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To: [REYNOLDS, ARLIS](#); [CHAVEZ, MANUEL](#); [HARLAN, JEFFREY](#); [STEPHENS, JOHN](#); [MARR, ANDREA](#); [GAMEROS, LOREN](#); [HARPER, DON](#)
Cc: [YEAGER, CHRISTOPHER](#); [GREEN, BRENDA](#); [CITY CLERK](#)
Subject: New Business Item 1 - Screening for Proposed Residential Development at 3140 Bear Street
Date: Monday, September 2, 2024 1:03:07 PM

Dear Mayor and City Council Members:

This is the first of this type of housing product proposed to be built in Costa Mesa. While the existing building is an eyesore to most, the height, layout and public benefits of this project do not qualify it to be the best replacement. In addition, there are other elements of the project that don't give attention to the City's focus on improving walkability, bikeability and quality of life of the residents.

In 2022 the City Council put Measure K (**which took away voter approval for large projects**) on the ballot. At that time Council Member Loren Gameros requested that this property, despite not being on a "major commercial or industrial corridor," be put on the Measure K map for rezoning. Obviously, the property owner had designs on rezoning it before now. He presently has a buyer, Meritage Homes (Meritage), a small California homebuilder. I ask that each of you, in the interest of transparency, disclose any ex parte conversations you had with the owner or the buyer after June 2022.

This is another project where the developer is cramming in as many units as possible. Meritage wants to build 146 homeownership units, 20 of which would be two-story single-family homes with standard two-car garages. The remainder of the units would be four-story stacked flat condominiums with tandem garages. The smallest of the flats occupies level 2 and the larger units are on levels 3 and 4. The owners of the top units must climb two flights of stairs to reach their units. Imagine getting several bags of groceries or a king-size mattress up those stairs. New York City-style living in Costa Mesa!

While the project is not subject to our new Affordable Housing Ordinance because of Mr. Gameros's demand that for-sale housing be excluded, it includes eight deed-restricted units for very-low-income earners. Where will the eight units be located? Close to the freeway?

The developer has decided to exchange the affordable units as a concession to the City's the maximum height allowed. This increases the height of the stacked flats from the allowed 27 feet/two stories to 50 feet, 6 inches/four

stories. **That is much taller than any of the residential properties in this area.** There is no mention in the Agenda Report of any attempts to block views into the nearby units or the private open space of those units.

Most of the units are built right out to the interior streets (mainly without sidewalks), except for 56 units that face a small interior courtyard, but the façades on the private streets are just a row of garage doors, and that does not encourage social interaction amongst neighbors.

Because it is using the one concession under State density bonus law for the increased height, the developer wants a waiver from the City due to the project's deficiency in providing the open space required by the City. Only the single-family homes that back up to the existing homes have any private open space. When the residents of the stacked flats want time outdoors, they will need to cross Bear Street to get to Schiffer Park, a City park that needs updating to serve the community's needs. The Agenda Report does not indicate the anticipated collection of park fees, but since these are homeownership units, those fees must be collected. How does the City intend to use those funds?

The project is within walking/biking distance of some shopping and services, but the bike lanes on Bear St. need to be converted to protected lanes with bollards. The addition of the Olympic Avenue pedestrian access point is nice, as is the signalized intersection and crosswalk across Bear Street to Shiffer Park. However, increasing the public access through the project to Shiffer Park is the only community benefit being offered.

The City has estimated there will be 1,009 daily trips generated by the project. Yet no traffic study is required because the City estimated that the peak hour trips will not exceed 100. However, the trips from this project will be a drop in the bucket as those 1,009 trips will join the traffic from the large Related Bristol and Village Santa Ana projects (combined, those two projects will have about 5,400 residential units, up to 300,000 square feet of office space, and up to 430,000 square feet of retail space; my estimate is the daily trips will be around 11,000). Add in the upzoning from the new Housing Element for the area north of the 405 and any more projects coming to Santa Ana, and this area will have LA-style traffic. Expect the intersections on and around Bear St. to fail at peak hours, as Santa Ana residents do not want traffic to go through its city and requested the traffic from its projects go down Bristol and Bear Streets. **And Santa Ana is not paying Costa Mesa one dime in traffic impact fees.**

Could this project be better? Yes. The developer is putting too many units on

the lot and discarding niceties like sidewalks in the process. Will the guest parking be used by the residents when their garages are full, forcing overflow parking to Schiffer Park (note there is no street parking on Bear St.)? It is located near public transportation, bike lanes, and some shopping and services, but no market or Target-like store is nearby, so the residents will be using their cars for everyday shopping. The elementary school for this area is Paularino School. The stress level of the bike lanes is high, as the lanes are not protected and the bridge over the 405 does not have any fencing. Bear St. and Baker St. are on the safe route to school for Paularino School, but I would not let kids ride bikes on either street during rush hour.

I would appreciate answers to the following questions:

1. How will the City mitigate the traffic impacts of this project, along with the cumulative traffic impacts of the large projects going forward near the Costa Mesa/Santa Ana border? Has the City taken into account the cumulative traffic impacts from the upzoning contemplated by the Housing Element update?
2. What will be the location of the affordable units within the project area?
3. Will the City require the developer to prevent occupants of the four-story units from viewing the private space of nearby units?
4. The rows of garage doors are ugly and uninviting. The developer must be instructed do better.
5. How does the City intend to increase the safety of the nearby bike lanes on Bear St. and Baker St., and the bridge over the 405 on Bear St.?
6. Costa Mesa is park poor. This project will add at least another 400 residents who will want to use Shiffer Park (the signal and crosswalk are needed for a reason). How does the City intend to mitigate the impacts of the increased use of Shiffer Park? What are the park fees that would be collected from the developer and what is the targeted project for their use?
7. Why aren't more community benefits offered? Perhaps Meritage could help fund the rebuild of nearby Fire Station 2.

