

Midtown Neighborhood Association

Creating a strong community and a clean, safe and thriving neighborhood through partnerships

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March 16, 2016

VIA EMAIL

Teresa Haenggi, Associate Planner
City of Sacramento
Community Development Department
300 Richards Boulevard, 3rd Floor
Sacramento, CA 95811

RE: Yamanee P15-047

Dear Ms. Haenggi,

The environmental and health benefits of well-planned, high-density, mixed-use communities cannot be over-emphasized. Our global population is growing exponentially, and California is the world's 8th largest economy, with agriculture being one of our state's greatest commodities. As the Farm-to-Fork Capital, we need to preserve the farmland that feeds our growing population and the open space that makes our state beautiful. With that in mind, and after much consideration, discussion and input from the community, the Midtown Neighborhood Association's interim board is confident this letter represents the voice of the majority of Midtown residents who feel the project brings great community benefits. However, for fair representation, we would be remiss to not mention the concerns of the minor voice.

The Yamanee Project has triggered strong feelings in some people, both in favor of the project and those against it. Knowing this, links to Yamanee project information have been on the front page of our association's website and on our website's "Developments" page since February 1, 2016, where we've allowed the public to leave comments. The project was also posted on our Facebook page before the December 10, 2015 Planning Commission meeting. In February 2016, the applicant gave a project presentation to the interim board. The development team later gave another presentation at our interim board's monthly meeting on March 10, 2016, to which the community was invited. Links to the meeting agenda were posted on the front page of our website, on our Facebook page (where about 600 people have indicated that they "like" our page) and to the Midtown neighborhood on Nextdoor. In addition, we emailed the meeting agenda to about 250 people.

Our interim secretary counted 47 people at our March 10 meeting, where the developer gave his presentation. Following the presentation, the community asked questions of the development team and then shared their thoughts and feelings about the project with our interim board. Of the people in attendance, 15 expressed support or excitement for the project and five expressed opposition or concerns. After considering all of the above, the Midtown Neighborhood's interim board is confident this letter represents all views gathered from our Midtown neighbors.

Our great city has gone through tremendous changes, some good and some that we could have done better. Our strongest driving force is Mother Nature, and our existence depends on caring for our natural world. As such, we need to focus on creating sustainable communities — places where people can live, work and play in the same area and move about by active transportation. We appreciate the City's General Plan Vision that

“Sacramento will be a model of sustainable development in its planning, its use of urban heat island reduction measures, and its conservation of energy, water, and other natural resources.”

Among Yamanees’s most significant community benefit is the effect it will have on the environment. Yamanees aligns with the goals of the Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006 (AB 32), the Sustainable Communities and Climate Protection Act of 2008 (SB 375) and the Sacramento Area Council of Governments “2016 Metropolitan Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy,” which collectively target reducing greenhouse gases and the number of vehicles on the road and the negative effects of those cars. Furthermore, the project is consistent with the City’s General Plan, in which the Plan Overview states, “The General Plan is designed to be adaptable to unique projects. It provides flexibility in decision-making for certain types of projects.” (Emphasis added.)

The General Plan Overview further notes, “Between now and 2035, the City of Sacramento is expected to grow by approximately 165,000 residents and 865,000 jobs” and promotes Smart Growth that “accommodates population growth in a better way than simply continuing to expand the city outward. It involves reinvesting in existing cities and suburbs to create vibrant town centers, providing housing close to jobs, promoting transit use and walking, and minimizing urban sprawl, loss of open space, and traffic congestion.” With a planned 130+ units, the Yamanees project will make multimodal transportation easily available to many people. A bus is conveniently located immediately in front of the building, and the project will have bike parking for its residents. The project site is near goods and services that are within walking distance, and it’s a short Uber or Lyft ride to Amtrak. These options can reduce vehicle dependency. In addition, for people who have yet to embrace the car-free life, the more than 100 parking spaces within the structure will allow density of people without negatively affecting street parking for residents who already live near the project site.

