February 20, 2020

Mayor Howard, Vice Mayor Masur, and City Council Members  
c/o Mark E. Muenzer, Community Development & Transportation Director  
City of Redwood City, Community Development Department  
1017 Middlefield Road  
Redwood City, CA 94063

RE: Sequoia Station General Plan Amendment Initiation Request

Dear Honorable Mayor Howard, Vice Mayor Masur, and City Council Members,

We are writing regarding the upcoming Council meeting on February 24th, 2020, where a General Plan Amendment Initiation Request will be considered for the Sequoia Station property. We urge you to allow this project to move forward in the planning process.

Housing Trust Silicon Valley has been a part of the development of almost 20,000 housing opportunities throughout the greater Bay Area for 20 years. We believe that our communities are more diverse, sustainable, and vibrant when everyone has a safe, stable, and affordable place to live. When developers partner with a lender that both navigates financing reliability and is also a trusted leader in addressing affordable housing in the community, affordable housing becomes a reality.

More specifically, we have worked with Eden Housing for many years and have collaborated with them on six developments in the last six years and have first-hand experience that Eden is a premier developer of quality, accessible affordable housing. Through our many years of providing acquisition loans for Eden we can attest that Eden not only delivers a high-quality building but also provides high-quality long-term property management and stewardship of their developments -- becoming a valuable member of the communities they do business in.

As a lender focused on affordable housing, we know that the greatest challenge for an affordable housing developer is land acquisition, followed by the inaccuracies and stereotypes people put on affordable housing developments. While we believe the latter has become more understood, the former remains of critical concern. It is incredibly difficult to secure land to construct affordable units, and often the only way to fund successful land acquisition is through partnerships with market rate commercial and housing developers. Specific to Sequoia Station, we expect the commercial portion is driving this affordable housing development and unlocking the opportunity to provide up to 225 very low, low, and moderate-income homes.
The opportunity to provide the largest affordable housing project in Redwood City that is both directly adjacent to transit and capable of supplying much-needed family homes is one that we fully support.

Thank you for your consideration of the General Plan Initiation Request, and please allow Sequoia Station to move towards the next steps in the process.

Sincerely,

Kevin Zwick
CEO, Housing Trust Silicon Valley

cc: Andrea Osgood, Vice President Eden Housing
    Alan Chamorro, Senior Vice President LOWE
    Diana O’Dell, Senior Planner City of Redwood City
Re: Proposed Sequoia Station General Plan Amendment

The Sierra Club’s Loma Prieta Chapter, Sustainable Land Use Committee (SLU) has reviewed the preliminary statistics on this proposal and we have serious concerns about the scope and nature of the proposal as currently envisioned.

SLU encourages the development of higher density, mixed-use developments near downtowns and major transit stations to encourage walking and transit to improve health and reduce traffic and local greenhouse gas emissions. To this end, we have created a set of Guidelines\(^1\) to evaluate proposed developments. This proposal meets our criteria for a TOD, but does not meet our criteria for a balanced development because of the intrinsic extreme jobs/housing imbalance.

Although the current 2010 Redwood City General Plan and Zoning allow for this imbalance, it does not mean it is the best way to develop this site in 2020. Conditions have drastically changed since the original General Plan was adopted.

Bay Area job growth has outstripped housing growth 19:1 over the past ten years.

From our research, it appears that Redwood City presently has a good jobs/housing balance of approximately 1.5 jobs per household overall, so the planning code has worked well so far, but there are several large new developments either approved or in the pipeline that threaten to upset this balance including the Sequoia Station proposal.

Below is a summary of Commercial Office projects and residential units demand created by them:

**Sequoia Station** (not yet approved)
- 1.6M SF Office + Could support up to 10,666 jobs\(^2\) which would require 7,111
- 175,000 SF Retail + residential units to maintain an acceptable Jobs/Housing
- 440 Residential Units Balance\(^3\). This equals a **shortfall of 6,671 res. units**

**1601 El Camino Real**
- 530,000 SF Office + 3,533 new jobs = need for 2,356 units = **shortfall of 1,816 res. units**
- 28,840 SF Retail +
- 540 Residential Units
**Broadway Plaza**

420,000 SF Office + 2,800 new jobs = need for 1,867 units = **shortfall of 1,347 res. units**
26,000 SF Retail +
520 Residential Units

**1180 Main Street**

109,375 SF Office + 729 new jobs = need for 486 units = **shortfall of 476 units**
10 Residential Units

**Other sizable office projects** (with no housing included), (not specifically listed above) will add an additional 2,551,000 SF Office = estimated 17,000 new jobs = need for 11,333 housing units

= **shortfall of 11,333 units**

**Currently, there are only about 1,600 new housing units either approved or in the pipeline**.

Clearly, there is a definite trend here.

