

January 4, 2023

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RE: Civic Center Revitalization Committee

Please share with the Committee, staff and public.

The Committee appears to be closing in on the end of its work efforts. I offer the following comments and observations:

1. VISION AND VALUES

As the Committee prepare its final report I suggest that a vision statement of the possibility of a bold and innovative development of the civic center core area be the lead-in of the report. This vision of these blocks in terms of land use, street life, civic presence, sustainable development, etc. be followed in the report by the values that have been expressed in the individual stakeholders' reports. These values are not the "nitty gritty" of the practical and the "how to" of getting things done by the redevelopment but are the principles of how the overall development will reflect San Diego's DNA now and for the future.

2. PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

The report should require that any development must allow for and integrate a more robust public engagement. This committee's efforts in that respect have been practical but not spectacular with engaging the public in the process. The stakeholders' engagement was a beneficial step, yet those participating seem to be more of a niche of like thinkers. A variety of opinions is valuable to truly bring forth a consensus. The City in the next phase must require the development teams to engage an outreach among a broader swath of the public across the city. The downtown community is one participant but if a new civic center is to reflect all of San Diego, more of the public across the city must be involved.

3. INTEGRATE THE FRINGE AREAS

The concept of the COB site being developed as a new City administrative building has practical benefits, both economically and time wise. However, from an urban design and place making approach, this site will be isolated from the rest of the core blocks. (As will Ash Street property). How does public space at a City Hall integrate into the broader area when it is on the fringe of the overall civic core? The City should engage a primary design team that creates the portfolio of the design aspects that are espoused in the vision and the values that this committee will develop and report to the City Council so that all development be in harmony yet reveal individuality within the civic core.

4. CLIMATE CHANGE, CARBON AND ASH STREET

All new development must be climate neutral at a minimum. Water resources are diminishing and utility infrastructure is changing. These blocks should be the standard for the future. The Ash Street property seems destined for demolition and rebuilding. An analysis of the structural integrity of Ash Street should be required as part of the next phase. Demolition will require inspection and abatement of hazardous materials, (as well may be possible in the other buildings as part of the six blocks.) Could Ash Street be restructured after the interior is abated and gutted? Could it be repurposed as housing or other uses at less cost and with more sustainability in mind? It's very easy to say, "tear it down." An environmentally conscious decision might be to rethink how to reuse the building.

Quoting from Architect Newsletter of the American institute of Architects, Erin McDade writes, "...how we value our existing built fabric, knowing that emissions avoided today are worth more than reductions promised in the future. While attention often centers on carbon-smart strategies for new construction, we will not build our way to an emission-free built environment; we must reuse existing building stock effectively. Renovating a structure usually has a much lower upfront carbon footprint than building new, because renovations typically reuse the emissions-intensive parts of the building—the foundation, structure, and envelope. Retrofitting an existing building can dramatically reduce its operating emissions."

5. PLACEMAKING, STREET SMARTS AND WORLD DESIGN CAPITAL

The street and open space is where the citizens will be greatly affected by any development of these blocks. Will streets be opened through the site? Will the four contiguous blocks be isolated from the surrounding streets? What if the Council Chambers were at the street versus an upper floor? How will the development reflect who we are as a city? San Diego and Tijuana are joint World Design Capitals for 2024. Will this redevelopment meet the standard for that nomenclature? It must and your committee must state it in its report.

I look forward to hearing the discussions regarding these comments and observations.



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