

MINUTES APPROVED AT THE PC MEETING ON April 18, 2024

PLANNING COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING COUNCIL CHAMBERS, RICHMOND CITY HALL

Council Chambers
November 16, 2023
6:30 p.m.

COMMISSION MEMBERS

David Tucker, Chair	Jen Loy	Vacant
Jonathan Harrison, Vice Chair	Alpa Agarwal	
Bruce Brubaker, Secretary	Aaron He	

The regular meeting was called to order by Chair Tucker at 6:30 p.m.

ROLL CALL

Present: Chair Tucker; Vice Chair Jonathan Harrison; Secretary Bruce Brubaker; Commissioner Aaron He

Absent: Commissioner Jen Loy; Commissioner Alpa Agarwal

INTRODUCTIONS

Staff Present: Planning Staff: Community Development Director Lina Velasco, Planning Manager Hector Rojas and Attorney James Atencio

MINUTES – October 5, 2023

ACTION: It was M/S/C (Brubaker, Harrison) to approve October 5, 2023 draft meeting minutes, which carried by the following vote: 3-0-3 (Ayes: Brubaker, Harrison, He; Noes: None; Abstain: Tucker Absent: Loy, Agarwal).

[The Commission moved to the Consent Calendar]

AGENDA

CONSENT CALENDAR –

Chair Tucker said there were no Consent Calendar items on the Agenda.

[The Commission moved to the Brown Act]

BROWN ACT – Public Forum

No Public Comments for Non-Agenda items.

ACTION: It was M/S/C (Harrison, Brubaker) to Close the Public Forum, which carried by the following vote: 4-0-2 (Ayes: Tucker, Brubaker, Harrison, He; Noes: None; Absent: Loy, Agarwal).

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[The Commission moved to New Business]

NEW BUSINESS

- 1. PLN23-206: Chevron Modernization Project Annual Compliance Report** PRESENTATION on the Chevron Refinery Modernization Project Annual Compliance Report pursuant to Condition Of Approval H5 Of Conditional Use Permit PLN11-089 at 841 Chevron Way/100 Chevron Way (APNs: 561-030-001; 561-030-002; 561-030-003; 561-030-005; 561-040-013; 561-040-014; 561-040-015; 561-040-016; 561-040-017; 561-080-001; 561-080-002; 561-080-003; 561-080-005; 561-080-006; 561-080-007; 561-090-003; 561-090-004; 561-100-003; 561-100-009; 561-100-010; 561-100-017; 561-110-020; 561-100-025; 561-100-037; 561-100-038; 561-100-042; 561-100-043; 561-100-044; 561-100-047; 561-100-048; 561-100-049; 561-110-022; 561-100-029; 561-110-034; 561-110-035; 561-110-036; 561-110-041; 561-110-044; 561-390-001; 561-390-003; 561-390-004; 561-390-016; 561-400-008; 561-410-002; 561-410-003). IG, Industrial, General District.
Chevron USA Inc, owner;
Chevron Products Company, A Division of Chevron USA Inc, applicant
Planner: Lina Velasco

Chair Tucker announced that New Business Item 1 is being held over to the new year to a date certain of January 18, 2024 and there will be no discussion at this meeting.

NEW ITEMS

- 2. PLN23-344: Hilltop Horizon Specific Plan** STUDY SESSION to present and receive Planning Commission comments on initial concept alternatives for the Hilltop Horizon Specific Plan (HHSP) area. The purpose of HHSP will be to guide development of an approximately 143-acre site that consists of the Hilltop Regional Shopping Mall and areas immediately surrounding it to the south and east. The plan area is within the Hilltop Priority Development Area (PDA) and is generally situated south of Richmond Parkway, between San Pablo Avenue and Interstate-80 (APNs: 405-290-068-7; 405-290-069-5; 405-290-070-3; 405-290-071-1; 405-302-010-5; 405-302-014-7; 405-302-016-2; 405-302-017-0; 405-302-018-8; 405-302-019-6; 405-303-003-9; 405-303-011-2; 405-303-012-0; 405-303-013-8; 405-303-015-3; 405-304-002-0; 405-320-001-2; 405-320-004-6; 405-320-005-3; 405-320-006-1; 405-320-007-9; 405-320-008-7; 405-320-009-5; 405-320-010-3; 405-320-011-1; 405-320-012-9; 405-320-013-7; 405-320-015-2; 405-320-016-0; 405-320-017-8). CM-5, Commercial Mixed-Use, Activity Center and CR Commercial, Regional District.