The Vision of the General Plan is that “Sacramento will be the most livable city in America.” Among its goals to achieve its vision, the General Plan states that, “Every neighborhood will be a desirable place to live because of its walkable streets, extensive tree canopy, range of housing choices, mixed use neighborhood centers, great schools, parks and recreation facilities, and easy access to Downtown and jobs.” (Emphasis added).

Part of what makes Midtown desirable is its diversity. But, we lack diversity in our housing options in Midtown. We need market-rate, workforce, affordable and transitional housing, and we need renters and homeowners alike. Yet, according to 2010 Census data, the four census tracts in which our association falls (J to R streets and 15th to 29th streets), owner-occupied residences are only about 5 percent to 10 percent. To make matters worse, Sacramento, and especially Midtown, has little options for homeownership. The inventory simply is not here. Yamanees will offer more than 130 for-sale units and retail/restaurant space in about a half-block — the same footprint currently occupied by only a handful of businesses. While this kind of density is new to Midtown, SACOG’s 2016 *Metropolitan Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy* states, “...over 5,000 people identified high levels of support for mixed-use development patterns that contained significant amounts of more compact housing patterns.”

Not only will the project bring strong environmental benefits, but these households will also bring economic activity to our area. Bringing 130 new residences will also improve safety with increased foot traffic on the sidewalks. And, the activated alley will bring further benefit. Many of our alleys are challenged areas because of illegal dumping, open dumpsters, and the illegal activities that often take place. Activated alleys are cleaner, busier, and better lit.

While we support this project and though the City’s General Plan Overview states, “The General Plan is designed to be adaptable to unique projects. It provides flexibility in decision-making for certain types of

projects,” we do not feel that this project would work just anywhere in Midtown. It is important to note that there are few places this project would work without looking out of place. The senior center across from the project location creates a gradual effect and balance to Yamanee’s height. This would not be the case even a block or two away if Yamanee stood solely amidst one and two story buildings.

Concerns have also been voiced about the Yamanee project setting a “precedent.” We hope, indeed, that it sets a precedent — one by which this project’s high-quality, innovative design, and environmental and community benefits are cited as the minimum standard by which similar deviations may be approved. We appreciate that the proposed building will have a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design Platinum certification — the highest rating available. To make sure that the completed project holds this esteemed certification, we ask that the environmental and sustainability features identified in the project proposal be included in the entitlements and binding upon the developers.

A walk through Midtown is an architectural tour reflecting buildings from more than 100 years ago, from the ornate Victorians to the concrete bunker style of the mid-to-late 20th Century. While some people are concerned that Yamanee will damage the fabric of the Central City’s many historic buildings and districts, we believe that like our diverse residents, our diverse buildings can coexist. Yet, this can only be achieved if new development is done with respect for the current buildings that make Midtown the hip and historic place many of us call home and makes it a desirable place for people to work and play. Yamanee, with its innovate design will be a new addition to our neighborhood’s diverse collection of architecture.

Land speculation and demolition by neglect have been long-time concerns in the Central City. While no one can predict the future, we insist that when our neighborhood identifies blighted and neglected buildings that we are able count on the City to be a strong and responsive partner in enforcing ordinances to prevent blighted areas and to enforce the proper care of buildings.

Many of us remember the terrible hole left in the in the ground Downtown when a large-scale project never came to life. Because of that, we also ask that a condition be made that no demolition work be done until all financing and building permits have been issued.

For some people, change is exciting, while others find it unsettling. Our interim board realizes that the Central City is experiencing an amazing Renaissance, and we look forward to being a part of it through continued partnerships and conversations with developers and City staff. Together, we can create a sustainable community that honors and respects the buildings that witnessed our City’s rich history while we continue our City’s exciting story by building new structures that can coexist with their ancestors and be here for our children’s children to protect. We know there will challenges at times, but we believe that together we can create a truly sustainable city that balances people, the planet, and prosperity — one neighborhood at a time.

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,



Angela Tillotson, Interim Chair