

**To:** Mike Webb and Bob Wolcott, City of Davis

**From:** Greg Chew (SACOG) and Robert Liberty (USA)

**Date:** April 17, 2015

**Re:** Davis Joint Unified School District Site Concept Project

### Summary

The Urban Sustainability Accelerator (USA) at Portland State University, and the Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG) have offered to assist the Davis Joint Unified School District (DJUSD or School District) in creating a set of redevelopment concepts for the school district administrative offices property at 526 B Street, consisting of 2.2 acres adjacent to downtown Davis. This offer of technical assistance is through a grant received by SACOG through the State's Strategic Growth Council. The city of Davis (City) and the DJUSD are interested in exploring the potential benefits of this project. With this document, if all parties agree on the scope of work, then the SACOG/USA team will execute the scope as finalized. If the City and School District agree to the following, SACOG/USA will provide strategic assistance in:

- (a) conceiving financially feasible redevelopment concepts for the School District property that are land-efficient and achieve the School District's objectives;
- (b) addressing associated public and neighborhood concerns about redevelopment of the site including scale, density, design and traffic impacts; and
- (c) identifying city regulatory barriers to this type of redevelopment and suggesting ways to overcome those barriers.

### Background

Yolo County and its cities have adopted strong, largely effective policies to curb urban and exurban sprawl onto the world-class agricultural land of the Sacramento Valley. However, the city of Davis, like other high-amenity university towns, has experienced substantial concerns about higher density residential and commercial development, a strategy that would reduce the kind of sprawl also opposed by residents.

These concerns, combined with the residents' genuine interest in their quality of life, is reflected in the growth and proliferation of various plans, land use policies and land use regulations intended to protect that quality of life.

However, the number of plans, policies and regulations is hard to navigate and allows for varying interpretations which increases the level of uncertainty and length of time for development.

This project is designed to help the city government and its residents address the popular fears and regulatory barriers to more efficient, higher density growth and development that advance SACOG's Sustainable Communities Strategy adopted pursuant to Senate Bill 375.

The goal above will be accomplished through a public consideration of redevelopment scenarios for property owned by the Davis Joint Unified School District (School District) immediately north of the downtown district. If time and funding allows, the results of the project may be adapted and applied to downtown City properties, although this is currently not a part of the SACOG/USA scope of work for this effort.

### **Desired Project Outcomes**

1. Secure School District and City support and an acceptable level of community approval for a concept or concepts for redevelopment of participants' property that reflects the city's goal of promoting more compact and efficient use of land and higher intensity and density of uses, and satisfies the needs and the goals of the participants.
2. Gather citizen concerns and consider them in regards to scale, design, traffic, parking, intensity of infill and redevelopment and other issues.
3. As needed to achieve the first two outcomes, refine or develop techniques for community engagement and response to community concerns about density and height and bulk that can be applied in subsequent projects in the city and other parts of the region.
4. Enhance the capacity of citizen groups to help them play an effective and constructive role in the City's advancement of Blueprint principles.
5. Gather existing useful information about market demand and market conditions in central Davis that will be useful for other redevelopers whose projects will advance SACOG's Sustainable Communities Strategy and the Sacramento Region Blueprint.
6. Through this process, identify some of the obstacles in the regulatory system (policies, codes and procedures) that need to be removed or modified in order to enable similar such projects to proceed.

## **Objectives of the Parties**

### ***Objectives of the City of Davis***

The city of Davis will need to specify and adopt its own objectives; but here are some draft objectives to facilitate discussion:

- “With support from SACOG and Portland State University’s Urban Sustainability Accelerator, help determine and address our citizens’ concerns about higher density and intensity of development in the city, which are a means to increasing the vibrancy and efficiency of land use in Davis.”
- “Through this project, identify changes needed to the City’s land use planning and land use regulatory system that inhibit infill and redevelopment that is more efficient and sustainable, but within the General Plan policies requiring development to reflect a small town character.” (Note: many towns the size of Davis that are considered to have small town character have significantly taller buildings and denser residential development.)
- “Help the city determine the potential advantages, financial and otherwise, of the redevelopment of all or some portion of its property around City Hall, including nearby recreation facilities, in conjunction with, or possibly independent of, the redevelopment of nearby property owned by the Davis Joint Unified School District.”

