

ULI San Francisco: TOD Marketplace Technical Assistance Panel

North Texas Corridor

Fairfield, California

Notes from Site Tour, July 26, 2007

ULI Panel

Dena	Belzer (Chair)	Principal	Strategic Economics	(510) 647-5291	dbelzer@strategiceconomics.com
Bryan	Grunwald	Principal	BGA	(510) 420-1812	bg@bryangrunwald.com
William	Lee	Executive Vice President	Economics Research Associates	(415) 956-8152	bill.lee@econres.com
Andrea	Papanastassiou	Development Manager	Mid-Peninsula Housing	(650) 356-2900	apapanastassiou@midpen-housing.org
Willis	Polite	President / CEO	Seagate Properties	(415) 455-0300	wick@seagateprop.com
John	Weis	Deputy Executive Director	City of San Jose Redevelopment	(408) 535-8500	john.weis@sanjoseca.gov

City of Fairfield staff

Mike	Duncan	Assistant Director of Public Works			
Joe	Luccio	Principal Planner			
Brian	Miller	Planner	(707) 428-7446		bkmliller@ci.fairfield.ca.us
David	White	Senior Economic Development Project Manager			

Field Notes

After convening in a vacant lot in the study area, the tour began with city staff offering an overview of key challenges in the North Texas corridor:

Challenges

- Once part of the Lincoln highway, much retail, commercial, hotels, etc. has now moved to I-80.
- Narrow, deep lots and varied ownership.
- From an urban design/pedestrian perspective, the street is currently wide and loud, with little greening.
- A mixture of old automobile serving uses (motels, repair shops, etc.) in various levels of condition. There is interest in the city to locate additional auto serving uses to this area from other parts of the city.
- A lack of interest on the part of some property owners to redevelop their site (i.e. the Chinese restaurant vacant for 20 years).

- The area has struggled with crime.
- Some old hotels, such as the "Gateway Inn" are a remnant of traveling uses, but now being used as default affordable housing (SROs).

Opportunities

- The staff noted the presence of some ethnic businesses and the possibility for an international village project in the area, perhaps building on the existing economically successful "Mexico Meat Market."
- At Tabor St and North Texas, staff outlined a five-acre approved project by Silverwing, of 50 attached single-family homes behind 10,000 square feet of retail below condos. The rear of the project will allow immediate access to the 10-mile Fairfield Linear path, the main public amenity in this part of the city, and the developer will improve lighting and monitoring of the path. This is the first large, mixed-use project to go in on the corridor and is seen as a key part of a new housing node on this part of the corridor. The project is projected to open in 2009, hopefully in time for the market to upswing.
- The City of Fairfield has been given a large share of "regional housing needs" numbers.
- City of Fairfield Urban Growth Limit line passed on ballot, providing an opportunity to focus growth "in" instead of "out".
- Travis Airforce Base workers are highly skilled and in need housing.
- Solano County is the fastest growing county in the Bay Area.
- Area enjoys highest carpooling rate in region.
- Amtrack station 2.5 miles away has 32 trains/day, 90% on time.

Transit

The transit in this corridor is local bus operated by Fairfield/Suisun Transit. Two routes, each with 30 minute headways.

Staff also discussed plans for a bus transfer center in the area, with a need for 10 bus bays. Currently the bus transfer spot is at the Solano Mall, which is not centrally located. There has not been solid support for the center on N. Texas, and it is not clear if it would be an amenity for potential homebuyers in the area unless connections to regional bus and train service were enhanced and headways were reduced. Also, the current configuration of the bus transfer station would encroach on the linear park.

The area is approximately 2.5 miles from the Capitol Corridor which operates hourly train service to the Bay Area and Sacramento. A planning effort by counties along the corridor seeks to add new service in the morning and afternoon peak period, though there is not sufficient funding at this time.

