



# Design Review Commission Meeting

Location: Novato City Hall, 901 Sherman Avenue

February 5, 2014

## MINUTES

THE CITY OF  
**NOVATO**  
CALIFORNIA

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Mayor  
Eric Lucan  
Mayor Pro Tem  
Jeanne MacLeamy  
Councilmembers  
Denise Athas  
Madeline Kellner  
Pat Eklund

City Manager  
Michael S. Frank

**Present:** Michael Barber, Chair  
Joseph Farrell, Vice Chair  
Tom Telfer  
Beth Radovanovich

**Absent:** Patrick MacLeamy

**Staff:** Elizabeth Dunn, Planning Manager  
Alan Lazure, Principal Planner

### CALL TO ORDER / ROLL CALL:

The meeting was called to order.

### APPROVAL OF FINAL AGENDA:

The agenda was approved without changes.

### PUBLIC COMMENT:

Eleanor Sluis: Spoke about late meeting time; not a lot of the public at the meeting; and the process for public input for the Bus Station project.

### CONSENT CALENDAR:

#### 1. APPROVAL OF JOINT PC/DRC MINUTES OF NOVEMBER 20, 2013 (MB,JF,PM,BR,TT,XL)

M/s Barber/Radovanovich (passed 4-0-1) MacLeamy absent; to approve the November 20, 2013 meeting minutes with one revision.

PUBLIC HEARINGS : None

CONTINUED ITEMS:

**2. HAMILTON SQUARE, LLC (ED)  
P2013-040; DESIGN REVIEW  
APN 157-980-05; MAIN GATE AND “C” STREETS**

**Conduct a Design Review Hearing to discuss the site plan for a proposal to use the former gas station site at Main Gate and “C” Streets for residential use.**

**CEQA Compliance: Pursuant to Section 15063, an environmental review will be prepared based upon the recommendation by the Design Review Commission on the site plan and conceptual architecture. This review will be brought to the Planning Commission for a recommendation and City Council for action.**

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENT

No one from the Public spoke on this issue.

Staff Planner Dunn gave a summary of the proposal.

- The Commission has seen this project twice before: Oct and Dec of 2013
- Site plan has many similar features as the last one: a perimeter road, where buildings frame the site
- Interior road towards western end of site was removed and now park space has increased from 7,500 to 13,500 square feet
- At the December 4, 2013 workshop, Commissioner MacLeamy indicated there should be a ring road around the entire site, creating a large interior green space, with a perimeter wall around proposal, and buildings oriented towards the green space
- Theme is Spanish style architecture
- Staff requests recommendation of the proposed site plan and have the move project on to environmental review stage. The next step would be bringing the environmental review and project to the Planning Commission

Rob Davidson of Thompson Development, Inc. gave a brief presentation.

Site History

- Operated by Navy as a gas station until 1990s
- Purchased by Thompson Development, Inc. in 2005
- Entitled for 30K sf of office space in 2007

Revised Proposal

- Reduced unit count from 31 to 35
- Increased park size
- Reduced massing on building on Main Gate to 2 stories
- Removed parking along Main Gate Rd
- Angled buildings facing Lanham to try and deflect sound

- Reduced hardscape
- Engages Main Gate and C street to the street rather than having garage doors faces the streets

#### Conclusion

- The site is constrained and we think this is best solution
- Excited about opportunity to bring TOD housing to SMART line
- Had a meeting with Commissioner MacLeamy to discuss the project. Lanham Village and the Hamilton Forum are concerned about having garage doors face Main Gate and “C” Street and this proposal responds to their concerns with buildings facing the street.

#### Questions to the Applicant:

- Did you do outreach with community about buildings facing the street?
- What did the process with the Community determine?

#### Response of the Applicant:

- We never took the walled concept to the community- we didn’t think the public would be excited about
- There were two public meetings - one with Lanham and another at the Hamilton Forum.
- Major concerns about height, addressed with articulation of architecture, hardscaping was another issue, working to have more water retention on site, density was another issue, initially 50 units, now smaller at 31 units. 2-story unit to top is 25 feet. 3-story unit is 30 ft, only exceeding by 4 feet.

