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'Downtown West' plan: Google submits proposal for San Jose transit village

Offices, homes, hotel rooms, restaurants, entertainment, shops, open spaces are in Google's downtown San Jose plan



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Site Plan for Google transit-oriented community near the Diridon train station in downtown San Jose. Google has formally submitted its proposal for a game-changing transit village in downtown San Jose whose name conjures up images of cutting-edge development and the spirit of the urban frontier: "Downtown West."

By **GEORGE AVALOS** | gavalos@bayareanewsgroup.com | Bay Area News Group
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SAN JOSE — Google has formally submitted its proposal for a game-changing transit village in downtown San Jose whose name conjures up images of cutting-edge development and the spirit of a real estate frontier: "Downtown West."

If built, the search giant's transit-oriented community would add office buildings, homes, hotel rooms, restaurants, shops, entertainment sites, event spaces, cultural amenities, and green areas in an 80-acre development near the Diridon train station and the SAP Center.

"A local and regional destination" and "a strong sense of place as an identifier for San Jose as the center of Silicon Valley, the capital of the technology world" are among the goals that Google sketched out for the mixed-use project in its official proposal to the city's Planning Department.

The proposed development also would create vibrant public spaces designed to encourage

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the proposed development will include pedestrian paths, spaces for walking, biking, and transit use, the documents filed with the city show.

"Distinctive architecture and civic spaces that reflect Silicon Valley's spirit of innovation and San Jose's rich history" would also be part of the proposal, the planning documents state.

Because government and environmental rules oblige developers to indicate the maximum amount of building spaces and residential units that would be included in a project, Google's proposal uses some numbers that are somewhat higher than what the tech titan intends to develop. Google said its development manager for the endeavor is Australia-based LendLease, a mixed-use builder.

The Google project would create 6.5 million square feet of office space; up to 300 hotel rooms; 3,000 to 5,000 residential units; 300,000 to 500,000 square feet of commercial and active uses, which could include retail and restaurants; event center space totaling 100,000 square feet; and up to 800 rooms that would be set aside for short-term visits to the site by Google employees.

"Google has demonstrated they are operating in good faith and, frankly, have set an example for other major developers coming to town," said Teresa Alvarado, director of the San Jose office of SPUR, a policy and planning non-profit. "Major projects such as this must take a human-centered design approach that respects San Jose's history, culture, and diversity and leads us toward a more sustainable, resilient and equitable model of growth."

For many years, this district on the western edges of downtown San Jose has been known as the Diridon Station area. Scott Knies, executive director of the San Jose Downtown Association, indicated he likes "Downtown West" as a new moniker for the area.

"Anything is an improvement over calling it Diridon area," Knies said. The Downtown West name "makes it clear this is part of downtown," he added.

Google also noted in its planning submittal that the project will blend in with existing downtown San Jose residential neighborhoods and business districts, as well as help meld the project with the rest of the urban core of the Bay Area's largest city.

"The project seeks to implement a vision of a new integrated part of downtown San Jose at Downtown West," the Google planning documents stated.

Mountain View-based Google could employ 25,000 people in the transit-oriented development.

"Create jobs near transit" and "provide housing alongside jobs" are among the goals that Google stated it seeks through the development.

The Diridon train station is a nexus for numerous rail lines. Caltrain, Amtrak, ACE Train, Capitol Corridor, and light rail trains all connect to the depot. In the years ahead, the transit hub will be a BART stop and someday could even provide a connection to a high-speed rail line.

"This is a really significant milestone," said Bob Staedler, principal executive with Silicon Valley Synergy, a land-use and planning consultancy. "Google sets the bar for all developments in the area. It's about the whole area being developed in a cohesive manner."

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Now that the plans have been submitted, final approval of the project wouldn't occur until sometime in late 2020, a Google spokesman noted.

"While Google has made important steps acknowledging their impact, I worry this plan still lacks details on public's number one concern, what Google will do to protect the thousands of families struggling to afford housing in San Jose from displacement if Google's arrival causes rents to soar," said Chava Bustamante, an official with Silicon Valley Rising.

Both the San Jose Planning Commission and the City Council will take formal votes to approve or reject the proposal, following an exhaustive array of planning, environmental,

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and policy reviews.

"Public outreach will be a big part of each step, especially the development agreement that will define the deal's community benefits," Knies said.

At one time, a large chunk of the site Google plans to develop was intended for significantly different uses. Among the now-discarded plans: a baseball stadium and a big retailer, recalled Carl Guardino, president of the Silicon Valley Leadership Group, a business advocacy organization.

"The Google proposal is an exciting reminder of why we should never kiss on the first date," Guardino said. "A decade ago, we persuaded the City Council to turn down a proposal for big-box retail at the site. If they had said yes to this suitor, this princely opportunity with Google would never have been possible."

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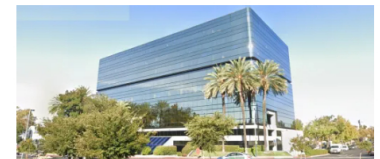
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