

DoWe plan would close 87 off-ramp

While City of San Jose staff has pushed the Downtown West (DoWe) project approval to next year due to the COVID-19 outbreak, it continues work on amending the Diridon Station Area Plan (DSAP).

The DSAP is a planning and zoning document approved in 2014 when the city was contemplating a major league baseball stadium in the area — long before Google started buying up more than 60 acres of property and before height limits for new buildings were increased from 80 to 200 feet on the westside of downtown.

With public outreach meetings shut down during the shelter in place orders, the city released three videos on April 14 that “share staff’s current thinking on potential DSAP amendments.”

One of the proposed DSAP changes was a shocker — closing the northbound Santa Clara Street off-ramp from Highway 87.

“The off-ramp on Santa Clara Street is a real bottleneck and scary place for pedestrians and bicyclists and hinders traffic flow for transit,” said **Ramses Madou**, division manager for the city’s Department of Transportation. “We’d like to see that traffic come out at Julian.”

It appears the plan to close the freeway off-ramp came exclusively from city transportation staff. Nobody had heard the concept before the video drop — not SJDA, nor Google, nor SAP Center, nor the downtown City Council office.

“Is this the city’s visionary traffic idea for Downtown West — restricting access and circulation?” asked **Scott Knies**, SJDA executive director.

Given the intensification of uses and density downtown, SJDA has long advocated for a comprehensive circulation plan for the city to “understand how the limited downtown street network can handle the projected growth.” The city finally engaged a consultant last year and recently started work on a Downtown Transportation Plan.

“Closing the 87 off-ramp at Santa Clara Street would be a traffic disaster and have a severe adverse effect on our customers and fans,” said **Jonathan Becher**, San Jose Sharks president. “This ramp provides direct access to a majority of the arena’s parking locations and is critical to the building’s continued success. I can’t imagine it’s good for downtown business either.”

The freeway exit closure was prominent among other DSAP proposals. Transportation staff also recommends

using one lane in each direction of Santa Clara Street for buses and emergency vehicles only; enhancing San Fernando as the east-west bike corridor; and improving the Julian Street/Hwy 87 interchange as downtown’s primary auto entrance and exit.

“It’s surprising the traffic staff would suggest some of these projects before having the data on downtown’s future access and circulation needs,” Knies added.

None of the initial projects unveiled in the DSAP video are funded, said **John Ristow**, the city’s Transportation Director.

“We are at the early stages of analysis and consideration of possible solutions,” Ristow said, inviting feedback from the public on the proposals.

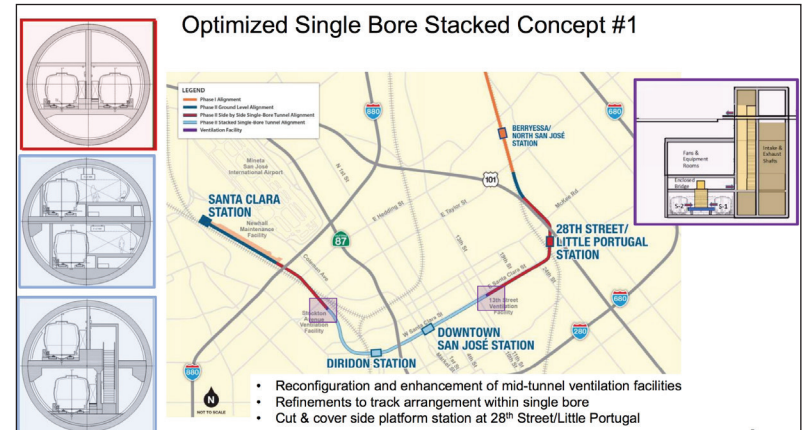
The primary DSAP amendments will accommodate dramatic increases in residential and commercial development for the 250 acre DoWe district: 12,900 dwelling units, including 5,900 by Google; and 12.9 million square feet of commercial space, 7.3 million square feet of which would be occupied by Google in its 62-acre project

The DSAP will also change to reflect completing Los Gatos Creek Trail by connecting it to the Guadalupe River trail system as a paved off-road corridor. In lieu of one big park, the city now favors creating an interconnected system of small open and public spaces in the Diridon area at about three acres per 1,000 residents, said Nicole Burnham, deputy director of the city’s Department of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services.

The city’s objective is to update the DSAP sometime in fall and move onto Downtown West consideration in early 2021 for the zoning, environmental and development agreement approvals.

