AGENDA: DECEMBER 1, 2005

ORIGINATED BY: COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT – PLANNING

SUBJECT: WALNUT CREEK BART STATION MIXED-USE, TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT (TOD) – Y05-027 (Study Session). Introduction of a proposal to construct approximately 575 apartments, approximately 29,500-square feet of commercial space, replacement BART parking (700 spaces), and new residential parking of approximately 750 spaces at the Walnut Creek BART station at 200 Ygnacio Valley Road.

GENERAL PLAN: PU, Public/Semi Public
ZONING: CF, Community Facility
APPLICANT: Walnut Creek Transit Lifestyle Associates, LLC
OWNER: SF BART District
CEQA STATUS: EIR to be prepared

STATEMENT OF ISSUES:

The applicants have an agreement with BART for development rights of a portion of the Walnut Creek BART station site and are currently proposing development on the two surface parking lots on the west side of the BART tracks. In review of the proposal, the City has identified a number of concerns related to access and circulation conflicts and the lack of a comprehensive plan of the entire BART site. Development of the BART site will require a General Plan amendment, P-D rezoning, design review and environmental review. Since this is a large and complex project, staff and the applicant believe it would be beneficial to introduce the project to the Commission and public at this early stage.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff is recommending that the Planning Commission hold a study session and provide input on the following points:

1. Site Goals
2. Access and Circulation
3. Site Development Options
4. Land-use Options
5. Design Characteristics

PROJECT AND SITE DESCRIPTION:

The BART station site is bounded by Ygnacio Valley Road on the south, Interstate 680 on the west, Pringle Avenue on the north and North California Boulevard on the east. A location map and site photo is included as Attachments 1 and 2. The elevated BART tracks split the site running generally from the southwest to the northeast. Two surface parking lots and a multistory garage are situated on the west side of the site. The bus terminal and additional parking is situated on the east side of the BART track. The site generally slopes down in a gentle grade from north to south and west to east. At the north edge of the site there is a short steep down slope from the parking lot to Pringle Avenue.
Access to the site currently occurs through an entry/exit driveway at the stoplight on Ygnacio Valley Road, an entrance-only driveway further west on Ygnacio next to the freeway, and an exit/entry on Pringle Avenue at Riviera Drive. A southbound exit-only driveway is located on North California Boulevard.

The City has received an application for development of the two surface lots on the west side of the BART tracks, north and south of the existing parking structure. The proposed development consists of 2 to 3 levels of underground parking, and 3 to 4 levels of residential apartments around a central podium courtyard. Retail storefront space is proposed facing the BART line. No change is proposed on the eastern parking lot (where the bus transit hub is located). Plans of the project are included as Attachment 3. The following table depicts an overview of the proposed development on the northern and southern surface parking lots.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WC BART TOD – Current Development Proposal</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lot Size</td>
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<tr>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Site</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exist. Garage</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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All of the existing BART parking affected by the project will be replaced on a one-for-one basis. The proposed retail/commercial square footage is a small portion of the project and is intended to primarily serve BART riders, residents of the project and office users in the immediate vicinity. The developer has stated their concept includes high quality architecture and materials that would be an asset to the community.

GENERAL PLAN CONSISTENCY AND CODE COMPLIANCE:

The current General Plan designation of Public/Semi-PUBLIC would have to be amended to a new designation allowing for the mixed-use project. In addition, the General Plan height limit of 35 feet would have to be amended to 50 feet, the maximum height permitted by the voter initiative, Measure A. The site would need to be rezoned from CF, Community Facility to P-D, Planned Development. The P-D rezoning would establish the site plan, building massing, the distribution of uses, number of residential units, parking provisions, etc., in short, all of the development details of the project. Design review of the appearance of the project will be required to determine the final details of the building configuration, the architectural character of the buildings and the site and landscaping improvements. All of the approvals, other than the design review, would be granted by the City Council after input from the Planning Commission.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW:

The project is subject to the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). A preliminary initial study of environmental significance has been completed, which has identified a number of potentially significant environmental impacts related to traffic, air quality, noise, public services, public safety, and recreation. Staff anticipates that an EIR will be required for the project.
ANALYSIS:

In recent years, BART has been exploring options to facilitate developments that support the BART system on their properties. Recent examples include adoption of the Pleasant Hill BART Specific Plan and construction of the Fruitvale Transit Village project. BART's goals include delivering high quality transportation services, enhancing ridership on the system, and working cooperatively with the local communities. At the same time, communities have been exploring ways of meeting the Bay Area's housing demand that minimize traffic, air-quality and other quality of life impacts. Two recent examples include the "Footprint for a Livable Community" sponsored by the Association of Bay Area Governments and "Shaping Our Future" sponsored by a consortium of all Contra Costa County cities and the County. Both community explorations identified the need to accommodate future housing growth in locations with transit options. For these reasons, BART has partnered with a development group to propose a mixed-use development for the Walnut Creek BART Station.

