



MEETING DATE: 1/9/12
JOINT STUDY SESSION
ADDENDUM

COUNCIL AGENDA REPORT

DATE: January 5, 2012
TO: MAYOR AND TOWN COUNCIL
FROM: GREG LARSON, TOWN MANAGER 
SUBJECT: JOINT TOWN COUNCIL/PLANNING COMMISSION STUDY SESSION FOR THE NORTH 40 SPECIFIC PLAN UPDATE. TOPICS INCLUDE PROCESS UPDATE, VISION, LAND USE, AND HEIGHT.

REMARKS:

The attached letter (Attachment 7) was received after the report on this matter was finalized.

ATTACHMENTS:

Received under separate cover

1. Height discussion summary
2. Land Use discussion summary
3. Specific plan primer and specific plan alternatives memo
4. General Plan goals and policies memo
5. Los Gatos School District paper
6. Residential product type examples

Received with this report

7. Letter from Grant Sedgwick, received January 4, 2012

Distribution:

Planning Commission
North Forty Advisory Committee

WRR:JP:ah

PREPARED BY: Wendie R. Rooney, Director of Community Development 

Reviewed by:  Assistant Town Manager  Town Attorney _____ Finance

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Grant Sedgwick
401 Alberto Way – Suite 5
Los Gatos, CA 95032

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JAN 04 2012

MAYOR & TOWN COUNCIL

January 4, 2012

The Honorable Mayor Steve Rice
Members of Town Council
Town of Los Gatos
110 East Main Street
Los Gatos, CA 95030

Subject: North 40 Specific Plan Discussion

Mayor Rice, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On January 9th you have scheduled a joint Town Council – Planning Commission study session to review the work of the North 40 Advisory Committee. I have attended two meetings of the Advisory Committee, the most recent on November 3rd, and have both comments and concerns I would like to offer for your consideration.

The sponsor of the proposal, Grosvenor Americas, is particularly accomplished, with an exceptionally long and proven record of planning, building and operating significant urban developments, both mixed-use and otherwise. The professional reputations of the principal consultants, assembled by Grosvenor to design the project, are similarly stellar. If the current development scheme reflected the very best possible combination of land uses, the Town could not hope for better sponsorship.

One might question whether a shopping center and 600 new residential units represent, in combination, the best we can hope for on the Town's last major site for development. How exhaustively have alternatives been considered? This scheme appears to be shaped almost entirely by three financial concerns; (i) the property owner's residual land value, (ii) the developer's return on investment, and (iii) the Town's sales and property tax collections.

How would this project, if built, improve or enrich the lives of current Los Gatos residents? Not much, in the opinion of some. Here are three alternative visions with somewhat greater potential to meet that test. There may be several more deserving ideas.

Seniors' Housing

The Town's recently updated General Plan identifies seniors' housing as an important land use priority. Recent market studies – and anecdotal evidence – completely support that conclusion. At the November 3rd Advisory Committee meeting, former Mayor Pirzynski asked whether the proposed Specific Plan would address the critical need for

quality housing for seniors. A staff member responded that perhaps 'some portion' of an inclusionary housing set-aside could be dedicated to seniors' needs. Assuming 50% of the 40 acre site was dedicated to residential uses and 20% of that was, in turn, dedicated to inclusionary housing and 50% of that was, in turn, dedicated to seniors' housing, the equivalent of 2 acres of land would be allocated to this specific land use. That would be an almost meaningless gesture.

The most comprehensive and appealing continuing care retirement community in the Bay Area is operated by Vi (formerly Classic Residence by Hyatt) and located in Palo Alto. It has no vacancies and has a long waiting list of prospective residents – almost one individual senior, or couple, for every independent residential apartment. By itself, this community occupies almost 25 acres. The newest retirement community of this type, now under construction in Pleasanton, is called Stoneridge Creek. More than half the residences in the first phase are already under contract even though completion is at least 18 months away. The community will occupy 45 acres. How can an effective allocation of 2 acres within the North 40 possibly meet the residential, recreational, dining, social and health care needs of a growing population of seniors in Los Gatos and Santa Clara County?

A Great University

Last year Mayor Michael Bloomberg invited universities to compete for the opportunity to create an entirely new institution for advanced studies in New York. The campus would be dedicated to applied sciences, engineering and technology. A total of 17 renowned universities, from 5 countries, collaborated on the submission of seven unique proposals. Among the competitors were Cornell, Stanford, NYU, Columbia and Carnegie Mellon. The scale of the proposals ranged from 400,000 square feet to 1,900,000 square feet - not much more intense, ultimately, than the scale of the current North 40 scheme.

What place on earth enjoys the concentration of technological talent, abundance of capital and fine weather of Silicon Valley? And what Silicon Valley address has more appeal than Los Gatos? What if the Town committed itself to the challenge of attracting a great university? You couldn't identify a more suitable site than the North 40.

An Urban Park

Some residents of Los Gatos may feel that parks and recreational space are abundant here and they would not be wrong - if acreage was the only measure. Refined urban park spaces, those celebrating sculpture, history or horticulture are relatively scarce, however. In this context you could imagine Butchart Garden in Victoria, BC or Boston Common – both comparable in size to the North 40 site.

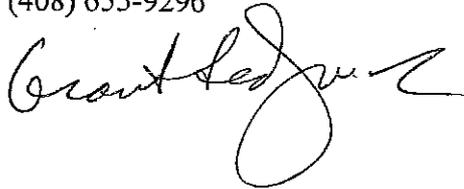
Of course, sufficient financial resources to acquire and then build an important civic asset (like an urban park) will not be readily available. But a great vision - and committed leadership - can overcome obstacles like that. My family and I were fortunate enough to live in the small town of Telluride, Colorado for four years beginning in 2001. Residents

of Telluride had been inspired to protect the gateway to their town by acquiring, and preserving, a pristine 570 acres of valley ranchland at the edge of the community. In spite of an offer by the land owner to dedicate fully 90% of the property to permanent open space – if only permitted to develop the balance at very low density – the folks in town decided against compromising their larger vision. In 2008, after several years of effort, the 2,400 residents of Telluride had raised \$50 million for this single purpose, and successfully completed the land purchase. Just imagine what the people of Los Gatos could accomplish if they were motivated by a similarly significant goal.

As the great American architect and land planner, Daniel Burnham, challenged his followers; *“Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men's blood and probably will themselves not be realized. Make big plans; aim high in hope and work, remembering that a noble, logical diagram once recorded will not die.”*

Let's be sure the vision for the North 40 is worthy of us, and our Town.

Respectfully,
Grant Sedgwick
(408) 655-9296

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Grant Sedgwick", with a stylized flourish at the end.

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