Just the current proposed office developments could result in a housing shortfall of **20,043 units**. Redwood City does not have anything close to that capacity under construction or in the pipeline to date, nor do any of the nearby cities.

Where do these developers expect these new employees to live? And how many people will be displaced because these additional jobs will increase local housing demand which will encourage landlords to raise rents on existing housing? This will lead to more in and out commuting which will add to increased traffic congestion, more air and water pollution, and greater GHG emissions.

Redwood City, and all the cities in the county should require the developer of any new commercial Project, that will create more than 50 jobs, to lay out a feasible plan, in concert with the city planning department and city council, indicating where the new employees are expected to live. If the proposal does not include a workable solution to employee housing, the developer should be asked to resubmit a plan that will include housing that is transit oriented and not add to the regional housing shortage.

We recognize that Redwood City has recently revised an existing mixed-use/live-work district zoning to allow higher-density mixed-use and stand-alone higher density multi-family housing where suitable, but the proposed changes fall far short of the 60 units per acre with community benefits (including strong incentives for affordable housing) that we have advocated in the past.

We further understand the city is considering launching a Transit District study within its Downtown Plan, a Community Visioning outreach process, and a Gatekeeper process to encourage more balanced overall development which we applaud, but if projects of the size and scope of “Sequoia Station”, and the other projects listed above, are approved before this is completed, it will seriously undermine the city’s current jobs/housing balance. Sequoia Station and all the projects listed above are woefully under-housed and will add to the regional jobs-housing imbalance without a more responsible plan.

We believe, because of this serious shortcoming, approval of the Sequoia Station General plan Amendment should be delayed until the Transit District Plan and related Visioning and Gatekeeper processes are completed, and until the Sequoia Station proposal is redesigned with a better balance of jobs to housing.

Respectfully submitted:
Gita Dev, FAIA
Gladwyn D'Souza
Co-chairs, Sustainable Land Use Committee
Sierra Club Loma Prieta Chapter (SCLP)

cc: Redwood City Planning Commission members
    Redwood City City Council members

Endnotes:

1 Sustainable Land Use Committee TOD (Transit Oriented Development) Guidelines:

2 Jobs per Square Foot: 150 SF per job is typical for high-tech industries which tend to use “floating desks” for
   their employees rather than closed offices or cubicles. This reduces the total number of desks needed, thus
   reducing total building square footage needed per job.

3 Jobs / Housing Balance: According to the Building Industry Association and the California Department of
   Finance, a healthy jobs / housing ratio is 1.5 jobs per household. Any ratio above 1.5 signifies there is an
   insufficient number of units to meet the needs of the local workforce.

4 Source: Redwood City website, Current projects

5 Source: Redwood City website, Current projects
November 7, 2019

Mayor Howard and Redwood City Council Members
Chair Bondonno and Planning Commissioners
c/o Diana O'Dell, Senior Planner
1017 Middlefield Road
Redwood City, CA 94063

via electronic transmittal: dodell@redwoodcity.org

RE: SPUR Endorsement of Preliminary Plan for Sequoia Station / Redwood City Transit Sub-Area

Dear Redwood City Councilmembers and Planning Commissioners:

The Lowe project team presented the Sequoia Station project (also known as the Redwood City Transit Sub-Area) located at James Street and El Camino Real to SPUR’s Project Review Advisory Board at our October 11, 2019 meeting for review and consideration. The SPUR Project Review Advisory Board finds this development proposal to be an appropriate set of uses for this location and endorses the Sequoia Station proposal as it is currently envisioned.

SPUR is generally focused on policies, plans and codes rather than on individual projects. In order to make infill development easier, we prefer to help set good rules around zoning, fees, housing affordability, sustainability, etc. However, on occasion, our Project Review Advisory Board will review and endorse development proposals of citywide or regional importance, evaluating their potential to enhance the vitality of the city and region according to the policy priorities and principles of good placemaking supported by SPUR.