Chair Tucker introduced Item 2 as a study session held for Commission comments on initial concept alternatives for the Hilltop Horizon Specific Plan (HHSP) area. The purpose of HHSP will be to guide development of an approximately 143-acre site that consists of the Hilltop Regional Shopping Mall and areas immediately surrounding it to the south and east. The plan area is within the Hilltop Priority Development Area (PDA) and is generally situated south of Richmond Parkway, between San Pablo Avenue and Interstate-80.

Commissioner Aaron Le recused himself from the study session due to potential conflict of interest with his employer doing design work for a property in the plan area.

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Chair Tucker stated that was at the advice of City Attorney Atencio and welcomed Commissioner Aaron He to the Planning Commission and announced that he was appointed by City Council in the previous week.

Commissioner He stated it was a pleasure to serve the City and residents of Richmond and that his background includes working in planning, with a degree in engineering.

Planning Manager Hector Rojas provided background on the Hilltop Horizon Specific Plan (HHSP) process which was initiated to help guide future development of the Hilltop Regional Shopping Mall and areas immediately surrounding it to the south and east. During the last two years the City has had several community outreach events. Mr. Rojas stated the City's presentation will summarize the input received thus far and the land use concepts that have been developed based on public outreach. The target outcome for this meeting is to receive feedback on what the Commission might like or dislike from each of those land use concepts. On December 5, 2024 that feedback will be presented to City Council for their feedback and the Specific Plan team will create and develop a proposed Land Use Vision for the plan area. That vision will be brought back to the Planning Commission and the City Council for confirmation at a later date. From there the Specific Plan team would begin drafting the Specific Plan document and conducting the appropriate level of environment review. The applicant on the project is the City of Richmond. Prologis and Signature Development Group are key stakeholders as they own the largest contiguous piece of property in the plan area. Planning Manager Rojas listed the consultants being used and introduced Bev Choi with ESA.

ESA Consultant Bev Choi provided an overview of how the different plans have progressed and the feedback received during the community outreach. As previously explained in the timeline provided for the project, the ultimate goal is to have the adoption hearings of the plan document towards the end of 2024 or early 2025. Existing conditions reports and market analysis have been completed. Key planning drivers that have surfaced include attracting new businesses, create entertainment opportunities, create more housing choices, promote new land uses that stimulate the local economy, promote mixed land uses, promote safety, promote employment opportunities, emphasize community sustainability, and enhance mobility connections.

SITELAB Urban Studio designer Woody Hanson continued the presentation and explained the concept alternatives and the progression of those. The community would like to see growing neighborhoods that are also a destination for new neighbors, new businesses, and visitors where they can belong, connect, and share. This has to be met with safety, employment opportunities, sustainability resiliency that also contain clear and intuitive mobility connections. Initial conversations with Walmart have indicated they are not currently interested in relocating. Landowner concept alternatives have started to evolve with a concentration on near term feasibility and accommodating more of the community and stakeholder input that has been received which has synchronized more the developers concepts as well as the city's. Some of the consistencies include a mix of land uses, clear housing opportunities, retail opportunities, parks and open space and enhanced mobility connectivity.

Bev Choi, ESA, explained the differences in the concept alternatives which include employment, retail and housing and summarized some of the results from the outreach surveys. Preferences in Employment and Industrial uses that have surfaced for the near term include mixed-use office, healthcare and research and development; smaller scaled mixed-use office and speculative office space were desired more so in the middle and long term planning of the site. Currently the mixed use classification does not allow for limited industrial however, manufacturing and research and development (R&D) can already occur through conditional use

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permits and/or limitations. Survey results indicate the community would like to see priority given to affordable housing and “for sale” residential in the near term, multifamily in the medium term with higher density housing in the longer term of 15+ years. There was general support for increasing density providing the proper amenities are also in place.

Staff is looking to receive Commission comments on the development timeline, which employment uses would be the least desirable in the Hilltop Plan area, what style of new retail is most desirable for HHSP, if the Commission would support a reduction to the density CM-5 zone to spur residential development, and whether the Commission would support an increase to the density maximum in the CR-zoned properties in order to spur residential development.

