

*City of Albany*  
**Planning and Zoning Commission**  
**Scoping Meeting/Staff Report**

Meeting Date: April 22, 2008 Prepared by: \_\_\_\_\_

Agenda Item: 6a Reviewed by: \_\_\_\_\_

**Subject:** University Village at San Pablo and Monroe Street. 1030-1130 San Pablo Avenue. Planning Application 07-100. Rezoning. Planned Unit Development. Design Review. Parking Exception. A request for rezone to San Pablo Commercial, planned unit development, design review and parking exception for a new grocery store and mixed-use development at a site owned by the University of California.

**Applicant/  
Owner:** Bob LaLanne with The LaLanne Group for University of California

**Recommendation**

Staff recommends that the Commission receive testimony from the applicant and members of the public. Provide direction to staff on issues in need of review during the CEQA review process.

**Previous Action**

No recent major improvements have been made to the property.

**Project Description**

The approximately 4.2-acre project site is 2 lots located to the northwest and southwest of the Monroe Street/San Pablo Avenue intersection in the City of Albany. The applicant would like to construct a new 55,000sq.ft. grocery store at the south end of the property and a mixed-use development at the north end of the lot, which includes 30,000sq.ft. of retail and 175 assisted living/senior housing units. Because the uses are not related to the educational function of the University, city land use policies apply to the proposed project.

The properties currently have two zonings, San Pablo Commercial for the first 100' along the eastern side of San Pablo Avenue and Residential for the rest of the property. A rezone to San Pablo Commercial for the entire area would be required to consider a project with commercial uses. A planned unit development is requested to allow an increase in height and a parking exception is requested to allow a reduced number of required parking spaces. The project is discussed in further detail in the study session staff report from November 13, 2007 (see attachment 4).

At this time a scoping session is being held to receive feedback from the public and other agencies on environmental issues that should be looked at during the California Environmental Equality Act (CEQA) process. LSA is the consultant firm that has been selected to perform the environmental review (EIR) and will be present during the scoping process to receive feedback. The scoping process is discussed in

further detail below. No action is to be taken at this time.

### **Background on Application**

A formal application was first received on October 31, 2007. A study session was held on November 13, 2008 to provide initial comments from the public and the Commission to staff and the applicant. The plans have not been revised since the study session. The environmental analysis, therefore, shall be based off of the concept of the plans that have been previously reviewed by the public and Commission.

### **Environmental Analysis**

An EIR was certified by the University of California for a master plan that included the entire University Village in 1998. A subsequent EIR was certified in 2004, which included the quadrant areas between Buchanan and Codornices Creek and San Pablo Avenue and 8<sup>th</sup> Street. The project description/plan has been changed since the 2004 approval in that the number of residential units has been decreased and the amount of commercial space has been increased. Additional environmental review will be required as a result of these changes.

### **Identification of Key Issues**

#### A. Purpose of the Environmental Scoping Process

Under CEQA guidelines, purpose of the scoping process is to provide a means for other public agencies to provide "early input" in identifying and articulating any specific concerns. A Notice of Preparation is the notice that initiates interagency dialogue and is required once an EIR is found to be necessary by the lead agency, which in this case is the City. The Office of Planning and Research holds The State Clearinghouse (SCH), which coordinates the distribution of environmental documents prepared under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) to State agencies for their review and comment. The City sent out a Notice of Preparation on March 31, 2008 to the neighbors within a 300' radius and all applicable agencies (see attachment 2 and 3). The comment period ends on April 29, 2008.

The scoping process has also evolved into a means for the public to identify and articulate their concerns about environmental and potential significant impacts. The process can be a successful tool for bringing all interested parties to the table and provide an opportunity for issues to be raised early in the planning process.