Thank you for your attention to my requests. I look forward to hearing responses to my questions during the meeting.

Cynthia McDonald

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September 3, 2024

Costa Mesa City Council
77 Fair Drive
Costa Mesa, CA 92626

Re: 3150 Bear St. Screening

Mr. Mayor and the City Council,

Thanks for all the work you do for the city. Here are my humble reactions to the conceptual plans for the Trinity Broadcasting site that I want to share with you. I would say these things about any large site development. The reason I'm bringing this up is to help you think through some of the aspects that maybe you aren't typically focused on, with the goal of getting any changes that you might deem appropriate directed to the applicant now—*before* any expensive design work that may follow the screening.

Site Design

The primary thing that I want to get across to staff and the city council is that *it is possible to build 146 units without the dreaded "townhome community site plan"*¹ that makes us all squirm. It's been done many times before, and it is still done in many places across the world. The [townhome community site plan](#) is one that is criss-crossed with driveways because each unit needs parking directly below. This leaves little-to-no room on the site for anything resembling "public realm"—the element that buildings traditionally [front](#) onto. A simple principle that our city should insist on is that new buildings front² a [public realm](#)—whether it is the existing sidewalks on the edge(s) of the site (necessary regardless), or *new* public realm that extends *into* (and *through* where possible) the site from the existing sidewalk in the form of new streets (*not driveways*), paseos, and/or open spaces.³ These spaces should be generous in size, contiguous with each other, and connected to the actual, existing public realm—not islands within inside-out blocks, floating in a sea of driveways/alleys. Please see my [previous letter](#) on

¹ The townhome community site plan is not necessarily limited to townhome projects, though that is what they are most of the time.

² The verb *to front* implies that the building has a front. A garage door with an inconspicuous auxiliary entrance for humans on the side would not be considered to be a front by any reasonable person. That's a back.

³ I'm using this term to describe the shared-ness of space, not the ownership of the space.

these sorts of projects. It's my opinion that it would be better to allow more units and require less parking if it means better design.

If we could collect units more efficiently and reasonably into buildings, perhaps we could pull all new buildings away from the existing neighbors, rendering the "need" to provide SFHs as transitions unnecessary.

I know that [these](#) are ridiculous images to share, but I think they're useful in reminding ourselves that density is not the enemy. Rather, bad urbanism is the enemy. Buildings and neighbors are good, and urban living can be green and quiet and beautiful and economically productive—the things we all want. Note that part of what feels "right" about all of these is that buildings front and frame a car-lite public realm. It's a key ingredient to livable cities that people want to be in.

The Units Themselves

There is nothing wrong with flats. People live in them all over the world. Ironically, everyone in this particular design is living *above* the ground floor (which is nearly entirely devoted to parking), making it puzzling as to why such tortured floor plans that are awkwardly trying to approximate townhomes are necessary. The multiplex buildings each contain something like 12 to 18 units each. Why not build [simple 12-plexes or 18-plexes](#) then?

Façades

Not only are the floorplans tortured, the façades are tortured. Part of this is the fault of our design guidelines, which beg for as much variety as possible—gratuitous or not. I believe that most people's preferences—whether they can articulate it or not—is [simplicity](#), with tasteful ornamentation, regardless of style. We should update our guidelines to reflect this.

If larger buildings were included, and they were brought up to Bear St., this would provide at least some bit of framing to the street, as well as some "eyes on the street" that could only make Bear St. a little more pleasant.

Parking

Parking precludes good design. This is especially true when each space needs to be connected to each unit on a dense site. It is embarrassing that we still have not managed to lower our parking minimums at this point, such that 477 spaces would be required were it not for density

bonus law. This forces us to admit something that many of us don't want to: thank God for state usurping of local control.

The provision of 288 parking spaces is still a lot. Not only does it degrade urban design, but it floods our streets with more cars (exacerbating traffic and parking problems elsewhere) and generally contributes to [car-dependent density](#)—something we do not want. Regardless of what the developer thinks the right number is, we as a city should be pushing for developers to embrace Costa Mesa as a walkable and bike-able city, and we should commit to continue to do our part to make such a risk worth it for them.

Context

Although this site butts up against the 405, it is not a terrible location for new residents: it is a 10-minute walk to Metro Pointe and South Coast Plaza and a five-minute bike ride to the heart of SoBECA. What is the city doing to ensure that Bear St. is a safe and pleasant place to be on and to cross? Same with Paularino and Baker. Would you want to walk to SCP? Or the park across the street? Would you want to bike to a brewery on Randolph? It shouldn't take a project of this size to make us consider these things, but *it would be remiss of us to entertain this project without having a serious discussion about whether we are doing everything we reasonably can to ensure that this neighborhood is a great place for people to live and where car-lite living is possible.* Car-lite living is the ultimate win-win scenario for housing projects.

Regarding the emergency access from Olympic Ave., we should never pass up an opportunity to create *more pedestrian connectivity* in the city. But the connection should be provided via the public realm (see above)—not through people's private car-alleys. This is really our only opportunity to integrate this site into the fabric of the existing neighborhood, unless we are ambitious and are able to provide another pedestrian access point further north on Bear St.

That's all—thanks for reading!

Russell Toler