Chair Tucker opened Public Comment for the item and suggested leaving the four questions on screen for reference.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Corey Riley, resident of Hilltop Green, thanked the Commission for continuing with hybrid meetings and gave a brief history of his experience with the project and believed they should make changes to the plan in a cautious way and expressed his support for higher density and more retail in a walkable environment. Parks, green space, and transportation should be at the forefront of discussions as the area is transitioned into residential.

Athan Magganas, business owner in Hilltop Plaza, does not support a reduction in density, however the Commission should be mindful not to oversell mixed use and affordable housing. There is already affordable housing in Richmond, as well as warehouse industrial space. More industrial and warehouse space would not be successful due to competition because of what is already in place and currently vacant.

Bhavin Khatri, President of the Hilltop District Neighborhood Council and Summer Lane Homeowners Association (HOA), is in favor of reducing the density as the area is not in need of an enormous amount of housing. Several neighborhoods are already in place and there is a lack of places to dine and shop. The focus should be to add more retail and entertainment and open space in the area and the current residents would like to see this more in the short term. It would be a good place for higher density housing once proper transit facilities are in place.

Don Gosney emphasized that the project at Hilltop needs to be one that benefits everyone in the area and not just the residents in close proximity to the area plan. They need to bring in something that helps to create jobs, tax revenue and someplace where folks can shop. There has to be a balance between recreation and what will actually benefit residents already in place. Elected officials should not be who decides what is built on the site. The taxpayers should choose. Housing is needed, but jobs and places to shop need to be in place for the residents who will fill that new housing.

Sherice Sharpe, resident of the Summer Lane community, was curious about the market analysis as the way the data was put together and the input while doing so was not shared. The outskirts areas would be a good place for higher density as the businesses in that area have not received the walking traffic that is needed for them to be successful. The mall area should have more single family homes with duplexes and townhomes. More open space is needed; however, the mall space is not large enough for any large outdoor activity space such as soccer or football fields. Grocery stores are not needed, there are already several. The plan in Fitzgerald

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has been very successful, she'd like to see warehouses that are reconfigured for residential space and boutique retail.

Mike Ghielmetti, president of Signature Development Group, commented that they are partnering with Prologis for the potential redevelopment of the Hilltop Mall. The city's consultants did a great job of explaining the background of the project, and explained they've been attending the community outreach meetings and listening to the feedback they've been receiving. When it was apparent the scope would be broadened for the HHSP, they recognized it and are in concurrence with the notion of a broader use of mixed use and are very encouraged with doing it in the time frame that is economically feasible in the near-term. They would like to be participatory with the city and the next generation of citizens in what that area may look like. Thank you to the Commission for their time and City staff for their work.

Chair Tucker brought the item back to the Commission questions and discussion.

Secretary Brubaker inquired if the Housing Element had designated plans for the site. Planning Manager Rojas explained that in the sixth cycle of the Housing Element, the site was not included in the vacant sites under the utilized sites survey and did not assume development. However, in looking forward based on the rate of production of housing in the city, this site could be a huge opportunity that could help contribute to the RHNA production numbers. Secretary Brubaker confirmed that the Summer Lane residential community were townhomes and seemed like an appropriate density and wondered if their density was known. Community Development Director Lina Velasco stated she would have to confirm it, but thought it was in the high twenties of dwelling units per acre.

Commissioner Harrison asked if the green open space to the east side of the mall was dedicated to open space in the HHSP, he did not see it included in any of the plans and it has the best freeway visibility of any of it. Community Development Director Velasco responded that the area just south of the Century movie theaters is a very steep ravine that is used as a drainage ditch. It is not publicly accessible and owned as part of the Century Theater property. Commissioner Harrison inquired if any type of analysis was done as part of retail viability because of the visibility from the freeway. Ms. Velasco stated they have not yet done that level of analysis; the city still owns the easement that had the signage for the mall so potentially they could add signage if it is redeveloped as retail. SITELAB Urban Studio designer Woody Hanson added that visibility has been considered in the context of topography however they have not done a detailed analysis. Bev Choi, ESA, explained that in the presentation they were starting to add some of the high level findings from the analysis which pointed to the potential for certain types of uses and dependent on if there was some type of critical mass. Stephanie Hagar, BAE Urban Economics, stated there is no concrete formula used in determining the density needed to support x number of square feet of retail, but it does seem that having additional residential in the area is a necessary component of supporting the technical retail development that people are wanting to see. Seeing marketable retail development would also support potential residential development. Having walkable retail has increased favorability whereas the idea of going to the mall has decreased significantly over time.

