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April 5, 2012

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San Francisco Planning Department
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Re: Central Corridor Project

Secretary
Mary McCue

Dear Mr. Switzky:

Treasurer
Bob Gamble

SPUR wishes to offer its comments on the Central Corridor Project. As you know we are very pleased that the Planning Department is undertaking a planning process in this area. Given the enormous transit investment in the Central Subway, coupled with the proposed extension of Caltrain and plans for High Speed Rail, this area's importance to San Francisco cannot be overstated.

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In March 2009, SPUR published a policy report entitled "The Future of Downtown San Francisco". That report described how downtown San Francisco, due to its walkable compact nature and its position as the hub of the regions transit infrastructure, encourages workers to commute by sustainable transportation modes, such as walking, bicycling and taking transit. In fact, downtown San Francisco is the only employment node in the region where most people travel to work without bringing their own car.

SPUR believes that one of the best ways to build on the successes of San Francisco's downtown is to expand our high density core into areas adjacent to downtown. If we fail to do so, jobs will either end up in parts of the city less well served by transit or bypass San Francisco entirely and locate in other parts of the region.

It is with these thoughts in mind that we provide the following specific comments on the proposed height and zoning scenarios for the Central Corridor:

Planning Principles

The stated principles for planning the Central Corridor Project are to *Support Growth* and to *Create Complete Communities*¹, both principles with which we concur. We agree that this area can support substantial development given the strength of the transit infrastructure. We also agree that office development should be favored over other kinds of growth and that the technology sector should be supported in appropriate locations. Housing should be allowed in this area, but job uses should be prioritized.

We support the goal of creating complete communities. Maintaining a mixture of uses in the area while adding new uses will help create a lively creative atmosphere. Historic resources should receive an appropriate level of protection, enabling the

¹ Central Corridor – Draft Land use Principles -11/3/11, accessed from the Planning Department Website on 3/21/12

retention of the best historic structures while allowing for growth and change in the area. Additionally, the public realm in this area is in need of substantial attention.

Zoning and Land Use

We strongly believe that the Central Corridor Plan Area is an appropriate location for high-density job uses. We are interested in Zoning Scenario 4, which extends the “MUX”² zoning classification to the broadest swath of the plan area, picking up the blocks between 4th and 6th Street adjacent to Townsend. While we are interested in the use of the new MUX designation as a means of flexible zoning, we would caution, however, that the zoning emphasis remain on job creation in this area. For this reason, we appreciate the fact that several of the largest parcels adjacent to or near 4th Street have been reserved for office uses (MUO).

We are very supportive of the idea of creating a new park in this area. As the materials from the March community meeting show, a park located between 4th and 5th and Welsh and Freelon would serve as a great parallel to South Park.

Heights

We are pleased to see that all four height scenarios presented in November 2011 propose an overall increase in height limits, especially along 4th Street and near the Market Street corridor. We agree that heights should be used to reinforce 4th Street and identify stations along the Central Corridor. We also agree that heights should be used to diminish the dominant presence of the freeway within the Central Corridor neighborhood.

We are supportive of the notion that more height flexibility should be allowed on large development lots and that these lots should be used to support office and workplace uses.

However, we would like to request that the Department to study an additional scenario – one with greater heights in a number of locations, including those parcels adjacent to the freeway and those adjacent to Townsend Street. There are many potential advantages, both urbanistically and in terms of focusing growth near transit, that would come with taller heights. We do not see any reason to preclude a scenario with taller building heights at this point. There may also be some opportunities to encourage higher heights along 5th Street and in other locations within the plan area as well.

Public realm improvements

We would like to stress the importance of pedestrian improvements throughout the area. As your March presentation materials show, many of the sidewalk conditions within this area are well below the minimum width recommended in the *San Francisco Better Streets Plan*. We would like to see many of the sidewalks within the district widened substantially and pedestrian crossings added.

We love the idea of making alleyway improvements within SoMA. Alleys are a critical part of the pedestrian network, especially in the South of Market area which tends to have a very large block pattern.

² we understand that the intent is to have the MUX zoning designation permit a wide variety of uses.

We are very supportive of efforts to enliven spaces underneath the freeway to make walking in this area more pleasant and are pleased that the Planning Department is working with other agencies to enhance the pedestrian experience in the AC Transit and Golden Gate Transit Bus Yards.

We would like to see the creation of bicycle lands on 5th Street and 2nd Street as called for in the San Francisco Bicycle Plan.

Eco-Districts

We were very intrigued by the Eco-District proposal that was presented at the March Community Meeting and look forward to learning more about this effort.

Conclusion

We are generally very pleased with the direction outlined in the Central Corridor Plan. We request, however, that the Department add an additional scenario to study greater heights within the Plan Area than those proposed in Scenario 4. We look forward to learning more about the MUX zoning category and how it might support high-intensity job uses within the plan area.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at 415-644-4292

Sincerely,



Sarah Karlinsky
Deputy Director

cc: SPUR Board of Directors
John Rahaim, San Francisco Planning Department
Jose Campos, San Francisco Planning Department
Sarah Dennis-Phillips, San Francisco Planning Department
Steven Wertheim, San Francisco Planning Department