

MEMO

To: Balboa Park Station Citizens Advisory Committee  
From: Robert Muehlbauer, Chair  
Re: Geneva and San Jose Avenues Proposal  
Date: September 7, 2015

**RECOMMENDATION:**

That the Balboa Park Station Citizens Advisory Committee (BPSCAC) adopt the attached resolution recommending the following:

1. That SFMTA partner with the City and BART to develop a Geneva Avenue/SanJose Avenue Intersection Specific Plan (Specific Plan) and design guidelines for street, sidewalk, transit stops and public plazas within its sphere of influence for adoption and inclusion into the Balboa Park Station Area Plan (Area Plan); and,
2. That SFMTA partner with BART, and the City to sponsor a one-day urban design community engagement charette and workshop to illustrate potential public and private design options at the Geneva/San Jose Avenue intersection.

Goals

The goals of the Specific Plan for Geneva and San Jose Avenues, and an urban design community engagement charette and workshop are:

1. Create illustrated design options to guide the development of public improvements that support the Area Plan and Vision Zero policies,
2. Develop a unique positive neighborhood identity and sense of place at the most highly used transit station in the south side of the City.
3. Enhance coordination of design ideas and implementation of improvements among SFMTA, BART and the City.

**BACKGROUND**

The Balboa Park Station Area Plan was adopted by the City in 2009 after several years of close community involvement. A number of public projects are soon slated to begin construction or are in active planning. These include new BART station elevators, 85 new units of affordable housing at the upper yard, remodeled SFMTA end-of-line platforms for two streetcars lines, and the redesign of the M-line terminus, among many others. The confluence of a "perfect storm" of projects is occurring that will significantly change the functioning and appearance of the station and nearby streetscape, particularly at the San Jose and Geneva intersection. Currently, this intersection is characterized by high traffic, poor pedestrian and bicycle circulation, dismal disabled accessibility, and in general, worn public area infrastructure, pot-holed street paving and street markings.

Despite the welcome news that many improvements are on the horizon, much is still undefined as to what projects will look like, or how the myriad of agencies responsible for various elements will coordinate their efforts. For example, several individual project elements that were previewed by the BPSCAC during committee meetings, such as lighting fixtures and bus shelters, seemed mostly to underscore a lack of inter-agency design cohesion between SFMTA, BART and the City. The San Jose/Geneva intersection, with its multi-modal public transit stops, active pedestrian areas and adjacent plaza areas deserves special attention. And while the Area plan contains numerous general policy, principals and narratives concerning design at key areas, they lack illustrations or visual options showing how proposed improvements might look, or how the various public entities will integrate their efforts into a seamless whole. This all leads to uncertainty as to what the affected local community is to expect and makes it difficult for the BPSCAC to contribute informed advisory committee feedback.

To address this challenge and assist in fulfilling the vision of the Area Plan, a "specific plan" is being recommended at the San Jose/Geneva Avenue intersection. The intent of the Specific Plan is to place this critical transit station and street intersection under a magnifying glass to further detail infrastructure improvements for public plaza areas and publicly owned properties (the upper yard and historic car barns) that directly front or are within the

intersection's zone of influence. The Specific Plan would establish illustrative guidelines for streets, lights, sidewalks, crosswalks, bike lanes and transit stops. Sightlines at proposed or renewed public plazas would be established to ensure that they embrace local landmarks and historic resources as called for in the Area Plan.

The geographic boundaries of the proposed Specific Plan are open for discussion. Ideally, they should capture the core of the intersection and be broad enough to include sufficient lengths of both Geneva and San Jose Avenues radiating out from the core that effect pedestrian, bicycle, transit and other motorized traffic. On the flip side, the Specific Plan is not intended to encumpass too broad of an area or duplicate (or contradict) planning work already addressed in the approved Area Plan. Rather, the proposed Specific Plan is intended to augment the Area Plan by providing greater detail so that the public and implementing agencies will be better informed with regard to plan particulars. Design elements within the Specific Plan could also serve as a model for other areas as improvements at these areas subject to the Area Plan move forward.

#### Supporting Area Plan Policies

Reading the Area Plan reveals many policies that would benefit from the proposed Specific Plan. Excerpts from the Area Plan that demonstrate this need include:

Policy 5.1.1 - "Create a variety of new open spaces"

Policy 5.1.4 - "Pay attention to transit waiting areas"

Policy 5.3.2 - "Redesign main streets to encourage walking, biking to transit station"

Policy 6.3.2 - "The Balboa Park BART Station should be reconfigured to reinforce its role as a regional and local transit node and important neighborhood landmark"; create "a strong and inviting public presence and memorable identity"; create "distinctive pedestrian entrances"; "public areas should be defined by a feeling of space, light and a strong sense of identity". "Public areas should include unimpeded sight lines to entry and access points"; "building massing on the upper yard should be greatest closest to the freeway and stepping down toward San Jose to respect the scale

of the surrounding neighborhoods"; include "special corner treatments".

There are many other examples. The above citations serve to exemplify the tenor as well as opaque nature of the Area Plan's recommendations.

#### Enhancing Coordination from SFMTA, BART and the City

The Specific Plan would enable greater design unity among agencies responsible for implementing improvements by providing illustrated design options developed in concert with their colleague agencies. They would also enable the BPSCAC and general public to see in greater detail what proposed design options are being considered.

#### One-Day Urban Design Community Engagement Charette and Workshop

A one-day Saturday urban design and community engagement charette is recommended to assist in developing the Specific Plan for the critical Geneva Avenue and San Jose Avenues intersection. As envisioned, a professionally moderated public workshop would take place at a location close to the study area such as at Lick Wilmerding High School. The event would be sponsored and hosted by SFMTA and the BPSCAC. SFMTA, BART, and City department staff, along with four pre-selected, pre-briefed urban design and one transportation design firm would moderate the day's activities and be active participants. As an all-day exercise, food, snacks and coffee would be available throughout the day. The workshop would have morning, afternoon and concluding late afternoon sessions.

During the morning session SFMTA, BART and the City would provide site plans, graphics and background of the study area and existing conditions along with some information about proposed improvements. For the afternoon session the SFMTA event moderator would break the attending public into sub-group teams moderated by the urban and transportation design firms. These firms would work with the various teams to create visual renderings and design element options particulars. To ensure a basis for some level of comparison, teams would be asked to develop their illustrated concepts along pre-designated perspectives, such as looking towards the plaza area from its kitty-corner, or a "birds-eye" view. At the end of the

afternoon session, the groups would be reassembled for one last concluding session to identify common preferences.

This body of information would then be used by SFMTA, BART and the City to create the proposed Specific Plan for adoption and inclusion into the Area Plan. It is desired that the Specific Plan be completed within four months.