

**SAN JOSE DOWNTOWN
ASSOCIATION**

28 N. FIRST STREET
SUITE 1000
SAN JOSE, CA 95113
TEL: 408-279-1775
FAX: 408-279-1904
WWW.SJDOWNTOWN.COM

July 17, 2015

Mayor Sam Liccardo
City of San Jose
200 E. Santa Clara St.
San Jose, CA 95113

RE: Proposed Rehab/Conversion of 1 N. First St.

Dear Mayor Liccardo,

The San Jose Downtown Association (SJDA) has reviewed the plan set submitted June 30, 2015, by Saratoga Capital for a potential conversion of an existing office/retail building to a mixed-use development at 1 N. First St.

Whether or not the proposed project is ultimately consistent with the general plan and downtown zoning, the proposal is neither dense enough nor interesting enough for this important corner at First and Santa Clara streets.

As a strong property rights and market forces advocate, SJDA has agonized over its conclusion that this is the wrong solution for this site. In looking at downtown development proposals, SJDA does not want “perfect to be the enemy of good” and curtail today’s investment for the promise of a better project many years down the road.

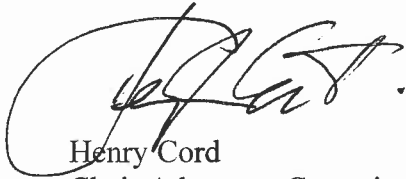
Nevertheless, we should not compromise today for a lesser project on this site. Even though a greater project in the future is not assured, we are confident the larger Mitchell Block that surrounds this building will encourage additional development opportunities that achieve the highest and best use for this site – and downtown.

This prominent corner deserves a taller building with more engaging architecture that understands its forward-looking place on the doorstep of BART as well as its historic context kitty-corner from the old B of A tower. The ordinary design proposed could be copied from any boilerplate mixed-use project in the state. The considerable lengths taken to maintain legal non-conforming status by retaining exterior walls to preserve a grandfathered no parking requirement while adding a fifth floor gives the project a square-peg-into-round-hole feel.

This project also encourages a larger discussion about downtown goals: What are the investments envisioned and encouraged for downtown “super blocks” like Mitchell, Valley Title or Greyhound? Will public plazas, pocket parks or paseos be required? Is Parking Plus (the addition of public parking spaces) needed? Minimum densities or heights? Certain percentage of sites dedicated to office? Will the big parcels like Mitchell be allowed to develop piecemeal and how does the first project in “set the tone” for the rest of block? Is it appropriate to locate permanent homeless housing on these key sites? SJDA looks to engage the city, VTA, property owners, developers, SPUR and others in addressing these questions and identify potential strategies, policies and incentives to support a more defined vision of the Santa Clara Street corridor and downtown.

New multi-family residential developed *anywhere* downtown is a long-term commitment. Once housing is built, it will be here for generations. To SJDA, the long-term benefits for downtown with a future high rise on this corner integrated with the entire block outweigh the short-term gains of rehabbing the existing building today.

Sincerely,



Henry Cord
Chair Advocacy Committee
Past-President

- Cc: Councilman Raul Peralez
Harry Frietas
Rosalynn Hughey
Kirk Kozlowski
Chris Neale
Steve Cox
Scott Knies