

Butler, Lee

From: Crabtree, Andrew
Sent: Wednesday, March 17, 2010 9:06 AM
To: Baty, John; Butler, Lee; Walton, Susan
Subject: FW: thoughts on the Ohlone Project
Attachments: kids on sculpture.jpg; Norwegian Plaza.jpg; P5190055 Pasadena plaza.jpg; Pasadena Plaza.jpg

From: LAmes@aol.com [mailto:LAmes@aol.com]
Sent: Tuesday, March 16, 2010 10:26 PM
To: mvanevery@republic-urban.com
Cc: Brilliot, Michael; Crabtree, Andrew; SJ-D6NL@yahoogroups.com; info@greenrepublicsj.com; lawrence.ames@lmco.com
Subject: thoughts on the Ohlone Project

March 16, 2010

Michael VanEvery, VP of Development, Republic Urban Properties
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cc: Envision 2040 Taskforce; D6 Nghbrhd Group

re: Ohlone Project

Hi, Michael,

I just wanted to say "Thanks!" inviting me to the interactive discussion a few weeks ago at the Korean Palace to discuss the Ohlone Project. It was an interesting exercise, and I heard the community provide a lot of honest and supportive input.

Repeating what I'm sure I (and others) have said many times, we are pleased to see the Midtown region of San Jose being developed, and we look forward to the new residents joining (and enjoying) our community. We're glad that they want to live here, and also that they are not residing out in some distant suburb and just driving through our neighborhoods en-route to employment elsewhere. That said, we do want the Ohlone Project to be done "right", and for it to "belong" in our neighborhood. The Midtown region of San Jose is (or at least is intended to be) a lively and vibrant area: we don't want a boring collection of domino-like boxy buildings at the heart of it -- we want something with "character"!

At the meeting, I mentioned to you that I was familiar with comparable projects, such as the new project in Oslo, Norway, where my father-in-law lived. (You can read about the project -- in Norwegian -- at www.nybydel.no.) The project is a collection of (short) housing towers, a little smaller in size and density than the Ohlone. The project is part of in a redeveloping region, comparable in size and background to the Midtown Study Area: it is an old army base a couple miles

from downtown, in an industrial area and across the street from the sausage factory, fairly close to a transit station.

The housing towers complex has retail at ground level (see accompanying photos):

- a grocery store: not just a Quick-E-Mart, but a full-service one with fresh veggies and meats, a bakery, and a take-out deli with prepared meals;
- a “paper products” store (stationary, gift-items, cards, candles, magazines, ...);
- a florist;
- a pharmacy;
- and a couple restaurants: not just a burger stand, and not an overly high-and-fancy place, but decent and rather unique places that could serve both the residents and attract outside customers;

all fronting on a small plaza, with sculpture and outdoor seating for the restaurants.

The stores do good business, even with the equivalent of a Pak-n-Save just two blocks away, as they serve not only the tower complex, but the adjacent developments as well -- much as Ohlone can serve the KB Homes Monte Vista development and the other sites planned or built in Midtown. When visiting, it was quite pleasant to take the elevator down each morning, pick up a fresh croissant or muffin, and return to the flat to enjoy breakfast with the family.

Several other features of the project that I liked, and which I feel would be appropriate for Ohlone as well:

- The project has a roof-top “viewing deck”, to provide residents a place in the sun (when it wasn’t raining!) and views of the vista. (Okay, they have views of the Oslo fjord, whereas the Ohlone will have choice views of freeway interchanges and train tracks, but there are nice mountains in the distance...);
- There is pay parking (first hour free) beneath for store customers, and a separate section of parking reserved for residents;
- There is a “common room” -- a sunny place that serves waffles to the residents on Thursdays, and where folks can meet for coffee in the morning, surf the internet (it had a couple PCs), and read the paper. It also has a banquet room and an adjacent kitchen area connected to the commons, which residents can rent for events (such as my father-in-law’s 90th birthday bash);
- There is a private courtyard, with a small play structure for the kids, adjacent to a patio that opens off the common room; and
- The project has a couple guest-rooms that residents can rent by the day for when they have out-of-town visitors.

