

Google village in downtown San Jose would connect local neighborhoods, company vows

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Google's proposed transit-oriented village would be a catalyst to connect people and nature with an array of experiences, a grand plan that would integrate the game-changing project with numerous adjacent neighborhoods, according to a presentation by the company Wednesday night.

The search giant sketched a vision of an innovation loop, a social and cultural walk, a farmer's market in front of the Diridon Station, and numerous open spaces, along with office buildings for its employees, as well as homes, retail and restaurants that would sprout as part of the company's proposed community. The presentation was made to the Station Area Advisory Group. The start of the presentation was delayed by a noisy protest.

"It's really about the spaces between the buildings," Michael Flynn, Google's urban design lead, said during the meeting of the station advisory group.

Mountain View-based Google's presentation to the Station Area Advisory Group marked the first time the search giant offered a vision for how the project would be integrated with nearby neighborhoods in San Jose. The advisory group includes political, business, labor, civic and community leaders who are providing official input regarding Google's proposed development.

"We want to connect people, places and experiences in an authentic

way," Flynn said in a brief interview with this news organization after the Google presentation.

The transit village that Google is planning would spur cultural walking areas, create a commercial loop and integrate with adjacent neighborhoods. Plus, the nearby Los Gatos Creek and Guadalupe River could become key components in the project experiences, especially since they flow between the hills that flank the Santa Clara Valley and the south end of San Francisco Bay.

"Wouldn't it be incredible to use our project to connect the Bay to the redwoods," Flynn said.

The meeting was delayed by a roughly 45-minute protest during which demonstrators paraded through the meeting room at San Jose City Hall. They chanted and held a sign that said "Googleville," a homage to the Hoovervilles, or shanty towns, built during the Depression by destitute U.S residents.

Some members of the Station Area Advisory Group expressed concerns about the prospect that local residents could become displaced should the arrival of 15,000 to 20,000 Google tech employees force already sky-high home prices to new record levels.

"How are you going to address social displacement?" Jeffrey Buchanan, an advisory group member and director of policy with Working Partnerships USA, an advocacy group, asked the Google representatives.

Google officials assured the meeting that this issue is front and center for the tech titan.

"Affordability and gentrification are very much on our radar screen," Joe Van Belleghem, Google's senior director of development. "We know it's

got to be addressed."

The Google development appears poised to create the connectivity the company has promised, Teresa Alvarado, director of the San Jose office of SPUR, a nonprofit civic planning organization, said during an interview following the meeting.

"The most amazing part of this plan is that we are talking about integrating all these pieces of the puzzle," Alvarado said. "That is what we have been missing in San Jose. We might have a good idea here or there, but they are isolated and we don't recognize the benefits from those ideas. Now, we are talking about this in a holistic way, and that's how we will see positive transformation."

The company's village could activate social and commercial loops along Santa Clara and San Carlos streets stretching miles east and west, as well as a cultural and innovation walk on a north-south axis along Montgomery and Autumn streets, as well as Bird Avenue south of Interstate 280.

Acting directly and through a joint venture with Trammell Crow, Google has spent \$221.6 million purchasing an array of industrial, commercial, office and vacant parcels during an acquisition effort that began in December 2016.

Google's interest in downtown San Jose is spurred, in part, by Diridon Station, which has links to Caltrain, Amtrak, the ACE Train, the Capitol Corridor train, light rail and buses. BART is slated to connect to the station in the next several years.

The Diridon train station, with all of its transit links, could serve as a gateway to downtown San Jose, much like the same way that Grand Central Terminal is a gateway to Manhattan.

"We can think of Diridon Station as an intermodal arrival starting point," Flynn said.

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