

1218 Willow St.
San Jose, CA 95125
June 20, 2009

Joe Horwedel, Director
City of San Jose Planning Dept.
200 E. Santa Clara St.
San Jose, CA 95113

re: Site Development Permit H09-009

Director Horwedel,

I respectfully request that you delay the approval of the planned development of a canopy structure by the Stucco Supply Company at 1601 Little Orchard Street. While the project itself appears quite appropriate, it would conflict with plans for “the Three Creeks Trail” along the abandoned right-of-way (ROW) of the Willow Glen Spur railroad.

A chronology:

- 1920’s: Railroad spur constructed to serve the canneries in Willow Glen.
- 1955: Stucco Supply Co. founded.
- August 2000: the San Jose City Council adopted “the Greenprint”, a 20-year strategic plan for the City Parks. It includes a proposed trail along the WG Spur ROW from Willow Glen over to Kelley Park, connecting the Los Gatos, Guadalupe, and Coyote Creek Trails, if and when the Union Pacific closes the spur line.
- 2001: Union Pacific closed the spur line. The City of San Jose was supposed to get first right of refusal on the purchase of the ROW, but if it did, it did not act.
- May 2002: the public became aware that the ROW is for sale; Councilmember Ken Yeager and Parks Planner Dave Mitchell met with the community on-site and toured parts of the alignment; and the City started negotiations with Union Pacific.
- 2002: the Santa Clara County Parks Dept., the Santa Clara Open Space Authority, and the Santa Clara Valley Water District all pledged donations, totaling \$4.3 million, towards the trail and the purchase of the ROW.
- 2002 - 2007: the public received periodic updates from City staff indicating that the City was still negotiating purchase.
- April 2007: the Stucco Supply Company requested a permit (H06-032) for “outdoor vehicle storage”. I emailed a challenge to the Planning Dept., and receipt was acknowledged.
- June 2007: the City trails coordinator stated that the City is not pursuing the eastern half of the trail. A letter exchange between County Supervisor Blanca Alvarado and the City prompted the City to establish “the WG Spur Trail Focus Group” to evaluate the trail’s feasibility. The public believed (incorrectly) that permit H06-032 would be delayed, pending resolution of the trail issues.
- 2008: the Focus Group met periodically to discuss the trail alignment. Meanwhile, Stucco Supply Co. apparently was granted the permit and proceeds to pave over the (former) ROW. The trail may still be feasible, but now it will require the City to acquire an easement from the Stucco Supply Co.

I do not fault the Stucco Supply Co. at all: the land was for sale, and it made perfect sense for the Company to acquire and develop it. Chart 1 [<http://www.saveourtrails-scc.org/docs/Chart1.JPG>] shows the situation:

- For years, the Stucco Supply Company (outlined in yellow) only had street access off of Little Orchard Street, a small street at the top-right of the photo.
- The railroad ROW (pink outline) gives the company access directly off of Almaden Expressway. It also provides more room for them to maneuver and park trucks within their facility.
- It is my hope that the City will work to acquire an easement (shown as the dotted green line) along the southern edge of the acquired railroad ROW. I believe such an easement would not interfere with the Almaden access road. Also, while giving up, say, 20' of pavement could have some impact on vehicle maneuverability, the driveways and parking lots are still significantly more spacious than before. Note that such a trail easement would not cut across their operations: the properties to the south are all unrelated to the Stucco Supply Co. and there is a continuous wall between the rail ROW and those businesses, and so the easement could be fenced off without block traffic.

If the canopy structure requested in the current permit application is constructed, it would prevent the possibility of a trail easement along the southern edge of the property. While the plans filed with the permit request do show a continuous path across the site (labeled “20' Fire Truck Access”), it cuts through the middle of parcel and is for emergency use: any trail users there would surely interfere with their operations.

Chart 2 [<http://www.saveourtrails-scc.org/docs/Chart2.JPG>] shows the need for a trail easement along this alignment. In the region between Almaden Expressway and Little Orchard Street, the only east/west connections are Alma Avenue, the rail ROW, and San Jose Avenue. (The next street south, Barnard Ave., doesn't connect to Almaden.)

- Alma is a busy, crowded 5-lane arterial, with substandard sidewalks and buildings constructed very close to the property lines. There are discussions about removing a lane of traffic each direction to make room for a bike lane, but that would result in an unacceptable degradation in the traffic Level of Service (LOS).
- San Jose Avenue is a substandard roadway: barely two lanes wide, without curb, shoulder, or sidewalk on either side. As is shown on the applicant's plans, San Jose Ave. is not much wider than the Fire truck access, and buildings are built right up to the edge of the road.

I have been working with the communities, nonprofit organizations, City Staff, Councilmembers, County Supervisors, and a State Assemblymember for some time to work out details and possible financing for the trail (see <http://www.saveourtrails-scc.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2009/05/wgspurfocusgrouplarryamesminorityreport.pdf>). I had not contacted the Stucco Supply Co. yet, since there was no need to negotiate for an easement until there was a firm commitment to pursue the trail. However, if the requested storage area building is constructed, it would ruin any chance of getting the easement, and that would permanently preclude this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to create an off-road trail connection between the Guadalupe and Coyote Creek Trails in central San Jose.

Thus, I hope you will defer approval of this permit request, and will allow us time to work out the practicality of the Three Creeks Trail connection and to determine whether to pursue an easement across the Stucco Supply Company property.

Thank you,

Dr. Lawrence Ames,
member, Willow Glen Spur Trail Focus Group

cc: Stucco Supply Co.
Nonprofits: Friends of Guadalupe River Parks & Gardens; Save Our Trails
San Jose Staff – Willow Glen Spur Trail Focus Group: Yves Zsutty, Matt Cano
Councilmembers: Pierluigi Oliverio (D6) and Madison Nguyen (D7)
County Supervisors: George Shirakawa (D2) and Ken Yeager (D4)