Chair Tucker inquired about the market study and if the income level was considered when determining the amount of residential would be needed to support retail development of that area. Stephanie Hagar, BAE Urban Economics, responded that in terms of income they found that some uses such as regional entertainment uses often require incomes that are generally higher than what has been seen in the Hilltop area currently. Precisely what that income would need to be does not have a specific formula to make that determination. They would look at

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draws from both the region and locally to acquire viability of retail space and believe a mix of income levels would help support retail in the area. Chair Tucker asked if the notifications that were sent out for the outreach meetings and study sessions were multi-lingual. Planning Manager Rojas stated he wasn't sure if the demographic ethnicity was tracked during the workshops. There were demographic questions that were included. Notifications were sent out to everyone within five-hundred-feet of the project plan boundary. They did receive feedback from Commissioner Agarwal who said she did not receive notification; however, she was outside of that five-hundred-foot range. Staff are able to adjust the notification range moving forward if needed. Chair Tucker suggested that the radius should be extended, particularly going towards the college where there may be potential traffic impacts as the HHSP is developed.

Commissioner Harrison commented he finds that in regard to the timeline, getting anything done in five years seems very optimistic, they should focus their attention on what they can get done in ten years. That is a big area that they are looking to completely redevelop and that is a huge undertaking. Six to ten years seems more appropriate for when folks will start to see significant changes. The way the priorities have been laid out, is fine, however they should develop the housing with the other uses for a more combined mixed result and combine the timelines for both. He's glad that it was recognized that Walmart was in place, particularly since they have since decided to stay. The retail concept with the nine acres around the Walmart makes the most sense, it gives almost enough land to create an area similar to downtown. As that space is developed, his hope is they would attempt to work with Walmart to change their parking lot into possibly a parking structure that would serve both facilities for future use, that is likely Phase 3 or 4 of the project but would need to be considered sooner during the planning phase. The open active space concept in the consultant's plan would be desirable and helpful in connecting the projects to enhance the walkability of the area. He likes the idea of R&D and advanced manufacturing components; however they should consider smaller building spaces as opposed to what was depicted in the presentation. Incubator space seems to drive more of that type of use. Victoria Gardens in Rancho Cucamonga has designed a walkable outdoor retail space that is quite effective and successful for various uses, that could be used as a resource during the planning phase. The idea of distribution space makes sense in the early phases because there is currently a demand for that. Going forward with that concept would need to consider future refinement for the desired end result of the HHSP. There's not a lot of space for long-term warehouse distribution for these small spaces. Housing densities should be increased to forty at some point and single-family development should be discouraged as it would use up the land without achieving the current goals.

Secretary Brubaker commented that there was very little mention of transportation in the presentation, and he has always felt there is a direct link between land use development and transportation circulation development. Whether there is potential room for better transit in the area would likely influence some of the land use planning. He would like to see more of those conversations between planning and transportation as the area plan moves forward. Density of 30 or more per acre seems to indicate that it would support high quality transit in the area, one of the reasons to get try to get a floor on the housing density is to support good transit and he encouraged them to look at that. There needs to be a lot of focus on the main area of the retail space so that it becomes an area where people want to spend their time. It also needs to be accessible regionally as well as locally. They also need to integrate it in with Walmart to ensure flexibility for future development. Secretary Brubaker didn't have an opinion on the timeline other than he's heard several community members state they are interested in near term solutions. His opinion is it's better to be good than quick. The least desired employment opportunities would be logistics uses that would increase truck traffic into the mix. There's

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already a burden from the logistics uses that are in other areas of Richmond. He's not sure about data center uses, those may help with the development of the area, but would also likely end up as vacant space. His preference is R&D and office space mixed with retail that draw people to the area and are pedestrian oriented. He would support a reduction in housing density, however he's on the fence. He'd rather not see single family residential, but if it's necessary to make progress with other components it should be limited. He believes the site could be zoned to support areas with both low density and higher densities. He does believe there are urban design changes that need to happen in the CR zoned areas. He scaled the area and Sienna Italy could fit within the walls of those space and they have one of the great public spaces in the world. While he doesn't expect to see that in the Hilltop location, he does feel there needs to be ambition for making the site great. It's a Hilltop, so maybe they could design a "Hill Town".