#### B. Environmental Issues Raised at November 13, 2007 Study Session

The study session staff report from November 13, 2007 included brief discussions on a few of the potential issues requiring environmental review. The issues included in the report are: creeks, traffic, noise, and stormwater (see attachment 4). The public and Commission raised a number of issues during the hearing:

- Traffic, including circulation and traffic levels along San Pablo, effects at Gilman St. freeway exits, circulation and safety through University Village and near Ocean View School
- Creek/open space, integrating, utilizing and enhancing the creek as open space for both the senior tenants and the community

- Preservation and/or relocation of the Gill tract and Gill House
- Comprehensive plan for University Village as a whole and not just the project area
- Bike and pedestrian access, circulation and safety
- Parking and whether there is adequate parking levels provided to serve the development, and conversely, reducing parking to reflect new urbanist ideas on design
- Height and mass of the buildings both along San Pablo and Monroe

As previously mentioned, the scoping session is an opportunity for the potential effects of the project to be identified early in the planning process. CEQA reviews all potential effects of a project, which are broken down into seventeen categories that include aesthetics, agricultural resources, air quality, biological resources, cultural resources, geology soils, hazards and hazardous materials, hydrology/water quality, land use/planning, mineral resources, noise, population/housing, public services, recreation, transportation/traffic, utilities/services systems, and mandatory findings of significance.

In some cases a CEQA environmental checklist will be created as a “draft list of issues” for interested parties to use as a baseline prior to the scoping session. Staff, however, believes that in this particular case the scoping session should be a “clean slate” without the structure or influence a draft checklist.

### C. Design Review

Design review is the discretionary process whose purpose is to ensure that the design features and architectural details of a project are appropriate and harmonious with the site and surrounding areas. During the design review process the architectural details such as the style and materials, signage, colors, landscaping, etc are refined. The “Aesthetics” portion of the CEQA review does not focus on the architectural details of the project but more the “big picture” aesthetics such as height, mass, and bulk, biological impacts and view impacts. The following questions regarding aesthetics are posed in the checklist:

Does the project...

- a) Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista?
- b) Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway?
- c) Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings?
- d) Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area?

After the environmental review is completed mitigation measures are incorporated into the redesigned project to become a final design submittal. The Commission will review the final proposed plans for Design Review in a public hearing. Therefore, the scoping session should focus more on the “big picture” aesthetic concepts and not focus on design details.

### D. Use of Earlier EIRs

An EIR was certified by the University of California for a master plan that included the entire University Village in 1998. A subsequent EIR was certified in 2004, which included the quadrant areas between Buchanan Street and Codornices Creek and San Pablo Avenue and 8<sup>th</sup> Street. The previously approved project included a higher number of housing, solely student housing, and a smaller commercial component. There have been concerns raised about the use of analysis from the 1998 EIR and 2004 subsequent EIR, which may be archaic and not applicable to current conditions.

It has been acknowledged that ambient conditions have changed over the last few years. For example, traffic conditions and improvements have changed, hydrology has been improved, etc. There are few portions of the previous EIRs that could be used in review of the current proposal. If data from the previous EIRs is utilized it will be updated and expanded upon as needed and discussed in further detail in regards to its relation to the current proposal. In addition, all sources of data will be cited throughout the document.

### **Conclusion**

Once a draft EIR is completed there will be a public review period where anyone can comment on the document's content. Subsequently an evaluation and response to comments will be completed and the EIR will be recirculated if/when new significant information is added to the EIR.

This is a very large-scale project for Albany. It is located on a major thoroughfare, connects to existing university housing and is bordered by two creeks. There are a number of potential impacts of the project that should be identified and analyzed as early on in the planning process as possible to avoid future problems and late identification of issues. Staff recommends that the Commission receive testimony from the applicant and members of the public, and then provide direction to staff on issues in need of review during the CEQA process.

Finally, it should be noted that a public notice regarding the scoping session was mailed to neighbors within a 300' radius and there is a webpage on the city website dedicated specifically to this project. All documents were posted ten days prior to the scoping session and plans were posted one week prior to the scoping session ([www.albanyca.org](http://www.albanyca.org) under title "UC Village").

### **Attachments:**

1. Plans
2. Notice of Preparation
3. List of public agencies that were provided the Notice of Preparation
4. Study session staff report from November 13, 2007
5. Minutes from November 13, 2007
6. Letters from public
7. CEQA Checklist