

From: Francie Souza [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, October 4, 2023 2:32 PM
To: Rendell Bustos <rbustos@cityofsanmateo.org>
Subject: Block 20 EIR

To Planning Commission re: Block 20 EIR,

We are residents of Central San Mateo, and a close neighbor to many of the new projects for downtown. We see, feel and hear the effects of building on a daily basis. The noise, dirt, increased traffic and workers parking on the neighborhood streets is experienced by all our neighbors. Please consider our comments below:

-Concerns about the gas station site and what it will take to remediate the soil. We've been told that for Block 21, it will be quite an undertaking with a large number of trucks every day to remove soil for remediation. Please consider the impact to the community for both of these projects, and avoid using our neighborhood streets as arterials – develop a traffic plan for these trucks, and coordinate these two projects to lessen the community impact

-Please ensure financing is in place before allowing the destruction of the viable business, Safari Kids, destruction of historic buildings on the block and cutting down of trees along the streets. We do not need another empty block in our neighborhood. Also, we encourage the Planning Commission to remedy the empty lot on Fremont and E 3rd, which has been a blight to the community with tarps draped over a mound of dirt for months now

-Consider parking options for the construction workers. For Kiku Crossing, workers park on our streets every day, anywhere there is not a 2-hour limit.

-A possible solution for the historic Japanese-American Community Center would be to move the building to a park-setting as some cities have done to retain their significant buildings

-There has been discussion about using builders remedy for this project, to increase the height and density and we are opposed to that action, as Block 20 is the next-door neighbor and transition to our primarily single family and duplex neighborhood

Thank you,

Tom & Frances Souza



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Scoping Meeting for the Environmental Impact Report associated with the Block 20 Mixed-Use Project at 500 E. 4th Avenue (PA-2023-003)

The Block 20 Project presents a significant risk to the dwindling cultural resources in San Mateo. The proposed development will impact two buildings that are both individually eligible for listing on the National Historic Register, and both are also examples of the contributions of the Japanese community to the city. These may be the only remaining buildings in San Mateo that remind us of these contributions.

The advance materials point this out:

“The proposed project includes the demolition of two historic resources located at 415 S. Claremont Street and 503 E. 5th Avenue, resulting in a potential significant effect on the environment. Staff has engaged a historic preservation consultant to conduct an analysis to explain and analyze various alternatives to demolishing the buildings in conformance with the Secretary of Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation and CEQA impact thresholds.

Alternatives to demolition could include the whole or partial preservation of these two structures by relocating the buildings on the site and adaptively reusing them or relocating them to an acceptable receiver site and finding compatible uses.”

We would like to propose a third alternative which is to renovate them in place, create a reasonable open space around them, and design the new projects’ buildings around this new garden area. This added recreation space would benefit the residents of the Kiku Crossing housing project, as well as provide an interesting companion to the Japanese Tea Garden in Central Park for tourists and residents recreation.

Please note that:

1. The building at 415 S Claremont was built around 1865, Which makes it one of the oldest remaining structures in the city, and the building at 503 E 5th Avenue was built around 1935.
2. 415 S Claremont is the Japanese American Community Center and formerly housed the Japanese American Citizens League- a civil rights group



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during the 1980's. The Community Center is moving out, but its history and that of the building remains.

3. The 503 E 5th Avenue building was the Japanese Gardener's Meeting Hall. The Japanese gardeners built the San Mateo Tea Garden in Central Park. It could make a nice venue for exhibits on Japanese gardens and the contributions to San Mateo of the Japanese people.

It's important to note that both 415 S Claremont and 503 E 5th Avenue buildings are recognized as eligible for listing on the National Register reflecting their heritage, so demolition should be avoided in any case. Moreover, these two buildings should represent the importance of the Japanese to the development of the city, something that is not often demonstrated or adequately understood.

This is an opportunity to embrace the Japanese aspects of San Mateo with its several treasures including, the Japanese Garden in Central park, the two buildings discussed here, and the new, nationally recognized Historic District at 1007 E 5th Avenue - the Yoshiko Yamanouchi House- a short walk from 503 E. 5th Ave. This small Japanese enclave was designed and built by a noted Japanese designer who was responsible for many of the area's Japanese gardens.

Whichever preservation option is selected, to move within the project land area and repurpose, or to move to a suitable alternative site (preferably somewhere nearby) or to develop them in place, please consider the opportunity to not only preserve, but to highlight the cultural resources that our Japanese citizens have provided to all of San Mateo.

Finally, there have been many cases where projects have destroyed historic resources. For example, Windy Hill demolished the T Endo Automotive (art deco building) and the PG & E transformer building- (Spanish Revival) at 4th, Railroad, and Claremont. This calls for a cumulative impact study.

Also noted in the advance materials is the need for an EIR:



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As the lead agency, the City determined that the proposed development does not qualify for any exemptions from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). An Environmental Impact Report (EIR) is required if there is substantial evidence in the record that the project may have a significant impact on the environment. If a potentially significant environmental impact is identified during the preliminary review, the preparation of an Initial Study (IS) is not required, and the lead agency may begin the EIR process. Per CEQA Guidelines Section 15064.5(b), "A project with an effect that may cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of an historical resource is a project that may have a significant effect on the environment."

The EIR for the Block 20 Project is important, but staff should also seek and EIR that evaluates the cumulative impacts to historic resources downtown, including identifying the past and current effects on historic resources.

Regards,

The Board of the
San Mateo Heritage Alliance