In review of the application, supporting information, and plans, City staff has identified a number of basic principals that any development of the BART site should demonstrate. First and foremost, the site is a multi-modal transit hub. Any project would need to accommodate the projected growth and expansion of BART facilities. A project at this site would need to improve access and circulation around and throughout the site and accommodate pedestrians, bicycles, bus and shuttle services, kiss-and-ride function, and parking. Finally, the plan needs to integrate into the Walnut Creek fabric and exhibit a strong architectural place-making characteristic.

In an effort to address these concerns the applicant, City staff, BART staff, and County Connection representatives (bus service provider) have met over the past few months. These meetings have been primarily focused on improving vehicle and pedestrian circulation, expanding access to the site, incorporating the eastern (transit hub) lot into the development plan, and exploring commercial/retail options to serve the predominantly residential and transit-oriented project.

The purpose of this Planning Commission meeting is to introduce the development concepts of the Walnut Creek BART station and receive input and direction on the following development principals from which to proceed.

1. **Site Goals**: As a transit hub, any development proposal at this site would need to consider future expansion of BART facilities and improve access and circulation to and throughout the site. The Walnut Creek Comprehensive Station Plan, prepared by BART in 2004, identifies goals and objectives for the site, as well as recommendations related to station capacity and functionality. As currently proposed, the project does not address a number of the objectives included in the Comprehensive Station Plan. Staff would like confirmation from the Planning Commission that development of the site needs to reflect the primary function of the site as a multi-modal transit hub.

2. **Access and Circulation as the foundation for the Development Plan**: The Walnut Creek BART station is first and foremost a transit hub serving every mode of transit including pedestrians, bicycles, buses, shuttles, taxis, and parking and kiss-and-ride functions for private vehicles. Currently, vehicle circulation is inefficient and confusing. Additionally, the kiss-and-ride function (drop-off and pick-up zone) is congested and backs out onto Ygnacio Valley Road during peak hours. Staff believes that access and circulation, to and throughout the site, is a fundamental consideration in establishing a development plan for the site. Staff is requesting confirmation that the establishment of an improved access and circulation plan.
3. **Site Development Options:** In review of the preliminary development plan, staff identified the lack of a comprehensive plan for the entire site noting that the plan did not incorporate or address the eastern lot. Staff was concerned that failure to address the eastern lot would be repeating the existing condition, which placed the existing BART parking structure in the center of the site without consideration of future needs. The applicant has stated that the eastern site was not included in the development plan due to concerns that development there would obstruct the view corridor, which is depicted in the General Plan along the BART line.

Views of Mount Diablo, downtown, and the whole Ygnacio Valley are indeed spectacular onboard a BART train entering Walnut Creek. Panoramic views of the Mt. Diablo range are also present looking eastward from the BART at-grade fare gate, bus terminal and eastern parking lot. Views of Mt Diablo from the elevated BART platform are, however, somewhat obscured by the platform covering and completely obstructed from the San Francisco-bound platform when a train is in the station. Additionally, access to the BART platform, while public, requires a paid BART ticket. The view experience from the elevated platform is also diminished in that, as a transit platform, most people using BART move quickly to depart the station. Staff believes that development of a comprehensive plan of the BART station should explore opportunities to preserve and enhance views of Mt. Diablo from the BART site as a public amenity from a (no-fee) public area or plaza. Staff is requesting input on the concept of considering view preservation alternatives.

4. **Land-use Options:** The project proposes a mixed-use development that is predominately residential with accessory retail commercial space serving project residents and the commuting public. The project would provide rental apartment units, as BART would retain ownership of the property. The applicant has identified a small convenience market, cleaners, coffee shop, flower/card shop, and a health club as possibly retail/commercial uses. Traffic generating uses, such as a destination restaurant, are not proposed. In previous preliminary presentations with City Council and the Planning Commission, other potential uses, such as a daycare, grocery store, and community meeting space, were discussed. Staff is seeking input and direction of potential uses to be considered during the project and environmental review process.

5. **Design Characteristics:** Although detailed architectural plans have not yet been developed, staff believes that the site topography, surrounding features, and scale of the project require particular attention to design. The site has a number of challenges in that it is sandwiched between an elevated freeway and BART track, and fronts Ygnacio Valley Road and N. California Boulevard; all busy and imposing edges. In addition, the project site is within the Golden Triangle and is adjacent to a number of taller office buildings, which were developed before Measure A height limits. The project requires creative design solutions to integrate with the unique setting and create a desirable environment for residents, commuters, and the surrounding area.

Staff is requesting input on these elements as the basis to guide the applicant in preparation of project refinements.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

1. Location Map
2. Site Photograph
3. Preliminary Project Plans

Prepared by Scott Harriman