#### SUMMARY OF COMMISSION COMMENTS:

**Telfer:** Main Gate Rd is a symbolic entrance to Hamilton and probably always will be. There will be more development and traffic going down that street. The concern is multiple access point to that busy street. There are two entrances into this development. Multiple access is not a good idea. Even with simple adjustment to dramatize single entrance. The North Bay Children’s Center will eventually be built to be more interesting facility. Charter School is between the proposal and Main Gate. Enormous amount of traffic between dropping off children in morning and afternoon. The Novato Unified School District has a master plan that terminates the through traffic use of “C” Street. Lots of vehicular and pedestrian traffic. Much more development over time combined with traffic brings back to concerns with vehicular access to this development. I do agree with not having a walled community. Visually it is not conducive to public interest. Fact is that you have reduced concept of loop road to create gigantic space in middle. Not sure how important it is for units to open on to enormous space. It seems like a plan that makes sense. The architecture is very dramatic. Complexity of shapes is what makes it work. I don’t think everything has to be 2 story building. We don’t object to 3, so why should we object to interesting architecture that is a bit higher. Landscaping will come later. I think you have to have access off C Street but not reasonable to have 2 streets with access, so eliminate Main Gate access? That will help traffic flow.

**Farrell:** We have seen this several times. Last time Commissioner MacLeamy illustrated a U shape ring road. This has a great concept for residents to share a central green. However, it was definitely an inward focused theme that turned its back to the community. I see benefits to both site plan concepts and it’s challenging for the architect. My gut tells me that I like MacLeamy’s concepts but

this is the Main Gate Rd and people drive by all the time. You don't want to have cluster of walled communities that turn the back to the community. Vehicular road around units is necessary for people and fire dept access. You need to be able to get in and out. I like access to the central road to get in and out. Too congested if we lose corner access point on "C" Street. Creating the solution to the access points into the development is the important thing. I'm in agreement with how units on the corner face the street. This is a nice way of facing the community. Worry they don't have access to green. But not direct connection. I'm looking at conceptual elevations and they are dead on regarding what Hamilton is. Spanish architecture is really nice, few comments for now- formal entry on units are very subdued. Massing is done really nicely especially on 3 story with popping out of balconies and porches. One thing about the 2 story is end units are access by an exterior staircase. That will demand a lot more length to building and is not shown on site plan. Not sure if exterior staircase works.

**Barber:** I agree with most of what Commissioner Farrell said. Walled scenario enhances individual units but detrimental to community. Would rather have benefits to community. Would prefer this site plan and design scheme to a more walled off subdivision. The loop road allows getting required parking within the proposal.

Central unit and one facing C Street- alley always bugged me. You have two 3-story buildings and going to look at driveways in both directions. Not sure how you can deal with that. It won't be a pleasant space to be. Sounds like community was not happy with height. Could you bring in combination of 2 and 3 stories on Main Gate and C to bring in more light? Entry (2 way road) should somehow be emphasized a bit more. It should look like an entrance. I'm sure this will be addressed later. Mail pavilion does something, but more should be done later. Front porch- nice to have people out on front stoop. Will give people a reason to sit out on the front stoop. Make it comfortable. For steps on end units- these staircases might need to go away because there are too long. Only place I feel uncomfortable about is the alley.

**Beth Swanson Radovanovich:** The idea of walls is not a new thing to Hamilton. Every community there has walls around to get their sense of community. On a very busy street, I will not want to sit on my front porch and watch traffic go by. We will still see garages of 6 units as you're going towards the Bay (east). The community was concerned about hardscape, density, height. I agree that alley will always be dark and shaded. Will not be a conducive. 4 access points and 2 on a very busy street. I like the idea of tucking the parking underneath and I like architecture and opt for more definition. I can't support site plan as it is.

**Telfer:** I hope with 20 ft setbacks there could be intimate place for families in addition to park space in center. Both areas can be developed in a positive and intimate way. I'm assuming we can make alleyway a nice spot by architecture. About issue of access points- need to have 80 foot fire track to turn around it. Road could connect to major road. Kiosk is a good idea but it does not need to be in front. Public works won't go with 2 points on Main Gate either.

**Rob Davidson:** One idea is to continue to bring alley that ends on Main Gate. Could bring that to inner road. Emergency access only can be on New Alley road. Main Gate is only right-in and right-out, as there's a median on Main Gate. Adjust building so that is more along Main Gate. Might need a wall around that section. Access to the site by the Fire District is an overriding factor with this proposal. Novato Fire Protection District has to be able to get to both sides of 3 story units with fire truck. Removing road altogether is not something will be able to accept. And this would reduce

parking. There is some overage in on-street parking.