Chair Tucker stated that the comments regarding the integration of Walmart caught his attention because it's more of matter of reimagining the Hilltop community while melding the existing with new. The goal is to encourage more people to use the space for various uses. The workforce development needs to consider the salaries of the people who would work in those areas and if those income levels would be able to support the retail and housing that is being considered. They want to elevate residential opportunities. They also need to plan for good paying jobs that can support those opportunities to ensure the commercial opportunities thrive. Chair Tucker agreed that transit should be part of the initial conversations in the planning phases, particularly when considering higher densities. They would be shortchanging themselves if they don't make those initial designs for transit at the same time. Walkability has been a large part of discussions since Richmond created a Climate Action Plan years ago. He wants to ensure that the elements of Climate Action Plan meet the elements of the design of HHSP, particularly when looking at the reduction of greenhouse gases, power usage and waste. There is already a timeline in place for the Climate Action Plan that should be considered during the design phase of this area. Whether it is a high or low density housing development, it has to be family friendly. Richmond has a school system that was closed because there are no longer families in the area anymore. However, in the Hilltop area there are at least three charter schools. They need to continue feeding the existing communities in resources while they plan the new area, particularly for young families. Those are ones who will be looking for affordable housing. He also didn't hear any mention of senior amenities and the Hilltop existing communities have been around for a while. Senior amenities are every bit as important as keeping it family-friendly. Public transportation is not always adequate in the space so there needs to be consideration given for seniors who can't drive or walk. He believed all the Commissioners agreed in terms of the density being whatever is needed to support the retail and business establishments. He believed it's somewhat premature to establish the most desired retail because there are so many other factors that will dictate the viability of success for retail. There needs to be more focus on the five-to-ten-year window of the timeline. The planning needs to be good more so than quick. Things are continuing to change rapidly, it's difficult to plan for the future by making near term choices.

Planning Manager Rojas thanked the Commissioners and commented that this would be an iterative process over the next year. They have begun the discussions with transportation through the FEHR & PEERS consultants who are experts in mobility options and active transportation. During the next wave of discussion there will be more specificity in terms of layered details of circulation, land use maps and planning documents.

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Bev Choi, ESA, also thanked the Commission for their time and input on the expanded area as well as the mall site. She found it all to be very valuable and is looking forward to returning in the future with more details of the plans.

Chair Tucker mentioned that Commissioner Agarwal submitted a letter in place of her absence and requested staff summarize some of her comments.

Planning Manager Rojas stated that he received Commissioner Agarwal's email on November 13, prior to the study session, who made three points. First being she did not receive notifications for the community outreach; however, it was found that she lives outside of the 500-foot radius boundary that was used for the mailing. As per the Commission's request, staff will consider expanding that radius boundary. For the record, the standard notification area for the City is 300-feet. Secondly, Commissioner Agarwal requested the street names proposed for the area, they were not visible on the proposed map. Mr. Rojas responded that there will be a deeper level of detail in the next iteration of the planning phase. Commissioner Agarwal's next point was that she is strongly opposed to any industrial in the area and is looking to the city to do more extensive outreach into the community regarding that topic for the Hilltop area. That was all for her comments, the email will be kept on record.

Chair Tucker thanked staff and the consultants for the work done thus far and feels it's something they can be proud of, and the Commission is looking forward to the next set of discussions that will have the Commission's comments factored in.

[The Commission moved to Commission business]

COMMISSION BUSINESS

3. Reports of Officers, Commissioners and Staff –

Mr. Rojas stated there is nothing to report, however they are looking to have a study session on the HHSP with City Council on December 5, 2023. There is a project website where people can stay up to date at www.hilltophorizon.com. Public input is included on the site. Lastly, welcome to Commissioner He (currently recused). Staff are looking forward to his input on other projects.

Community Development Director Velasco noted that they are currently looking to hire a senior planner. Anyone interested can go to www.neogov.com and look up Richmond, as well as the Human Resources page on the Richmond City website. There will be a public kick-off in early 2024 for the \$35 million dollar transformative climate communities grant that will be in partnership with other cities in the Iron Triangle for Santa Fe, Coronado and Richmond neighborhoods, that is designed for building climate resiliency.

Mr. Rojas stated currently there are not any projects expected to be reviewed in December by the Commission.

Chair Tucker stated there is a vacancy on the Commission, anyone interested in serving on behalf of the city of Richmond, please give the Planning Commission consideration.

4. Adjournment - The meeting was adjourned at 8:20 p.m. to the next regular meeting on December 7, 2023.