The site as a whole has a decent-sized park, with open space, play structure, and artwork/sculpture that was designed to invite folks to climb up on. This park is next to an old hall, a historic structure that had been part of the army base, preserved and restored, and which is now used for cultural events such as concerts. There is a nearby daycare/preschool.

I think it may be that the entire Norwegian project -- towers, hall, park, retail, and adjacent housing complexes, is all being done by a single developer, whereas the Midtown Site is being developed by several different groups. The single developer has the advantage of knowing how the whole project will piece together, and of knowing how to balance housing with retail and parkland. For Midtown, it was for the City and the Community to work on the “vision of the whole”, and to determine where the retail goes and what is to be parkland. This is why you may sense a level of apprehension and distrust from the community: we fear that you will come in and say “forget the planning; housing is more

profitable; I'm going to build what I want and let someone else be stuck with the less profitable portions of the project." (And we have been burnt in the past: the first developer in Midtown said "forget 'walkable': we're going to build a block-long blank wall and a drive-through burger-stand"; elsewhere in San Jose we've been promised a park in exchange for accepting a high-rise tower, only to be told afterwards that "oh gee, the price of concrete went up, but if you let us build two additional towers, we promise to build the park that we had promised to build in the first place".) It is not your fault, but I'm afraid you will have to work to overcome our fears and prejudices that are based upon our past experiences.

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Unrelatedly,

Transit is critical for a successful Transit-Oriented-Development like Ohlone. (I think we may have mentioned this in passing...!) I notice that a few years ago the VTA added another in-fill station, this one at Moffett Park in Sunnyvale. Perhaps you can check your contacts in the development community and find out how much they had to pay to get that station developed.

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On a final note: while I've been going on about the Norwegian project, the U.S. can also do projects well, such as a lively project (with character) in downtown Pasadena. (I'm including some photos.) And the U.S. does do a number of things better, such as handicap accessibility, and parking lots (those Norwegian lots were awkward to maneuver around, and one had to get out of the car -- in the rain -- to push a door-open button!)

Along the lines of accessibility: while this may not apply directly to the Ohlone project, it is relevant to other new projects in the area and across San Jose: please design the homes so that they are appropriate for a range of ages and abilities. As has been mentioned at the Envision 2040 meetings, there will be a significant increase in the "advanced youth" population in the near future. My wife and I recently toured some of the model homes in the Midtown area, and, while they were quite elegant, we wouldn't want to purchase any of them: they were "row-houses" spanning two or three levels, with parking below (on a fourth level). While we can manage the stairs quite well now (and may benefit from the exercise), by the time the mortgage is paid off, there'd be a fair-to-middling chance that one or the other of us might be unable to navigate those stairs. I appreciate the desire to avoid having overhead neighbors, and the multi-story developments were nicely designed and constructed. And while I know it would not be practical to have an elevator in each unit, what I would like to propose is that there be a common, private, service elevator. Each unit could have a lockable door from each level to a private central service-way. Normally, one would use their own internal stairways, as now, but if someone had, say, a broken hip, they would not have to move away from their home: instead, they could go out the door on one level, take the common elevator up to the other level, and then reenter their home: they could still have full access to their home -- including the bedroom and the kitchen -- and would not have to live out their lives on the living room sofa. (Also, such a common elevator would make the delivery of furniture much easier!) So, again, I ask that you talk with your developer friends and pass along this idea.

I look forward to continuing to work with you on best fitting the Ohlone project into the Midtown area, and also to working with you on the Envision 2040 General Plan Update.

Let me know if I can answer any questions -- I have a lot more photos of Norway I could share!

~Larry Ames
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p.s.: I'm cc'ing the Envision 2040 Task Force, since the Ohlone project could be a prototype of the future developments in San Jose. I also cc the D6 Nghbrhd Group, which is a collection of community leaders from the area most affected by the Ohlone.