### ***Objectives of Davis Joint Unified School District***

The School District will need to specify and adopt its own objectives; but here is a draft objective that may facilitate their discussion:

- “The School District will use this project to determine, at least to a preliminary extent , the potential financial, educational, and community advantages of the redevelopment of all or part of its property surrounding and including its administrative offices.”

## **SACOG/USA’s Assistance Activities & Partners’ Contributions to the Project**

SACOG/USA will provide assistance to the participants for three important and interconnected efforts:

- Part 1: Two or more site development design concepts and financial feasibility;

- Part 2: Determining and addressing neighbors' and public's concerns about and receptivity to more efficient development including identifying and to the extent possible
- addressing concerns about densification such as building design and landscaping, height and bulk, parking and traffic;
- Part 3: Identification of barriers to higher intensity development contained in the city's land use development review standards and processes, and methods to overcome those barriers.

All assistance will be provided within the framework of a joint project work plan adopted by the city, the school district.

### **Part 1: Site Development Opportunities and Feasibility**

SACOG/USA will help organize and deliver expert advice, in a preliminary form, on how the School District property could be redeveloped in ways that would realize the School District's various objectives while testing neighbors' and the public's reactions to higher densities and more urban forms of development, and multi-use facilities operated by multiple public agencies.

The creation of these redevelopment concepts or options will be carried out initially without regard to existing regulatory requirements but in conformity with the property owners' goals and constraints. The concepts will allow for a mixture of public and private uses of the properties.

SACOG/USA will find and guide experts in design and real estate development in creating these concepts but will rely on the property owners to provide advice and direction along the way.

This exercise will generate useful information about market demand and market conditions in central Davis that will be helpful for other redevelopers whose projects will advance the regional Sustainable Communities Strategy.

The city and school district will be responsible for assuring the necessary staff participation and support and governing body review to make the effort successful. In the case of the city, this will include any partner agencies.

USA will budget a total of 80 hours of its staff time and up to \$2,500 for expert real estate advice for Part 1 of the project, and SACOG will budget a corresponding number of hours for its staff time.

## **Part 2: Determining and Addressing Public Concerns about Density, Infill and Redevelopment**

SACOG/USA will take the lead in presenting and discussing the redevelopment concepts with neighbors, interested citizens, businesses, and organizations, focusing on height, bulk, design, landscaping, uses and traffic. If it proves helpful, SACOG/USA may also assemble and prepare materials that provide context and policy grounds for more intensive use of land inside the city's boundary.

SACOG/USA will serve as the point of contact for presenting designs that are challenging and for receiving reactions, both critical and supportive. It will make it clear to all participants that the concepts do not reflect preferences or decisions by the property owners. SACOG/USA will also offer different forms of engagement, including online discussions, webinars, and virtual tours.

An important part of this project will be identifying which, if any, nongovernmental organizations have an interest in working to help the City implement its existing policies in support of infill and redevelopment and to build up the capacity of these organizations to help with this task.

To the extent that community meetings or presentations to committees, councils, boards, etc. are undertaken, SACOG/USA will be responsible for organizing and providing content and the City and School District partners will be responsible for all invitations, logistics, event planning and so forth.

USA will budget a total of 80 hours of its own staff time and up to \$2,500 for design assistance for Part 2 of the project and SACOG will budget a corresponding number of hours for its staff time.

## **Part 3: Regulatory Barriers**

Once some financially viable and potentially publicly acceptable redevelopment concepts have been developed for the School District property through the prior assistance activities, SACOG/USA staff and other project participants will create and review a hypothetical development application for that project. The purpose of this hypothetical review will be to identify standards and criteria that would prohibit the construction of the project; standards and criteria that are ambiguous or subject to interpretation that would prohibit the project as proposed; and procedures that are especially lengthy and burdensome.

Out of this will come recommendations about whether and how to modify standards or adopt different processes or interpretations of standards within the scope of the city's authority that would make it possible or probable for this or similar projects to be developed.

The city staff will be responsible for developing the hypothetical application and for carrying out a review of it. SACOG/USA team will ask questions as if it were the development applicant and make suggestions to clarify barriers and opportunities for different approaches and interpretations without amendment of regulatory language. SACOG/USA staff will also make recommendations about how to overcome the regulatory barriers.