Technical Assistance Panel Discussion with Staff

After the tour, the Panel met with city staff from the planning department and the community development department. The discussion focused on the following themes:

- **Market:** Recent housing projects in the area are selling slowly in the current market, though previous phases did well (including a the Olson project "Providence Walk" formerly mobile park, now 107 units. At "Centennial Units" across the street from "Providence" unit prices have come down and are slow to sell). The presence of Travis Air Force Base is expected to continue, and the base will continue to reduce its housing stock people working on base is expanding.

Staff reported the city does not have a great deal of funding available to invest in the North Texas corridor, perhaps \$8-10 million to start with. The City's redevelopment budget is only \$20 million a year, \$4 million of which is set aside for housing. It is possible that the city would bond against future tax increment gains in the area in the future.

The Panelists generally agreed there was a market for a mixed-use medium density product in the corridor, perhaps up to 800 units using different building types (Hercules and Santa Clara/Avalon cited as examples) over 20 years. Lee suggested starting with a high density single family housing product with granny flats to appeal to growing Indian, Asian families. Weiss suggested that if the Redevelopment Agency could subsidize projects, higher density might be possible.

The Panel did not believe a strong market for high-density office exists.

- **Planning:** The Panel recommended the development of a 20-30 year specific plan for the area to further refine what uses will be placed in the area at a more detailed level, reducing the number of affected neighborhoods and property owners. This will offer a chance to focus both residential and retail development at the proper scale for the area (neighborhood instead of regional retail), as well as to educate the city council about the potential changes in the study area. Another benefit of a specific plan is the opportunity to develop a phased approach and investment priorities for the area's development. A specific plan would also allow the chance to examine the placement of auto related uses in proximity to new housing developments.
- **Transit Planning:** The Panel expressed concern about the proposed bus transfer station encroaching on the linear park and the lack of visibility at the current proposed site. The Panel encouraged the city to look into taking over the corner car repair site instead – the challenge being that "Autoville" is a long-term family

business and is not interested in working with the city. (The "Autoville" site also has serious hazardous clean-up issues.) Belzer suggested looking at Watsonville's bus transfer station as a model: Mid-Penninsula housing built 40 units on 2/3 acre, 60 units/acre, 3 stories over parking garage with a day care center. Fairfield should look out 30 years, start assembling land for public/semi-public space, consider amenities that will sell connectivity, build in transit infrastructure to serve the community. She also pointed to lessons learned from Fruitvale Transit Village, like building in a library and daycare.

Several Panelists emphasized the need to connect buses to the Amtrack station, and that then the corridor could be marketed as a high-capacity, connected place. Belzer also suggested looking at Lafayette Park in Oakland as a creative way to organize buses.

- **Design:** The Panel suggested focusing on the area from Pacific to Oak, around the linear park. Caliming North Texas should be a priority if the area is expected to have pedestrian activity. Grunwald suggested off-peak on-street parking as a way to create a buffer between pedestrians and high volume, high-speed traffic. Grunwald suggested looking at Carmel, San Diego – and creating a whole new environment, "change the grain". Grunwald also recommended new projects should move the housing closer to the main street, utilizing a smaller grid pattern and "lifestyle housing", which combines shops, cafes, services and entertainment with housing if possible. This combination would help to activate the sidewalks. He also suggested "branding is important" and the city should consider changing the name of the street.

The Panel expressed concern over the design of the Silverwing project, specifically the parking in the front. Belzer suggested looking at an Avalon Bay project as an alternative.

- **Implementation:** The Panel suggested that the City push their consultants to show over 20-30 years how housing will be integrated over time and a landscape/streetscape plan.

Polite suggested the City make wholesale changes: cluster automotive uses, incentivize developers with zoning changes, increase densities, don't try to do everything on one site (i.e. Silverwing project).

As other possible models, Lee suggested Hercules. Belzer suggested W. San Carlos.

Belzer emphasized the opportunity to use the specific planning process to educate city council re: economics of development, other models – the City of San Jose Council just completed such a 2-hour study session.