A survey will be available into early May asking for community feedback to all the proposals plus affordable housing and other community benefits preferences. The survey and presentations on the suggested changes are at diridonsj.org/spring2020, including the aforementioned videos.

In December 2019, the city and Google began negotiating a development agreement that will determine the monetary added value of land-use changes required to move ahead with certain elements of the project — such as building higher than the area’s height limits and reducing the number of required parking spaces.



This schematic shows the side-by-side and stacked stations, plus stairway for emergencies.

BART tunnel design reaffirmed

The big tunnel is out.

The subway design beneath downtown approved two years ago by Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) and Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) was reaffirmed at a special VTA board meeting April 17.

In March 2018, VTA and BART made the unprecedented decision to build a single-bore tunnel with stacked tracks going through downtown. The single bore technique, long championed by San Jose Downtown Association members, avoids cut-and-cover construction that would disrupt businesses and streets for years.

However, BART soon thereafter had second thoughts about the stacked lines and asked VTA to study a tunneling approach that would allow side-by-side tracks consistent with other BART stations. This resulted in an amended proposal last summer to dig a deeper, wider — and much costlier tunnel.

Earlier this year, engineers concluded the bigger tunnel concept would cost an additional \$4 billion and result in risks that contractors were not willing to take, according to **Nuria Fernandez**, VTA general manager.

BART and VTA engineers have now agreed to two concepts acceptable to both agencies that provides the emergency egress and ventilation facilities BART operations require. Both concepts maintain the original single bore with stacked platforms for the two downtown stations at Market/Santa Clara streets and SAP Center/Diridon Station.

Key to the new design concepts are optimizing the proposed 13th Street and Stockton Avenue mid-tunnel ventilation facility sites for ventilation and emergency evacuation and for more operational flexibility by making refinements to the track arrangement within the single-bore tunnel. The remaining question engineers will consider is whether to go single-bore or twin-bore the first miles from the Berryessa BART station to 13th Street. From 13th Street, a single bore tunnel would be dug through downtown until the tracks emerge back to grade near Newhall Street and continue to the city of Santa Clara end-of-line station.

Immediate steps include more analysis on the two concepts expected to take four months before an eventual update to the VTA Board of Directors that will lead to a federal transportation funding application.

Downtown Councilmember and VTA Board member **Raul Peralez** said he was pleased with the new plan and asked VTA staff to begin outreach immediately regarding the expanded ventilation/egress facilities at 13th and Santa Clara streets.

Virus questions unanswered / Market returns June 5

Editor’s note: Due to space constraints, conversations with downtown businesses about the impacts of COVID-19 are featured on sjdowntown.com/sjda-news and our Facebook page @sjdowntown.

As disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic enters its third month, many questions remain unanswered: Who gets to go back to work and when? What are the new rules for businesses and their customers? And once shelter-in-place is lifted, will people feel safe enough to gather?

Downtown businesses are relying on their ingenuity and grit to stay mentally and economically healthy.

“This experience sucks,” said **Elizabeth Truong** of Lee’s Sandwiches, who has reduced staffing and cut hours at her Santa Clara Street location. “But it also made me realize that the world will change after this and I need to learn to adapt.

“Personally, I feel like the fire in my belly just reignited, that this is the time to dig deep and remember how it was when you started on Day One with a ton of learning,

adjusting, debt and training new employees.”

Amid all the upheaval caused by COVID-19, the Downtown San Jose Farmers’ Market will return to San Pedro Square for its 2020 season starting June 5, open Fridays from 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

“We made the decision to open the market because farmers’ markets are considered an essential service,” said **Bree Von Faith**, SJDA managing director. “We will have social distancing and other tactics in place to ensure that everyone stays safe and healthy.”



Groundwerx: Still on the street cleaning and detailing

Best known for keeping downtown safe and clean, Groundwerx has been essential to downtown during the shelter-in-place order. **Chloe Shipp**, operations manager, and **Semu One Bear**, program director, answered questions about changes to Groundwerx's routine and recent activities.

What do you hear from staff about the state of downtown?

One Bear: The main comments we get from staff is how clean everything is right now and how nice that feels, but also how unnerving it is to be one of the few people still out in the streets. I'm also told that the little things that the employees used to take for granted are now a much bigger deal, such as finding an open restaurant for a 10 a.m. lunch break since most of them changed their hours of operation during the shelter in place. With the new restrictions placed on the businesses that are allowed to stay open, even finding a clean restroom to use is almost impossible if the employee isn't near the office. I will say that everyone that drives into work is really enjoying the free street parking right now, thanks City of San Jose!