We understand that Sequoia Station is a major mixed-use development project proposed for the 12+ acre Sequoia Station site located in the Redwood City Transit Sub-District. Currently occupied by a low-rise shopping center with a Safeway, CVS, Old Navy, Pier 1, Barnes & Noble and several other retail tenants, the proposed project will transform the site into a mixed-use urban center with densities and design intentions appropriate to the downtown core and on a regional transit line. As currently proposed, Sequoia Station and the adjacent Caltrain property will provide up to 1,635,000 square feet of commercial office space, up to 440 residential units, up to 175,000 square feet of neighbor-hood serving retail and a two-level below-grade parking structure. Specific to Sequoia Station, a total of 225 affordable units are proposed for extremely low-, very low- and low-income residents.
SPUR affirms that Sequoia Station:

- **Is located at an appropriate location for development**, near transit and infrastructure and not on a greenfield site. This downtown site sits right at the Redwood City Caltrain station, one of the Bay Area’s most important regional transit systems today and one that will be even more critical in the future after electrification and high speed rail. This plan also includes land dedication for future Caltrain expansion, which supports Caltrain’s 2040 business plan and the ongoing vitality of Downtown Redwood City.

- **Provides an appropriate mix of land uses** of residential and retail, contributing to a diverse stock of housing, fostering economic development, and providing amenities and services to the surrounding community. This is the right location for concentrating jobs. Office jobs tend to cluster, and commuters are most likely to use transit when their job is close to the transit stop or station. The Sequoia Station location – in the downtown core and at a transit station – is ideal for a jobs-heavy mix of uses. Safeway will remain on the site, and a significant amount of retail is called for in the plan. In addition, the proposed project would bring a large number of new affordable housing units to downtown Redwood City, close to new market-rate housing.

- **Provides sufficient density at the site** with a floor area ratio (FAR) of 3.4, supporting adjacent transit and preventing underutilization of land, serving the future needs of Bay Area residents. This project makes good use of this key downtown site, which has been until now a single-story shopping center surrounded by parking.

- **Creates a good place for people and contributes to a walkable environment** with active ground floor uses and planned improvements to the street network. While the plan is too preliminary to analyze in detail at this time, we are encouraged by the vision to improve bike lanes, create new walkable streets, improve connectivity, incorporate art, create new community gathering spaces and eliminate surface parking. We look forward to learning more about the design as the proposal develops further.

We understand that this is just the beginning of a City-driven process for Central Redwood City and the Transit District. **The SPUR Project Review Advisory Board finds this development proposal to be an appropriate set of uses for this location and endorses the Sequoia Station proposal as it is currently envisioned.** This is a key site for transit-oriented development in the region, and this proposal shows great potential to create an exemplary station area in Redwood City and to support the city’s broader visioning process for the Transit District and central Redwood City. The downtown location and adjacency to transit make this site highly appropriate for office, and we are happy to see a significant number of affordable housing units included in the plan.

SPUR appreciates being brought into the conversation at this early date. We understand that this will be a challenging project to execute given the complexity of ownership and leasehold interests on the site, so we
hope to be kept in the loop by the project sponsor as the proposal and design evolves over time. Please do not hesitate to contact us or Kristy Wang, SPUR’s Community Planning Policy Director, with any questions or clarifications.

Sincerely,

Charmaine Curtis                                Diane Filippi
Co-Chairs, SPUR Project Review Advisory Board

cc:    SPUR Board of Directors
September 26, 2019

SENT VIA EMAIL

Mayor Ian Bain and City Councilmembers
1017 Middlefield Road
Redwood City, CA  94063

RE: Support – Lowe Development Project

Dear Mayor Ian Bain and City Councilmembers,

Let me begin by congratulating Redwood City for your admirable track record in accommodating growth, both jobs and homes, in your community in a sustainable manner. If every City in our region was as responsible as you have been we would not have a housing crisis or the second worst traffic in the nation.

I am writing today concerning the Sequoia Station Redevelopment project and to express the Bay Area Council’s support for the plans presented to us by the project sponsor Lowe and for their request for a General Plan Amendment. The current uses on the site, primarily surface parking and low density retail, appears to us to be a huge missed opportunity given the size of the site, its proximity to Caltrain, and its situation in the center of the world’s most dynamic economy.