USA will budget 40 hours of staff time for Part 3 and SACOG will budget a corresponding number of hours for its staff time.

### **Phases and Deliverables (Work plan)**

Because of the potential scale and length of this effort, SACOG/USA's engagement must be phased. How much we can do will depend on how far each phase proceeds and what the participants need from SACOG/USA.

#### ***February – April 2015***

- Initial informal meetings and telephone discussions with staff to discuss and agree on purposes; develop working relationship, confirm support from governing bodies.

#### ***April- June 2015***

- Identification of lead staff and liaisons from the governing bodies from the School District and the City. The School District should seriously consider creating its own project advisory group to refine and advise on project options and goals – for example, to retain or sell the site, whether to be tenants or not, etc. The group should also define the role of the city property in the project.
- Designate an initial, informal working group to discuss how to frame and present the project and the role of participants – e.g., confirm or modify the initial concept of having SACOG/USA be the lead for the public effort.
- Adoption or acceptance of an initial work plan, including assignments, deliverables and dates.
- Public endorsement or simply acknowledgement of the SACOG/USA project by the City Council and School District board, including articulation of the purposes of the project.
- Formation of a SACOG/USA-led informal working group, including representatives from the school district, NGOs and neighborhood groups, and a progressive redeveloper (may be from outside the Davis area). This group's assignment will be to brainstorm and discuss potential uses and designs within the framework of market feasibility and to help develop and carry out the public engagement program.

***May – November 2015***

- Preliminary collection and synthesis of information on public attitudes and concerns about infill and redevelopment, densification, etc. – such as a review of news articles, and polling focus group information – as preparation for the development of a plan for public and stakeholder engagement.
- Carry out a preliminary determination of market feasibility for different types of projects, using PSU and Sacramento State University students, local developers and redevelopers, and loan reviewers. They will draw on publicly available information and advice from property owners and developers, and comparables from other parts of the region.
- Development by SACOG/USA of an outreach and engagement plan to address density concerns. This may include group virtual tours using Google Earth, Sketch-up tools, Photoshop, and online (moderated) discussion forums. We will draw on help from any of the following educational resources: Davis high school students, UC Davis faculty and students and Sacramento State and PSU real estate students. We will also discuss how to engage print and online media.
- Briefings and progress reports to City Council and School Board.
- Brainstorming of development concepts – uses, height, bulk, design. In the beginning, I believe we should ignore existing regulatory constraints on height, bulk, uses and design. We might make some field trips within the region to look at examples of particular interest. This would also be the time to take a virtual tour on Google Earth leading to identification of especially interesting exemplar projects. The goal is to generate a wide spectrum of development concepts as quickly as possible.
- Carry out public engagement program.

***November 2015- January 2016***

- Reports to School Board, City Council on results of this first phase.
- For the School Board, an oral and written report will focus on:
  - Potential financial and other benefits of the project to the school children in the district
  - Promising project concepts; uses, designs (and possibly financing options)
  - Recommended next steps

- For the City Council, an oral and written report will focus on:
  - Potential benefits of the project to school children
  - School District's view of promising project concepts; uses, designs (and possibly financing options)
  - Identification of possible barriers in land use regulatory system
  - Potential contributions to the project that the city could make or may be asked to make (staffing, subsidies, etc.)
  - What has been learned regarding public concerns about or acceptance of higher density and intensities of land uses and best practices from public engagement
- Recommended next steps
- Decisions by the School District and the City about whether to proceed, and if so, whether the project will continue or cease, without the further support from SACOG's technical assistance grant. If the project is to be continued, the school and city can decide who will lead the effort.
- If there is a very clear, unified direction from all partners to continue. SACOG/USA will draft scope of work for a consultant RFP or RFQ.
- If successful, the School District might choose to take the lead for the project and issue an RFP or RFQ for a development partner.
- Informal project evaluation by participants.
- To the extent useful and practical, SACOG/USA will share the results of this process with other project partners, e.g., Placer County (Granite Bay), Woodland, and area school districts.

***Spring-Summer 2016***

- Potential for a continuing role by SACOG/USA, probably in connection with redevelopment of the city property, or following up on regulatory reform efforts at the city and capacity-building around infill and redevelopment, with interested NGOs (non-governmental organizations) working on this issue.