Any advantages to Groundwerx staff's ability to work these days?

Shipp: With a reduced number of "hot-spot cleaning," like coffee spills or biohazards, and less pedestrian traffic, pressure washers are able to spend more time deep-cleaning blocks. Deep-cleaning is harder during normal business hours due to the number of pedestrians.

One Bear: With a lack of foot traffic and the associated litter and spills that normally come along with it, it's much

easier to focus on sanitizing major touchpoints like cross-walk buttons, door handles, public litter cans and benches when you don't have a lot of litter to sweep up or spills to clean. We have been able to concentrate more on special projects such as increased pressure-washing. Also, we've

been able to tackle some sidewalk safety projects such as filling in deep tree wells so that distracted pedestrians don't injure themselves. The current policies actually make it a lot faster and safer for us to complete these projects.

Do Groundwerx staff miss the interaction with downtowners?

One Bear: I think it's different for each employee. We always train our employees to be friendly and approachable, but that comes naturally to some and takes a little more effort for others. I believe some of our staff is enjoying being able to work without having to worry about interacting with customers, but at the same time we have some "social butterflies" on staff who are feeling isolated right now. For those folks, I think it's much harder to stay focused and motivated when the daily routine that they really enjoyed has been upended.

How have cleaning services changed?

Shipp: Groundwerx operational hours have been reduced to 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. in an effort to limit staff exposure, and shifts have been staggered to limit the number of employees working together in one shift. We're collecting less trash, but biohazards and other messes still need to be cleaned up. All of our safety ambassadors have switched to essential services work, primarily focusing on disinfecting fixtures.



Semu One Bear



Chloe Shipp

Downtown News

Urban Community expands SoFA holdings: Real estate investor Urban Community has made another large purchase in the SoFA District, buying several Second Street properties including the parcel on which City Lights Theater resides.

The UC group headed by **Gary Dillabough** and **Jeff Arrillaga** paid \$22.5 million for a total of about one acre of land—three residences between the corner of Second and Williams streets and City Lights, plus the former Emile's Restaurant building, and the former Emile's parking lot that fronts First Street next to the San Jose Museum of Quilts and Textiles.

"We have been working on this for over a year now," Arrillaga said. "This property will be a great addition to the other properties in our SoFA district portfolio as we move forward with an integrated approach to projects that will enhance the experience of downtown San Jose."

The final deal was arranged before the coronavirus started spreading locally.

Urban Community also owns the Valley Title building and parking lot at 300 S. First St., and the LvlUp (former Botown) building at 409 S. Second St.

The previous owner, **Arnie Kamrin** of Los Altos Hills, acquired the properties between 2012 and 2018, according to the Santa Clara County Assessor's Office. Kamrin will continue to work with UC in keeping City Lights as part of future development on the site.

Swenson buys: Swenson owns three-fourths of the properties at the West St. John Street-Notre Dame Avenue intersection.

Property records show that Swenson held the triangular Star Parking Lot property, which extends to St. James Street, in 2017, sold it to a family trust in 2018 and repurchased it Jan. 30 by paying \$1.75 million. The San Jose-based developer had already held the southwest corner and then added the Dark Horse gym building at West St. John and Almaden Avenue in November. Swenson also owns the property and parking lot extending the entire block to Terraine Street on the northeast corner. The Centarra apartment building sits on the southeast corner and is the only non-Swenson entity at the St. John-Notre Dame intersection.

Similarly, Swenson has purchased another parcel on the "Mitchell Block" bordered by Market, Santa Clara, First

and St. John streets.

In March, Swenson acquired 41-55 W. Santa Clara St., now occupied by Chase Bank and Valley Transportation Authority's (VTA) customer service center, paying \$4.1 million to REDCO Development, which was co-founded by **Chris Friese**.

Swenson also holds the buildings at Market and Santa Clara containing Umbrella Salon and Erik's Deli, on Market Street with Back A Yard, Sheesha Hookah and Gotta Eata Pita as tenants, and the St. John-North First corner building with Legal Pursuit and Groundwerx as tenants.

VTA owns the Victory parking lot and a vacant building on First Street mid-block, and plans to use that space for BART construction staging when that work begins. VTA has shown drawings of a mixed-use urban transit center and could start development during BART construction. Swenson reportedly would be the partner in that development.

Another Google purchase in Downtown West: Google continues to fill in its property holdings in Downtown west, acquiring the parking lot at 93 S. Autumn St., next to Poor House Bistro, on March 3. The latest transaction cost Google \$5.3 million for the 8,780-square-foot property, or \$603 per square foot. **Daniel and Cami Palermo** were the sellers.

