AGENDA: MAY 17, 2006

ORIGINATED BY: COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT – PLANNING

SUBJECT: WALNUT CREEK BART TRANSIT VILLAGE – Y05-027 (Study Session).
Introduction of a proposal to construct a mixed-use transit oriented development at the Walnut Creek BART Station. The conceptual plan proposes 560 to 600 residential apartment units, 35,000 to 60,000-square feet of commercial space, replacement BART parking, and new residential and commercial parking at the Walnut Creek BART station at 200 Ygnacio Valley Road.

GENERAL PLAN: Mixed-Use Residential (west side of BART line); Public/Semi Public (east side of BART line)

ZONING: CF, Community Facility

APPLICANT: Walnut Creek Transit Lifestyle Associates, LLC

OWNER: SF BART District

CEQA STATUS: EIR to be prepared

STATEMENT OF ISSUES:

On December 1, 2005, the Planning Commission reviewed the applicant’s initial plan for a mixed-use development on the two surface parking lots on either side of the existing BART parking garage. The Planning Commission, in this initial review, recognized the important role of BART for Walnut Creek and the region, but also expressed concerns that the plan did not examine the transit station comprehensively, did not correct existing access and circulation deficiencies, or provide a design that integrated with the surrounding area. The Planning Commission recommended that the project be redesigned to 1) include a comprehensive plan for the entire BART site, 2) recognize the site’s primary function as a transit hub, and 3) focus on circulation and access as the foundation of the development plan. In response to Planning Commission and staff comments, the applicants have revised their proposal to include the entire BART site and are requesting preliminary feedback from the Design Review Commission on the conceptual site plan.

Development of the BART site will require a General Plan amendment, 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 this comprehensive plan to the Design Review Commission and public and receive comments prior to commencing with the required environmental studies and further architectural design work.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

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

1. Site Plan Design Concepts – Schemes A and B
2. Pedestrian, Bicycle, and Vehicle Access and Circulation
3. Residential, Commercial and Transit Environments
4. Integration with Community
PROJECT AND SITE DESCRIPTION:

The Walnut Creek BART station is comprised of a 16.8-acre site 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. The net buildable area, excluding BART facilities (tracks, parking structure, access roads, etc.) is approximately 9.8-acres. 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. The BART site contains 823 parking stalls on surface lots throughout the site and a 1,250-stall multistory garage on the west side of the site. An existing 14-bay bus terminal is situated on the east side of the BART track. The site generally slopes in a gentle grade from north to south and west to east with short steep down slopes along the Ygnacio Valley Road and Pringle Avenue edges.

Access to the site currently occurs through an entry/exit driveway at the stoplight on Ygnacio Valley Road at the I-680 off-ramp, an entrance-only driveway further west on Ygnacio next to the elevated freeway, and an exit/entry at Pringle Avenue and Riviera Drive. A southbound exit-only driveway is located on North California Boulevard.

In response to the initial Planning Commission review in December 2005, the applicant has revised their proposal to include a comprehensive plan for the entire BART site. The project design, in the conceptual stage, proposes a phased development plan consisting of 560 to 600 residential apartment units, and 35,000 to 60,000-square feet of commercial space. Approximately 2-acres of open space areas are included within the 9.8-acre development area. The northern and eastern surface parking lots would be developed with four-story residential apartment buildings over one and two-levels of underground parking. Ground floor retail storefronts face the BART line and Pringle Avenue. Plans of the project are included as Attachment 3.

The project proposed to replace the existing 823 surface parking spaces within a new five-story, 7-level parking structure (one sub-surface level and one roof-top level) and new bus transit center at the south of the existing BART parking structure. The applicant is also evaluating providing an additional 100 BART parking spaces within the proposed garage in response to concerns raised at the December 2005 Planning Commission meeting. The existing 1,250-space BART garage would remain with only minor adjustments. Based on this conceptual plan, a total of 2,173 BART parking spaces would be provided.

Residential parking is proposed at a ratio of 1.3 spaces per unit (+/- 780 spaces), which is generally consistent with the City’s parking standard for BART proximate multi-family projects. Parking for the commercial uses is proposed at a ratio of 2 spaces per 1,000-square feet (120 spaces at a commercial build-out of 60,000-square feet). The applicant has expressed interest in a commercial parking adjustment from the city standard of 4 spaces per 1,000-square feet as a result of the project’s increased bus capacity, mixed-use and shared parking associated with a transit-oriented development. Total residential and commercial parking would be approximately 900. All of the proposed parking is subject to further analysis through the environmental review process.

GENERAL PLAN CONSISTENCY AND CODE COMPLIANCE:

The recently adopted General Plan 2025 designates the west side of the BART site as Mixed-Use Residential and the east side as Public/Semi-Public. The BART site has two General Plan
designations as only the western portion of the site was under consideration at the commencement of the General Plan update process. A General Plan amendment would be necessary to expand the mixed-use designation to the entire site. In addition, the General Plan height limit of 35 feet would have to be amended to 50 feet, which is consistent with Measure A restrictions. 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 Commissions.

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:

Based on comments received by the Planning Commission and City Staff, the applicant prepared a series of access and circulation diagrams to include and integrate pedestrian, bus, bicycle, and private vehicles throughout the site. Analysis of those diagrams resulted in the selection of a circulation diagram, which became the basis for a revised development proposal for the entire site. It should be noted that while the various circulation diagrams were prepared by the applicant’s traffic consultant and reviewed by City staff, the selection of a preferred access and circulation plan was preliminary and intended only as a place to begin the design of a site layout. Further analysis of access and circulation will occur through the environmental review process.

Overall Site Concepts

Throughout the preliminary review of the project, staff comments have focused on the need for the project to integrate into the fabric of Walnut Creek, to enhance access and circulation to and throughout the development, to include strong place-making elements, and create a sense of arrival. The following points summarize development principles used by staff to review the initial plans.

- BART success now and future
  Primarily as a Transit Hub
- Access and Circulation throughout the site has to work for:
  BART Pedestrians and Vehicles
  Residential Pedestrians and Vehicles
  Bus and Taxi Services
  Drop-off and Pick-up
- Defining Characteristics
  Relationships between Residential/Retail/BART
  Connections to City
  Public Benefit (View Corridor, Plazas, etc)
In response, the applicant team has developed a set of guiding principals, included within Attachment 3, which has been used as the foundation of the two conceptual site plans. Schemes A and B are similar with respect to the placement of the new parking structure and bus terminal on the south site, general orientation of the buildings, and major pedestrian corridors opening the Mt. Diablo view and connecting mid-block on Pringle Avenue. However, each scheme provides a different building and open space arrangement. Both schemes place the commercial areas directed toward the BART fare gate and along the Pringle Avenue edge. Both schemes show commercial space, suggested as a health club by the applicant, at the southern side of the proposed parking structure along the Ygnacio Valley Road frontage.

The applicant will be presenting their site and architectural design concepts during the public hearing.

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**ATTACHMENTS:**

1. Location Map
2. Site Photograph

Prepared by Scott Harriman

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Walnut Creek Transit Village

"Scheme A"