**Farrell:** I'm still stuck on alley. What if the alley connected to mail pavilion and put up a low wall around corner units. I would not want to be on end units near traffic. This is an urban solution but this is not an urban area. If we had walls we could rotate one unit, add wall to hide garages and then transition to a short wall around 2-story building.

**Beth-** We are down to things that are resolvable. If we approve now, will we never be able to change again?

**Barber-** we can still address site plan issues and wall- how short and tall walls are.

**Planner Dunn:** You are framing what will be done for rest of reviews (environmental, etc.). For example, bringing the alley to west towards entrance. That will not change as we go forward. Details can be changed, but not concept.

**Beth-** from a conceptual perspective, this is going to be set. If that is the case, there is no guarantee that down the line things won't change. They usually do.

**Farrell-** Won't see ramifications until it is drawn. Not sure if it works. We need to see more design development. We make recommendations to applicant to make one entrance at a max on Main Gate. And creating some sort of semi-private space for outside corner units. We think the walls could work, but there might be other suggestions.

While the Commission did not recommend the site plan so the project could move into the environmental review phase, they provided direction to Staff and the Applicant for the next review of the site plan:

- Single access point on Main Gate
- Create semi-private space for corner unit on Main Gate and corner on "C" street
- Add a wall on the western end if the end building is rotated with the intent of blocking garages
- The ring road may connect to alley way if it wraps around

**NEW ITEMS:** None

### **PROJECT DESIGN WORKSHOP:**

#### **3. REDWOOD AND GRANT TRANSIT IMPROVEMENT PROJECT (RG TIP) (ED)**

**Conduct a public workshop and consider making a recommendation to the Novato City Council regarding the center platform site plan concept for proposed renovation to the existing bus transfer facility on Redwood Boulevard, between Grant and DeLong Avenues.**

**CEQA Compliance: This project is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Section 15302, replacement or reconstruction of existing structures and facilities.**

Staff Planner Dunn presented the proposal.

The purpose of tonight's meeting is to conduct a public workshop and consider making a recommendation to the Novato City Council regarding the center platform site plan concept for proposed renovation to the existing bus transfer facility on Redwood Boulevard, between Grant and DeLong Avenues, in Downtown Novato to: 1) improve transit operations; 2) enhance passenger safety; and 3) improve the surrounding area for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Staff from Marin Transit, Mark Thomas and Company, a consultant hired by Marin Transit, and the Golden Gate Bridge Highway and Transportation District (GGBHTD) began the design process to discuss improving the Downtown Novato Redwood and Grant bus transfer facility.

This working group created a Project Communication Plan, and identified six goals of the project:

- Improve ability to meet transit and roadway operational needs
- Improve safety and security for passengers
- Make pedestrian access to the transit center more convenient without compromising pedestrian safety
- Improve passenger comfort while waiting for the bus
- Use context sensitive design to match the desired look and feel of the surrounding community
- Design for project constructability and sustainable long-term maintenance costs

A Matrix was prepared which compared the six goals with the current platform, a center platform, and a side platform concept.

Current Site Design Issues were discussed:

- a. Bus passenger loading area and inability to have independent bus movements
- b. Bus passenger safety and security concerns
- c. The facility's location at the gateway to Downtown Novato
- d. The facility's location relative to the rest of the transit network

A previous planning study suggested upgrading three existing stops with Novato, as opposed to creating a new Transit Hub in Novato. One of the stops identified for improvements was the Redwood/Grant Downtown site.

### **Site Options**

There are two alternatives to the center platform site plan concept: 1) keep the site as is; and 2) propose a side platform site plan.

### **Community Outreach**

At its December 10, 2013 meeting, a representative from the Downtown Novato Business Association (DNBA), and the Novato Police Department attended this Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) meeting to provide comments on the center platform and side platform site plan concepts. The Police Department representative indicated the current site is problematic when viewing into the bus facility area and the

center platform site plan concept provided a better ability to view activities within the bus transfer facility, especially if camera monitoring is continued at this location. Lighting was also discussed to ensure adequate visibility for police surveillance capabilities.