The initial plans include upwards of 1.4 million square feet of new commercial space, over 400 new homes, ~225 of which will be below market rate, all while providing valuable ROW land for Caltrain and retaining and expanding existing neighborhood serving retail establishments.

There is a significant need to introduce mixed-use spaces that combine existing infrastructure with added community resources. For this and other reasons described below, the Bay Area Council strongly supports this proposed community redevelopment:

- **Commuter Friendly** — The project plans to accommodate future Caltrain station upgrades, and increase pedestrian and commuter accessibility by introducing protected bike lanes and new walkable streets between Downtown and neighborhoods. Drivers can expect less traffic congestion with the expansion of Marshall Street and portions of Jefferson Avenue and Middlefield Road. Planners kept safety and ambiance in mind by including lighting and safety improvements for future CalTrain upgrades and enhanced street planting and streetscape.
- **Mixed-Use Revitalization** — The project combines retail, public transport, and leisure into a desirable and compact package. Lowe is focused on keeping jobs, housing, and shopping all within walking distance or public transit’s reach, while also creating a cohesive community brought together by an open space and local festivities.

Of course there are those who will say that a project of this scale will exacerbate an already extreme housing jobs imbalance in San Mateo County and this argument cannot be dismissed out of hand. However, we must remind ourselves that the pursuit of an appropriate balance between jobs and homes is not the real end goal, it is a means to an end. That end is commonly accepted to be the reduction of traffic on our roads and overall Vehicle Miles Travelled. It is our opinion, having reviewed the project and given its unique proximity to Caltrain, that even with a jobs/housing mismatch this development will result in a net reduction in VMT and greater accessibility to the region’s housing. Recent studies, including those conducted by the [Public Policy Institute of California](https://www.ppic.org) have concluded that while adding residential density at transit has a VMT lowering impact, it is not nearly as effective as adding job density.

All things being equal we would definitely like to see a more housing rich mix in this plan or in the surrounding area, however in this current housing market this is simply not possible. Just this week Palo Alto Online reported that one of the most successful developers in Silicon Valley history, John Sobrato, cannot make an entitled housing development in Palo Alto work and he will not move ahead with construction! Should the economics of the project change, we will be the first in line seeking additional housing, but at this time that simply makes this exciting opportunity infeasible. With the various ownership and leasehold interests on this site, we understand that we may not get this opportunity again for decades.

The Council applauds Lowe for introducing this well-planned project with ample community benefits. Lowe’s proposals to cultivate the urban dimensions of Downtown Redwood City with public transit and residential upgrades warrant close attention and consideration. The project sponsor has demonstrated a strong commitment to engage, work with, and respond to the community. We urge you to allow planning of this project to continue and we look forward to being part of the conversation as it progresses. Please let us know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Matt Regan
Senior Vice President
Bay Area Council
-----Original Message-----
From: Brett Weber
Sent: Monday, February 03, 2020 1:59 PM
To: CD-Lindy Chan <lchan@redwoodcity.org>; Council-Diane Howard <DHoward@redwoodcity.org>
Subject: Sequoia Station Development/Plan Ammendment

Group;

I am greatly concerned about this proposed development and quite frankly the plan to go over 12 floors is troublesome for our community.

I am happy what the city has done with the downtown and I am for development as I have assisted owners to remodel their old buildings to enhance this great downtown.

But this plan (attempt to go 12-17 stories) is over the top and quite frankly insulting to our intelligence.

We need, as a city and community, to work together on what needs to be put on this site, which includes how to handle the traffic to our residential neighborhoods that are nearby and the traffic impact thru the downtown. Then how we can support all the new employees in with affordable living to support additional impact to the community.

I believe we will need to look at all of our developments proposed and under construction and then dig deep on the impact these developments will have in our community, then carefully look at this site and decide together on what our community can support.

Bottom line....I will work hard with the community to fight this type of project of this magnitude.

Further, I support Mayor Howard and the city council members on leading a community outreach and discussions on this site and believe that we can no go any higher than 5-7 floors(depending on design and how it fits the site).

Last, please keep me on a email list as I will be at the city meetings and focus groups as I am taking this one seriously.

Brett Weber
640 Maple Street.