



Tuesday, December 15, 2009

Mayor Bob Grassilli, and Councilmembers,  
Planning Commissioners  
City of San Carlos, City Hall  
600 Elm Street  
San Carlos, CA 94070

**RE: San Carlos Transit Village - SUPPORT**

Mayor Grassilli and Councilmembers, Planning Commissioners:

For over 50 years, Greenbelt Alliance has protected the Bay Area's open spaces in part by promoting smart infill development in our existing cities and towns. Our Compact Development Team (CDT) endorses and advocates for livable, transit-accessible communities with a wide range of housing options for families of all sizes and income levels. The CDT evaluated the San Carlos Transit Village (SCTV), proposed by Legacy Partners Residential, using an established set of endorsement criteria. We have endorsed the project for a variety of reasons. First and foremost, the site—immediately adjacent to the San Carlos Caltrain station—is an ideal location for this type of compact, residential infill development: rich in transit connections, and also steps away from Downtown San Carlos. Secondly, we strongly support the Grand Boulevard Initiative, which holds as its goal to transform El Camino Real into a vibrant boulevard with well-designed pedestrian amenities, and believe the SCTV will contribute greatly to this effort, enhancing not only a currently underutilized stretch of El Camino, but strengthening pedestrian connections to downtown as well. Finally, the provision of 42 new very low-income, low-income, and moderate-income homes will help the City of San Carlos fulfill its responsibility to provide homes that everyone can afford. Providing new homes, jobs, and shops along transit corridors is one of our best tools in limiting greenhouse gas emissions and curbing climate change.

With 280 homes situated on more than 6 acres, the SCTV translates into 45 homes per square acre. While the compactness of this project is impressive, we understand that height restrictions on the site have the effect of precluding more homes here. The compactness of this project should be maintained to preserve what makes this project special—the fact that it makes the most of the site and uses the available land efficiently. This is because compact development within San Carlos' existing urban footprint helps alleviate development pressure on the Bay Area's open spaces, and also translates into economic benefits for local business owners in a tough economic climate. For these reasons, Greenbelt Alliance encourages the City of San Carlos to fully support the compact nature of the SCTV.

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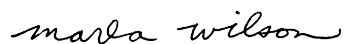
The impressive number of public improvements planned for the site—particularly enhancements of the pedestrian realm—provides another strong reason for our support of this project. As it stands now, the entrance to the station in front of the Historic Depot is strongly oriented toward cars, while the north and south ends of the site are similarly unwelcoming of pedestrians. Plans for a new public plaza in front of the Depot, improvements to the intersection at El Camino and San Carlos Boulevard, and the provision of trees, benches, and water features will create a vibrant, varied pedestrian experience. The plaza should become a well-loved, functional public space, accentuating the historic importance of the Depot and providing a better connection to the rest of downtown. Furthermore, in the context of the Grand Boulevard Initiative, these improvements are essential and will help breathe new life into this stretch of El Camino: reborn, revitalized, and responsive to the needs of 21st century residents.

Additionally, we should not forget the importance of the 42 new affordable homes provided as a part of this development. Affordable homes are an essential component of a community's housing stock, and attractively designed, high-quality affordable homes are a vital part of the revitalization efforts of neighborhoods and communities. Furthermore, despite the current downturn in the housing market, more families than ever before are struggling to find suitable housing that is within their budgets. These new homes will not only help to fulfill some of that demand in San Carlos, but do so in a highly suitable location adjacent to transit, shops, and services. Low-income residents are more likely to utilize transit than the general population, so this is also a positive development for Caltrain and SamTrans.

On a final note, we strongly applaud both the developer and the City's decision to pursue a reduction in the required parking for the SCTV. Currently, many municipalities are at a crossroads: they are grappling with how to encourage walking and transit usage while recognizing that many individuals still own and use cars. No solution is perfect, but if there was ever an appropriate location to experiment with lower parking requirements, the SCTV site is it. Future residents of this project will have abundant transit connections at their doorstep, and be within quick walking distance of downtown's Laurel Street and the array of services nearby.

Greenbelt Alliance encourages the Planning Commission and City Council to support the San Carlos Transit Village. Doing so will mean taking a stand for the kind of high-quality infill development that will help protect the region's open spaces and contribute to a vibrant, diverse Bay Area for generations to come.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "marla wilson".

Marla Wilson  
Sustainable Development Associate