Business News



Cruise downtown with a Griv scooter and delivery cart.

Get your Griv on: Two hundred Griv scooters have moved onto downtown streets. The base operation is working out of 25 Post St., however, users can grab a Griv anywhere and unlock it through the Griv App, scanning the QR code or entering the vehicle number directly. Griv started in Chicago in 2019 and has now opened in San Jose and Oakland. The Griv.App website focuses on safety and considerate riding.

Is staff helping homeless people?

Shipp: Groundwerx staff still interacts with individuals experiencing homelessness every day, but are required to practice social distancing. PATH's outreach team is also still working in the downtown core, and focused on temporary housing instead of more permanent solutions at this time. If Groundwerx speaks with someone seeking services, they connect them directly with PATH, just as they would prior to the shelter in place.

The City's Housing Department has placed temporary hand washing stations and porta-potties near encampments, four of which are in the downtown core. This is an effort to reduce the risks of spreading COVID-19 in encampments. Groundwerx is checking these sanitation stations daily to ensure there are supplies, and communicating with housing staff when supplies are needed.

Additionally, the Housing Department established two temporary shelters for homeless individuals, one at Parkside Hall and another at the Convention Center's South Hall. These temporary shelters are for individuals who do not have symptoms of COVID-19 and individuals are referred to these shelters directly from the County's Office of Supportive Housing.



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The Grad inks Lee's: Lee's Sandwiches will open a sandwich shop at the base of the new Graduate apartment building at 88 E. San Carlos St. The shop will represent about one-tenth of the total 14,900 square feet of retail available on the building's ground floor. Lee's will be on the San Carlos Street side of the building among the largest block of available retail spaces.

The Graduate is expected to open to residential tenants in the next few months. Catering to students, the building has 260 units. Check theGradSanJose.com.

Working at the Car Wash: Longtime downtown business Pacific Hand Car Wash has remerged at 1051 E. Santa Clara St. The previous location with entrance on Fifth Street and exit on Fourth Street shut down to make way for the Miro high-rise development across from City Hall. Check carwashpacific.com

From the Archives

10 years ago – May 2010 – So that it could continue buying parcels near Diridon Station for a future baseball stadium, the Redevelopment Agency sold two prized properties to Sobrato for \$20 million – the parking lots at San Fernando and Second streets (Block 2) and Market and San Carlos streets (Block 8). "Our intent is to hold the property and then build the right product at the right time," said **Tim Steele** of Sobrato.

15 years ago – May 2005 – Construction began on San Jose MarketCenter off Coleman Avenue. The 385,000-square-foot center had already signed on Target,

Has there been an uptick in individuals experiencing homelessness, graffiti, vandalism?

One Bear: Immediately after the shelter-in-place order took effect, we saw a noticeable decrease in the homeless presence within the downtown. After a little while, we started seeing most of the familiar faces come back and I believe part of the reason is that there are now so many more empty storefronts for them to sleep in. Luckily, we haven't noticed an increase in criminal activity within the PBID, maybe a broken window or two but nothing widespread.

What are secondary enforcement officers doing differently?

Shipp: Secondary Employment Units of off-duty SJPD officers are focused on connecting with businesses that are still open to see if they have any concerns, monitoring shuttered businesses in an effort to discourage vandalism and connecting individuals experiencing homelessness with temporary shelter services.

What's the best way to contact Groundwerx for on-street needs?

Shipp: As always, call the dispatch number, (408) 287-1520, or use the Groundwerx Everywhere app, between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m.

Marshall's, Cost Plus World Market, Michael's, PetsMart, and Office Depot as tenants.

20 years ago – May 2000 – "Think underground," admonished SIDA President **Todd Elliott** in his President's column, foretelling by nearly 20 years the conversion of parking spaces into retail units. "It's more expensive to build underground with our shallow water table, but let's preserve our pedestrian level street frontages. Walk the length of San Pedro Square to get an idea of how an above-grade parking garage can doom a block's full potential."

25 years ago – May 1995 – Not updated since 1929, a downtown Zoning Ordinance proposed in 1992 and then shelved for three years was ready to be updated by the City Council.

30 years ago – April 1990 – City planners, builders and businesses were committed to mitigating impacts caused by construction. Tactics included utilizing temporary barriers to maintain 24-hour access to businesses, providing a temporary location for outdoor café seating, and preventing jackhammer use during the lunch hour.

DOWNTOWN DIMENSION

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