Reed wrote, "nor do we overlook the extraordinary costs that an underground option poses."

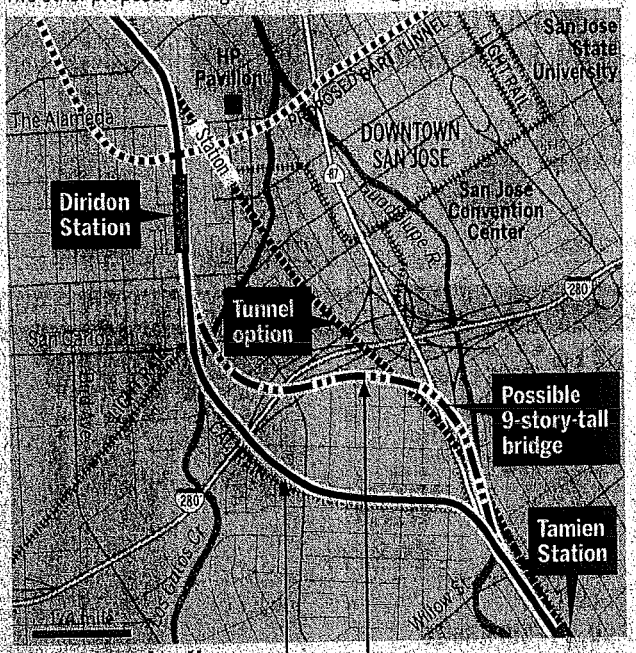
In an interview, Reed told the Mercury News, "We need to get the facts, and the way you get the facts is to do the analysis."

The $45 billion bullet-train plan, supported by bonds that state voters approved in 2008 with Proposition 1A, is projected to run trains from San Francisco to Los Angeles in 2 hours and 40 minutes, beginning in 2020.

The authority's board last month reviewed several op-

Underground tunnel back in play

Planners would continue to study bringing high-speed rail trains into downtown San Jose through an underground tunnel and into a new station. Two other proposed configurations would bring trains in above ground.



Aboveground options

North of Caltrain tracks: Two new tracks north and east of existing Caltrain/Union Pacific tracks, which would be moved south and west.

Highway 87/I-280: Aerial alignment, no tunnel; uses 87/280 right of way. At one point, bridge over Hwy. 87 might near 90 feet in height.

Source: California High Speed Rail Authority

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