The TAC also expressed approval for pedestrian crossing improvements, including a pedestrian signal and crossing gauntlet to improve viability and awareness for pedestrians crossing Redwood Boulevard to the east. The TAC members noted their agreement for: 1) no solid walls or barriers along the perimeter of the facility; 2) high canopy trees, and low canopy landscaping for clear line-of-sight through the facility; and 3) sufficient weather protection for the bus passengers. Additionally, the representative from the DNBA wanted to insure that the passengers had adequate access to the merchants on Redwood for their travels needs (coffee, food, etc.).

A survey was conducted at the Downtown Novato bus transfer facility on Jan. 28 and 29, 2014. The four question survey was available in English and Spanish. The same survey is available online at <http://redwoodandgrant.org/transit-survey/> for users to respond to, in either English or Spanish. The survey asks if the responder is a bus rider, what amenities are important to the bus rider, the elements and future design that are important to the bus rider, and asks for additional comments.

### **Staff Recommendation**

Staff recommends the center platform site plan concept, and that this recommendation be endorsed by the Design Review Commission and forwarded to the Novato City Council for action.

Paul Price, consultant for Marin Transit, discussed the proposal and had a power point presentation. He showed the recommended center platform site plan, as well as the alternate side platform option. The survey conducted at the bus transfer facility illustrated that the top amenities are: shelter; lighting; real time schedule information; seating areas; general transit information; bike parking; and landscaping. The following elements were also of importance to bus riders: safety; pedestrian access; ease of transfer in the facility; connectivity and integration; bicycle access and safety; and general cleanliness.

Mr. Price discussed the off-set crossing to the west and east sides of Redwood Boulevard. This design, called a “Calgary Gate”, would not have a barrier in the roadway, and that a barrier is about two feet tall. The Police Department needs this barrier for visibility into the facility. Marin Transit would be working with the City of Novato to install a pedestrian signal at this facility. This feature provides a safe opportunity to cross, but not a false sense of security for pedestrians.

About 8-9 trees would be removed, and new trees would be installed.

### **COMMISSION QUESTIONS**

Tom Telfer:

Will the platform be parallel with the bus entrance? Paul Price: It depends on the bus.

Will people be coming along Redwood and crossing into the facility? Paul Price: the highest majority is passengers transferring between buses.

Can bicycles be put on the front of the bus? Paul Price: yes

Is the shelter taller than the bus? Paul Price: Not really. The wind load has to be addressed, if the canopy may be high.

Will some buses act as shuttles? Yes, if there are SMART shuttles.

### **SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENT**

2 members of the public spoke:

Eleanor Sluis

Are the crosswalks paid for by the City; this is important to the downtown; aesthetics are important; cost/benefit of this facility; the Working Group is made up of staff and no public; there were no workshops or public participants; concerned about the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) and housing. How could this facility impact tourism? Believes 13 trees will be removed.

Susan Wernick

Doesn't like driving in this area; worried about hitting pedestrians; is this the right location? What about SMART shuttles? Make sure the design retains the small town character.

SUMMARY OF COMMISSION COMMENTS:

**Farrell:** The purpose of the meeting is to get the site plan concept decided and the details will be provided later. The center platform feels safer; the side platform is concerning for passenger safety and access and egress into and out of the facility; additionally, one shelter may cost less.

Direction on the architecture: maintain the small town feel. An industrial/glass/metal/ urban feel would not go over well with the DRC or the community; the architecture can be sophisticated with wood and metal – try to make something like this work.

We need to provide options for people who don't have cars.

**Radovanovich:** She is terrified of driving on Redwood due to the pedestrians and crossings. Not sure if we've gone far enough with this proposal. There's no way to access the platform from the north or south end of the platform – it's only a mid-block crossing. The weave for buses entering the station is counterintuitive, but it creates flexibility, makes the best use of space and the center island approach makes the best proposal. Keep the small town character.

**Telfer:** SMART buses as an option to get folks off the highway; bus riders have different needs and SMART isn't competing with bus ridership – he doesn't see any reason to have the bus facility near the SMART stop; site plan seems logical; amenities seem reasonable. Concerned about the design of the shelters.

**Barber:** what about the alternate locations? Different markets serves different needs – in this area, local transit is taking Golden Gate Transit busses to SF; there's a synergy with the downtown area, and being close to Highway 101; this use at this location is appropriate for the area. The center island works. Shelter design will be important – doesn't want to make this element too sterile.

M/s, JF/BR, to recommend the center island site plan concept to the City Council. 4-0-1 (MacLeamy absent).

GENERAL BUSINESS:

ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting was adjourned at 9:40 pm.